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# IN THE CLAWS OF THE DRAGON

BY GEORGE SOULIE DE MORANT



NEW YORK  
ALFRED · A · KNOFF  
1921

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# I

“**R**EALLY, these Westerners are not reasonable beings!” said the Duke of Krong, Ambassador of China in France, to his First Secretary, Ming-ni, Viscount of Lin.

The Ambassador was fat, as became a Chinese dignitary of his rank, his wealth, and his age. His long eyes were always half shut, as if to sharpen his vision. A few stiff hairs, scattered over the lower parts of his round face, did duty as a beard.

He was receiving the guests for the inauguration of his newly built Chinese palace in the Rue de Babylon; and he examined them critically.

“Look at the costumes of the barbarians!” he continued. “Can you imagine anything more uncomfortable, hideous, and ridiculous? or, I must add, more shockingly immodest? The men display their shirts: think of that! What should you say if *we* displayed our shirts? And that absurd black waistcoat with a tail, which they call an evening coat! The men look exactly like those white-breasted black fowl of the Polar seas, the penguins.”

“It certainly could not be much worse,” assented Ming-ni. “But their every-day costumes are not so bad.”

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“Yes,” sneered the Duke, “their hard collars, four or five inches high! I tell you, a whole population which dresses like that is not led by Reason, but by the wildest and lowest impulses.”

Ming-ni’s face became expressionless. He did not over-much enjoy these remarks: he had to recognize that they were perfectly just and sensible, but still they touched only a very small part of a civilization which, after ten years of study, he had learned to understand.

The Duke, like many European diplomats, could not speak or read a word in the language of the country to which he had been accredited as Ambassador. That did not prevent his being confident, like those same diplomats, that he possessed a complete and immediate knowledge of the population with which he had no direct, and very little indirect, contact. He relied on his First Secretary to do all the work, and disagreed politely but firmly with him about every detail which involved the “men of the Ocean.” Ming-ni, then, put on the face of a statue, which indeed he resembled anyway, thanks to his thin straight nose, his firm mouth, and his even, colourless complexion.

“And the women!” resumed the Duke vindictively. “More than half naked! showing their shoulders to everybody! Oh! there is next to nothing between them and the nakedness of savages. In the heat of summer, that would be reasonable enough, though rather primitive—but in winter! And yet they would

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be frightfully shocked if the men went round half naked, as they do themselves."

Ming-ni was saved the trouble of answering by the arrival of another group of guests. These, approaching, held out their hands to their host; but the old man merely kept his fists close to each other and waved them up and down two or three times, according to the Chinese custom. The visitors, a little at a loss, bowed awkwardly and moved away.

"They ought to know that we civilized folk do not shake hands. A dirty and stupid custom," grumbled the Ambassador.

Just then came two ladies. The elder, evidently the mother, addressed Ming-ni in a tone which betrayed a certain consciousness of her own importance. "Excuse me, Monsieur," she said. "You speak French, do you not?"

"Yes, Madame," he answered.

"My friend who was to present us to His Excellency is not here, and I have not had the pleasure of meeting the Duke before. It seems a trifle awkward for us to be under his roof in the circumstances. May I ask you to introduce us? Baroness and Mademoiselle de Rosen."

"Assuredly, Madame," said Ming-ni, with a slight bow. Then, turning toward the Ambassador, he said in Chinese: "O Duke, O Great Man! here are two women who desire to have their names mentioned to your distinguished ears."

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“Never mind their names, O Elder Brother,” replied the old man. “I can never catch these barbarous noises.”

The elder lady bowed majestically and with an imperious air proffered her hand. The Duke answered by a meaningless smile and once more flourished his fists. But the lady, not satisfied with that, continued to offer her hand. Overcome by such insistence, the Ambassador diffidently gave her his plump fingers, leaving them, however, for no more than a second at her disposal.

The younger lady, who had noticed his reluctance, merely made a curtsy. “A sensible girl,” said the old man, relieved. “Take her into the other room and give her some sweets or cakes; these Western women are even fonder of them than our own womenfolk. Do you remember that last reception of ours? Three of these helpless creatures were caught in the rush when the door to the dining-room was opened. They were crushed and fainted, and we had all we could do to revive them.”

The young lady’s grey-blue eyes were turned on Ming-ni with unmistakable admiration and sympathy. Her fair hair and delicately pink-and-white complexion enhanced her beauty of feature. But the dictates of Confucius enjoin men from looking at women not of their own family. “What the eyes see not, the heart desireth not.” Ming-ni, demurely averting



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his eyes, obeyed the order of his superior with the same impassive countenance.

“May I now introduce myself?” he said. “I am the Viscount of Lin.” He bowed and shook hands with the two ladies. “Since your friend is not here,” he added, “will you not allow me to conduct you? Should you like to join the dancers first, or to see the conservatories?”

He offered his arm to the mother. She was surprised not to detect in his manner the hint of self-denial to which she was accustomed in young men on such occasions. There was not even the glance of regret which they always involuntarily gave her daughter.

“My friend tells me that you have the most beautiful and striking conservatories in Paris,” said Madame de Rosen.

“You shall judge our humble efforts for yourself,” he answered. And they mingled with the crowd.

The Duke of Krong had decided that everything in the Embassy must be Chinese. All his staff retained the gorgeous and flowing costumes of the East. All the palace furniture was of deeply carved ebony, with incrustations of mother-of-pearl and mottled marble. Ancient pictures, on silk made brown by the centuries, covered the walls. Thick carpets, with blue boughs on a golden ground, brought from Yarkend or Khotan, deadened the noise of footsteps.

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The visitors behaved as in a museum, stopping before the various treasures, admiring or criticizing aloud. Many hardly restrained themselves from doing the same before the young secretaries in their glittering embroidered robes.

Ming-ni walked on, erect, impassive, and enigmatic. A two-eyed peacock feather was inserted at the top of his hat, under the blue sapphire button which was the insigne of his rank. It trailed on his back and covered the beginning of his long, thick, and intensely black plaited hair—which, by the way, was not his own, for he had had his own hair cut short in the Western fashion.

They traversed the crowded rooms and, turning the corner of a passage, found themselves suddenly in a strikingly novel yet restful setting. The conservatories consisted of several rooms intersecting one another at various angles. The Chinese gardener, instead of trying to realize a preconceived idea of the schools, had given free play to his own fancy and used to the utmost all the opportunities offered him. Here, a glade curved among bamboos. There, a tiny mountain scene contained wild crags and a little valley, in which a temple and a pagoda were half hidden under ancient dwarf pines. The hills round about were reflected in a pond over whose surface nelumbos and nymphæas flaunted their broad leaves and regal flowers. Cunningly contrived gaps in the foliage and shrubbery allowed the beholder to see those walking

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at the farthest point of the conservatories. The illusion of distance was enhanced by an adroit use of perspective. Seats were fashioned in the most extraordinary shapes, so as not to give any idea of their actual size in relation to the landscape.

Madame de Rosen gave a little well-bred exclamation of delight. "Look, Monique," she said to her daughter. "Those magnolias! That strange red star of a flower! And that pagoda! I simply adore it all."

"It is truly wonderful," said Mademoiselle de Rosen.

By the time they had reached the end of the last of the conservatories the subject was exhausted. Monique turned to her escort and asked: "Do you dance?"

"Oh, no—I mean yes!" said Ming-ni, remembering his duties. "May I ask you to give me your next dance?"

"Certainly, with pleasure. Perhaps mother will sit here and wait for us—won't you, mama?"

"I suppose so," answered her mother resignedly. It irked her to resume the thankless and uninteresting rôle of chaperon.

Ming-ni bowed to her and offered his arm to Monique. They two slowly retraced their steps toward the orchestra, from which subdued harmonies drifted to their ears with the sadness peculiar to all gay music heard from afar.

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“Why did you say ‘no’ when I asked you if you danced?” asked the young girl suddenly.

“Why, are you sure I said ‘no’?” he answered non-committally.

“Quite sure,” she insisted.

“And you—do you care for dancing? You do, of course: every young lady does,” pursued the diplomat.

“No! I don’t like dancing at all. Shall we sit down somewhere, then?”

“With pleasure.”

The seat which they found was small for two, though they did not notice the fact until they were seated. Then neither ventured to remark upon it. So they found themselves squeezed uncomfortably against each other, a position not favourable to conversation, especially between persons who are not very well acquainted. They fell silent.

A faint, sweet perfume awoke Ming-ni’s attention. For the first time he stole a direct glance at this lovely young foreigner. Her blue-grey eyes were lustrous in the dimness. A mysterious light emanated from her clear skin. He thought of the Duke’s testiness on the subject of low dresses; and inwardly he smiled. For his own part, he did not disapprove of the custom quite so decidedly. The result was sometimes worth the tribute of—to put it mildly—a passing glance.

The silence was still not broken between them. Then, suddenly, they both broke it at once. “I

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should like very much to go to China," said she. "Should you like to go to China?" he asked.

They both laughed at the coincidence of thoughts.

"And now," said Monique, "will you not tell me why you first said 'no' when I asked you if you danced? I will not accept another evasive answer," she added, smiling.

"Why, then," he replied evenly, "if you insist on the truth, men never dance in China. We like well enough to watch professional dancers, but we consider dancing as conducive to vanity and unseemliness, not to say immodesty."

"Not such a false view, either, perhaps," mused the girl.

"Physical activities and all kinds of sports are naturally destructive to the life of the mind, and every scholarly person must avoid them," he continued. "The primitive instincts and animal impulses are strong enough already: they need no training or exercising. If we want to rise above our natural plane of beasts, we must live most fully in the spirit."

"And is it living in the spirit that has made the Ambassador so fat?" asked Monique archly.

He laughed and changed the subject. "I greatly admire your beautiful city," he began.

"Ah, but can you find beauty in these dark, dirty, muddy streets, these rows of prison-like houses with streaks of coal-dust spreading over the walls?"

"Well," he conceded, "they may be a little lacking

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in form and colour outwardly—even a little gloomy, by comparison with our gayer palaces and houses. But inside they are very comfortable, not to say beautiful. Those great halls such as one finds in some of the residences—”

“Oh, don’t remind me of the great salons, with their tawdry little five-o’clock teas!”

“And Parisian society is extremely gay and enjoyable,” he went on, unabashed.

“Parisian society? Which part of it? There is hardly any such thing in Paris. Some persons collect a few notabilities and have a salon, very much as certain bandmasters compose a potpourri by piecing together a few familiar tunes. And of course there are always good friendships. But can these be called ‘society’?”

“Whatever one calls them, these social gatherings are by no means disagreeable,” he returned suavely.

“Oh, but do you think so?” There was a touch of disdain in her manner. “Conversation is reduced to a few stereotyped remarks, always on the same subjects. Even the pleasure of telling scandalous stories about absent persons is more than balanced by the certainty of being libelled unmercifully oneself as soon as the door closes behind one.”

“But, at least, it is very easy to get away. One can go anywhere, see new things.”

“Yes—but one comes back! You see, to live anywhere but in Paris is called by such circles burying

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oneself alive. To live outside France is to be an absolute exile. Both possibilities are dreaded as if all the life and merit of the whole world were concentrated in the little group to which one happens to belong."

"Well, if they believe that, it is true so far as they are concerned, and that is sufficient for their contentment. But you seem, I should say, a little disillusioned. Why not go to China? You would see something different from Paris, I can promise you!"

"If it is at all like this conservatory, I would willingly live there all my life. But it could hardly be the same all over: China is so immense—"

"Only ten or twelve times as big as France," said Ming-ni simply.

"So huge as that?" said the astonished girl.

"And the population is more than thirteen times as numerous. But it really is a great deal like this conservatory on a large scale."

He began to talk about his country. It was nothing short of a revelation to Monique, to whom China had never been much more than a name in an atlas. She vaguely connected it with the porcelain vases, screens, embroideries, and other curios which she saw on so many tables and mantelpieces; but that was all.

They were interrupted presently by the Ambassador himself, who, deprived of his Secretary and therefore of his sole means of contact with his guests, had

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simply slipped away to the conservatories for a little quiet.

“Did you give her those sweets?” he asked Ming-ni.

“We talked about our country instead,” answered the Secretary. “I wish the Great Man could have heard her opinion of these people here in the West.”

“Sensible girl. I told you, O Elder Brother! Beautiful, too, in her way.”

The young girl coloured under the appraising glance of the old man. She felt as a fowl in the market might feel under the significant scrutiny of a cook.

Ming-ni saved the situation. “His Excellency says that I am to conduct you to the dining-room.”

“Oh, does he?” she said, with slight relief. “How thoughtful!”

But at that moment appeared Madame de Rosen, accompanied by a gentleman who bowed to Monique and claimed the dance just beginning. She shook hands with Ming-ni and went away. In her manner there was a hint of frank regret.



## II

“**R**EALLY, we might just as well have come away earlier,” said Madame de Rosen to her daughter. They were on the way home in their motor-car. “I met only two people we knew.”

“I met them too, worse luck,” commented Monique succinctly.

“It is all very well for you to take that attitude,” said her mother with some heat. “You go about and do as you please: you even dance with people you don’t know. But I can assure you that it is no fun sitting gloomily in a corner and watching other people enjoying themselves.”

“Poor mother, you do have a dull enough time of it,” answered the girl contritely.

“That garden really was unique, though,” said her mother, satisfied with this indirect acknowledgment of her pains. “And nobody would ever believe our account of it, more’s the pity.”

“Isn’t it wonderful!” agreed Monique eagerly. “And all those Chinese with their beautiful robes. And their hats! really much nicer than top-hats, you know.”

“Somehow it reminded me of that reception at St.

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Cloud, in the second Empire—the one at which I first met your father.”

“And you know, mother, China is a very big country. I mean, it is much more important than we realize.”

“Possibly,” answered her mother without enthusiasm. “It is so far away: one never knows the reality of such remote places.”

The car stopped at their door. They went quickly up to their apartment. After a hasty kiss exchanged, each went into her own room. Monique lay awake for a long time. When at last she shut her eyes, it was to dream of wondrous exotic landscapes. On the morrow as soon as she was up, she looked along the bookshelves for works on the Far East. She found a few, and began to devour them.

At her next dinner party she mentioned China to a young man who sat beside her, only to be chilled by his absolute unresponsiveness. He attempted a spicy anecdote, and was surprised in his turn to see that she was not amused. She went home very early that evening; and her next invitation she refused.

Her mother was incensed. “What is this new nonsense?” she asked contemptuously. “Are you planning to stay at home the rest of your life and read books of travel, like a child?”

“Better read books of travel than spend one’s time listening to the conversation of idiotic young men,” retorted Monique.

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"Men *are* stupid—we know that well enough," her mother conceded. "But we have got to marry them and live with them, for all that. So what is the use of calling them names? If you don't go out, you will never have the chance to marry."

"It does not strike me that it would be such a terrible loss," answered Monique. "Especially for the other party," she added, with a touch of false modesty.

"You think of not marrying? You are absolutely mad! I would rather give you away to anybody than see you unmarried. My daughter unmarried!"

Monique could not, of course, refuse all the invitations. Neither could she consistently refrain from mentioning the subject which was now filling her mind. In a very short time all her friends were aware of her latest whim and deferred to it, some of them calculatingly, some with genuine interest. The lady who had procured her the original invitation to the Chinese Embassy was highly pleased to see her enthusiasm and to have had something initially to do with it. She called with Monique upon the Duke of Krong's daughters. Conversation was somewhat difficult, for the young ladies were only beginning to study French. But they were all very pleased with one another. A few days afterward the same worthy lady arranged a dinner party, at which Monique found herself sitting next Ming-ni. This time he was dressed in the simple uniform of an officer of the

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Guard. A turban of blue silk with figures chastely embroidered in gold encircled his thin, finely molded face. A short coat of dark blue silk with a dragon embroidered on the breast, a belt with jade ornaments, and high boots made of black silk with thick white felt soles, gave him an arrestingly distinguished appearance.

Madame de Rosen was not pleased to see the obvious delight of her daughter. She caught Monique looking intently at Ming-ni's thin, long, supple pale hands, and immediately afterward at the short, stubby, red, hairy hands of her neighbour on the other side.

Monique's mother had to concede that the young diplomat's manners were perfect. Under his admirably polished reserve there certainly appeared an interest in this beautiful girl who was chatting with him in such simple and gracious friendliness. But he was so self-contained and aloof that Madame de Rosen did not know which of two things made her the more furious: his failure to show gratification over her daughter's attentions, or his demonstration that he was completely worthy of them.

The two remained together for the greater part of the evening. When Madame de Rosen considered that it was time to take her daughter home, she did not succeed in attracting her attention until after several attempts. The door had hardly closed behind them when she began: "You are absolutely mad!

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Compromising yourself with a Chinese, and in such a frightful manner! With a Frenchman it might not matter: it is more or less the custom. But with a Chinese—! Everybody noticed it.”

“Maybe,” answered Monique indifferently. “But it was the first dinner party I ever really enjoyed.”

“Tcha!” said her mother, with an exasperated shrug. “One would think you had always martyred yourself.”

“I haven’t very often enjoyed myself, anyhow.”

“No? Well, I can assure you that the persons who have to sit beside you enjoy themselves still less when you keep talking about your everlasting China.”

“That is very silly of them.”

“It is not silly at all. They live in their own country and in their own time.”

“A jolly country and time to live in, I must say! I assure you, mother, I really can’t go on for ever talking about Mrs. So-and-so’s dresses and her last divorce—or her next one. Our contemporaries have destroyed everything that belongs to the past. Their new order of things is such a fizzle that our civilization will very likely disappear.”

“Let it disappear, then, my dear girl. We ourselves shall have disappeared long before that. In the meanwhile, we must live—and marry. As for you, our family and fortune are such that you may aspire to any one. Don’t play with your reputation for a mere passing fancy.”

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There was a pause. No answer forthcoming, she continued: "You will see, as the years pass and you find yourself alone. You will be ready to marry anybody who comes along, then."

"No. Not any ordinary man like most of those we meet."

"Perhaps you will marry your Chinese, then?" sneered her mother.

"And why not?" answered Monique simply.

"Oh! do you mean it?"

"Why not?" repeated her daughter. "He is a hundred times superior to the whole lot of the others."

"Surely you do not think it really possible to marry a Chinese?"

"Of course I do. As well a Chinese as any other foreigner."

"You would have me going about with a Chinese for a son-in-law? I, for one, will never accept any such situation."

And the estimable lady, more than ever disturbed and incensed, swept majestically from the room. She was all but capable of slamming the door shut behind her.

### III

“**I** ADMIRE you greatly, O Elder Brother!” said the Duke. He was reclining, rather than sitting, in a copious armchair. “At your age I had, in spite of my work, three second wives. I am wondering how you can exist without even one.”

“The pleasures of love are but a waste of time, O Great Man,” answered Ming-ni, flicking the ash from his cigarette.

“True, true! but they are no less a pleasant necessity of Nature.”

“Besides, I must confess that here in the West they are not conveniently provided for. With married women, they are very dangerous, complicated, and therefore absurd. With unmarried girls, they present all sorts of difficulties, socially as well as otherwise; and they might stand in the way of my work. I hate scandal.”

“Perfectly right,” said the Ambassador with an approving nod. “All the fault lies in the scandal. What nobody knows does not exist.”

“Then, as I would not stoop to the lower and dirtier version of what they call ‘love’ here, I have to go without.”

“But why not *marry* one of these foreigners? She

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might help you in your work if you chose her from a good family. You are hardly a foreigner to them now, after ten years in their country. And as you intend to follow up your career and stay out of our Eighteen Provinces for the rest of your life, it would be just the thing for you."

"They hold too conspicuous a place in the household, these foreign women," said Ming-ni.

"Ah! ah!" laughed the old man. "And how is it in China? You don't take account of the true state of things. Women are mistresses in the household always and everywhere."

"Then why should we forsake our liberty?"

"Because," said the Ambassador, suddenly grave, "we must have children. The pleasures of love are given to us as a bribe to rear a family. Being of nature, they cannot be evaded. It is high time that you had a son to continue your lineage and perform the sacrifices in the Temple of the Ancestors. In order to have a son, you must have a wife. Why don't you marry that sweet girl—what is her name?—Monique? My daughters have the most excellent opinion of her."

"Why," said Ming-ni hesitatingly, "I really have never weighed the possibility. She is certainly charming, and she has very intelligent ideas about our country. But I have simply never considered the matter. And my family might have different ideas for me."



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“Leave that to me. I am your father and your mother here. I shall write to your family.”

This conversation took place some time after the reception at the Embassy. In the interval Ming-ni and Monique had met more than once. The Ambassador, who wished Ming-ni to remain with him in Paris, thought that the best plan was to accomplish his marriage there. When his daughters, who had opportunity to observe the very evident admiration of Monique for the young diplomat, reported the fact to him, he saw at once a possibility of achieving his wish. Thereupon he made private inquiries about the family de Rosen. The result was highly satisfactory. He told his daughters to entertain the de Rosens frequently and to be especially amiable to them.

Madame de Rosen was flattered by these delicate and assiduous attentions. She was also flattered to meet, in the sumptuous drawing-room of the Rue de Babylon, the wives and daughters of the representatives of all the nations. At dinner parties she could not resist the temptation to remark casually: “Madame X—, the Italian Ambassador’s wife, whom I met the other day . . .”, or: “The young Duchess of Krong, who is a great friend of my daughter. . . .” Such allusions were received with the deference always accorded to the utterances of those who frequent the highest society. But she was thought to be much less gracious

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than before, and in consequence was left more and more to herself. In turn, she found her own friends less entertaining, and came to fancy that after all Monique might not be so far amiss in her estimate of their world. She, too, took to reading various works on China, and even attempted to discuss Confucius, whom she managed to confound, now with the Emperor of Japan, and now with a celebrated Jesuit missionary. She entertained Ming-ni several times, together with the Ambassador's daughters.

Perhaps nothing would have come of all this—Ming-ni, in his own mind, was not in the least committed to such a marriage, and Monique thought of him as so icily detached that she could never perceive the potential lover in him—had not the Ambassador taken his family for the summer to Etretât, where Madame de Rosen had a little villa. Ming-ni was of course invited down as the guest of his chief; and thus he had opportunity to see a good deal of Monique. They went about freely together, in the way of folk at summer resorts.

One day they found themselves alone together among the cliffs, descending toward the sea by one of those precipitous inclines which, in the parlance of the locality, are called *valleuses*. The blue expanse of ocean glittered in the sunlight, and between its ultramarine and the fresh vivid greenness of the countryside the long file of cliffs, here chalkily white,

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there sombre-hued, curved away into a mauve horizon. They lost the view suddenly, on entering a tiny pocket of a valley. Sheltered in this nook was a group of thatched farm buildings, dating perhaps from William the Conqueror, and now dilapidated and forlorn. There was nobody to be seen, and the only sound was the mild plashing of surf on the shingle far below.

The valley ended in a circular staircase hollowed out of the chalk. This descended to the beach. Loopholes here and there gave a light barely sufficient to reveal the uneven steps.

Ming-ni and Monique began the difficult descent. The girl was wearing those high-heeled slippers which fashion has decreed to be necessary, against every requirement of comfort, beauty, and health. They nearly cost her a serious injury. In one place where the chalk was wet she slipped; then, in the attempt to regain her balance, she stumbled, turning and nearly spraining her ankle. She would have fallen headlong had not Ming-ni instantly put a firm arm round her waist.

The sudden exigency had stepped in ahead of restraint and the proprieties, thrusting them cavalierly aside. He had no interval to consider anything except that her warm and supple body was strained against him, yieldingly. On a sudden she was a foreigner no longer. And to her he was no longer a Chinese: he was only a man, very strong and at the

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same time very gentle: a man whom—yes, she was sure now—she loved.

“Are you badly hurt?” he asked. There was a little suppressed throb in his voice.

“A trifle,” she admitted. Her voice, too, was altered and strange. She forced it back, however, to the note of casual lightness by asking: “Isn’t my weight too much for you to hold up this way? I shall be all right in a minute.”

He murmured an emphatic, softly explosive disclaimer, insisting that he must not leave her unsupported until they reached the bottom. They went on down, very slowly and carefully. Neither was in a hurry to see the end of the staircase, little as either would have admitted it. The high heels of fashion abetted their secret mutual inclination. A few steps further, Monique slipped a second time, so dangerously that to save herself she threw her free arm round the neck of her companion. For an instant they swayed and nearly fell, clinging desperately to each other. Then they stopped.

They were just at the opening of the stairs. Before them the sea was breaking in wavelets on the grey pebbles. The beach was silent and empty. Behind and above them the cliffs towered more than two hundred feet. In this whole land- and sea-scape nothing had been touched or marred by men since the beginning of the world. The two might have been the Adam and Eve of a fresh creation. The bright

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sun lighted wonderful glints in Monique's eyes, or so it seemed to Ming-ni. And it seemed to the girl that never had she seen such lustrous, brilliant, grave, dark eyes, so softly burning in their intensity. They were loth to unclasp hands. Their breathing quickened. Waves of colour swept up their cheeks. She lifted her face toward his; and slowly his lips met hers in a passionate and lingering kiss.

They disengaged themselves suddenly, as though they had heard some one call. The girl, still holding his hand, murmured: "You will speak to my mother?"

"The Ambassador will," answered Ming-ni.

They sat down on the shingle, filled alike with the burning desire to kiss again. They thought of the stairway, and said, both at once: "It is time to go back, is it not?"

They laughed, a trifle embarrassedly, and started the climb. Ming-ni offered his help. She accepted it. At the first turning they stopped and kissed again. Alas, there were only three turnings.

They found themselves, too soon, out in the valley, a little flushed, but very happy, and perceiving innumerable new beauties in the old half-ruined buildings, in the fresh colour of the lush grass, in the fleckless sky overhead, and in the boundless expanse of the sea.

#### IV

THE Ambassador was delighted when Ming-ni asked him to act as "honourable intermediary" and to make to Madame de Rosen the formal demand for Monique. When the young man brought up the subject of his own family's consent, the Duke interrupted him. "We are not in China, O Elder Brother. The customs of our country cannot be followed here. If we had to wait for your father's sanction, your marriage could hardly take place within the year. I will cable your Venerated Lord and settle the question out of hand. Just you write him a letter: I will do the rest."

Ming-ni could not but comply. He went to his room and sat down at his table. There, meditatively rolling his writing-brush on the ink-stone, he searched his memory for the most ceremonious formulæ. Then he began to write, covering his paper with fastidiously traced ideograms.

To the Venerable Chen, Count of Lin, his son, the Little Dog of the Household.

Since the day when the Small One left the respectable roof which shelters the Car of Light, the time has passed as an arrow. Light and shade have come and gone as does the

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weaver's shuttle. My constant desire has been to know that the Car of Light and the Precious Jewels have enjoyed a robust health and an unmixed happiness.

The Imperial Envoy, the Grand Man, has deigned to bestow on the Little Dog of the Household his kindest favours. He has been my father and my mother. Always attentive to his behests, always I have obeyed them. I hope you will say it is well.

The Grand Man has recently given me the order to take a wife after the fashion of the West, in order that my services may hereafter be more useful to my country. I have obeyed. She is a Frenchwoman, and of a noble family. Her father has a title of nobility of the fifth degree.

The custom of the West is not that our family should supply the gowns and ornaments. It is the family of the bride which gives her a trousseau and a certain sum of money as a dowry.

In the hope that you will approve my decision, I kneel before you and touch my forehead to the ground again and again.

Ming-ni read over his own prose with a certain pride, reflecting that it would surely strike his father as remarkably gifted, and be shown to the different authorities and other notables of the city. He imagined the compliments which would be made, and enjoyed in foretaste what are the most subtle, and perhaps the greatest, pleasures of literary craftsmanship. He carefully folded the letter and inserted it into a long envelope, tracing on the red band which sealed it the names, titles, and addresses of his father. Then he enclosed the whole thing in a foreign enve-

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lope, so that it should not be defaced by the post office.

In the meantime the Ambassador, without waiting for an answer to his cablegram, put on his robes and his hat of semi-state, ordered his carriage, and told his daughter to accompany him in order to act as interpreter. Madame de Rosen, who saw them coming, was overwhelmed. She ran to her room and, hastily calling her maid, told her to admit the visitors to the drawing-room and then to come up at once to help her into a new gown. While she was dressing—and she did it more quickly than ever in her life before—she writhed inwardly at having to make the Ambassador wait for her. She little knew that this was the greatest mark of respect which could be shown a Chinese visitor. To make him wait is to say unobtrusively that the preparations made for his reception can never be deemed sufficient.

She entered the drawing-room at last, looking as though she were in serious danger of bursting from her grey silk dress. The Ambassador rose heavily from the sofa on which he had deposited his portly bulk. They exchanged the inevitable urbane confusion of greetings, which the young Duchess translated haphazard. This first flurry over, the call took a more ceremonious turn. The Duke led off, and his daughter translated his sentences word for word. Most of them plunged Madame de Rosen into the



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deepest momentary confusion. Some of them remained a mystery to her for ever after.

“O noble nurse of an exquisite child!” he began. “O sorrowing widow of a most distinguished scholar!” (In sober fact, her husband had been a soldier and had detested literature.)

“Excellency, I am much confused—I do not know what to say—”

“Since the powerful Master of the Palace has departed for the lower regions—”

“What,” thought Madame de Rosen, speechless with astonishment, “does he mean?”

“—Leaving a tender rose in the garden of your virtue, the warmth of your maternal love has made it bloom. From the distant regions of the ancient province of Se-*chrwa* has come another rose, grown likewise in the shelter of parental love. Shall we graft these two roses on the same stem and help them to give forth many new buds?”

Happily for the baroness, Monique had told her that the Ambassador was to come and sue for her hand in behalf of Ming-ni. Otherwise she would never have guessed the meaning of language so flowery, and the resultant scene might have been painful. For once she was ashamed of the platitude of Western idioms. She answered: “My little rose and your dahlia will make a delicious nosegay, and I am very pleased to give my consent to their union.”

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To this the Ambassador made answer by a bow. Then he tried valiantly to kneel down in order to make another and deeper bow. His hostess, filled with consternation, felt sure that if he succeeded in doing it he would never be able to rise again; and there ensued a gentle struggle, such as is foreseen and provided for by the rites governing similar instances. At last, amidst many protestations and greetings, the old man departed, accompanied to his carriage by Madame de Rosen. She asked herself afterward whether she ought not to have helped him into his seat.

When she returned to the drawing-room, still quite overwhelmed by the suddenness and the ceremony of the call, Monique was waiting for her. "What did he say?" she asked breathlessly.

"He talked about roses and flowers and gardens. I hope I really understood: he may have come merely to ask for a graft out of our rose-tree!"

Monique laughed and kissed her mother affectionately. "You know, mother," she said, "that the Chinese always speak in elaborate images."

"And their language! *A-choo-chi-to-rao*—my dear girl, not in a thousand lives should I be able to understand a word of it."

"Oh, I will learn it quickly enough when I am married. Moreover, Ming-ni speaks such excellent French! I need be in no hurry to master his language."

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“Especially if you stay here all your life. But what are we going to do now? Have they any special ceremony to perform?”

“My dear mother,” answered the girl, laughing, “we are going to marry just like anybody else, so don’t you worry yourself about it. The Ambassador had to come because your future son-in-law’s parents happen to be ten thousand miles away.”

“Ten thousand miles! Good gracious! What a distance! Anyhow, they will hardly be able to drop in on you every day. But now let us be serious and speak of important matters. What sort of gown are you going to wear for your wedding, and where shall we go for it?”

It was a long discussion which began with these words. Nothing was settled when, presently, Ming-ni appeared. Faultlessly attired in frock-coat and top-hat, he inspired such bewilderment in the soul of a young fisherman just arriving from the beach with a basketful of seaweed on his back, that this overwhelmed youth remained standing rooted with his little eyes wide open, long after the door had closed behind the visitor.

Ming-ni ceremoniously kissed the hands of the ladies. He was going to sit down to a grave and deferential talk with his future mother-in-law, but Monique forestalled his generous politeness by leading him off to her own room. Before he went, however, he made a chance to thank the baroness for her consent, and to

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tell her how fervently he hoped to make her daughter happy.

On that day there began for Monique that always too short period of enchantment, more and more interspersed with long visits to the dressmaker, which precedes a European marriage. The knight of old, before taking the great oath required by the orders of chivalry, used to pass the night in a church to ponder deeply on the importance of the vows to which he was about to commit himself, and which he might not henceforth break without crime. The marriage vows are even more important in a woman's life, and perhaps even harder to keep. Yet, instead of passing her last days before the event in a calm retreat where she can reflect and scrutinize her own heart, she is rushed about in a whirlwind to dressmakers, milliners, jewellers, and their kind, not to speak of the complete round of visits to all her family and its connections. When the day of her marriage finally dawns, she is utterly worn out in both body and mind. Some women are so broken by these proceedings that they never recover.

Monique passed through the ordeal without much difficulty. Fortunately, it was summer, and many people were away. She remained as late as possible at the seaside. Nevertheless, everything and everybody seemed changed to her. The voices of callers reached her as from afar, and their persons appeared

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to her eyes as if enveloped in a sort of haze. The fact was that she never listened to them or really looked at them, her mind being entirely obsessed by her own present and future.

Madame de Rosen was perfect during the whole period. Her daughter was going to be a Viscountess; and although a foreign title is never quite worth a good old national one, it was somewhat gratifying to her pride. She even developed a liking for Ming-ni. His constant and ready politeness rendered very pleasant any social relation that one might have with him. His cold reserve, too, inspired in her a sort of respect. She dared not speak to him as she would have done to any European.

As for Ming-ni, he carried out his duties with thorough conscientiousness. His education had deeply impressed upon him the great importance of the most trifling details of social intercourse. Still, he could not help thinking sometimes how complicated and absurd the whole business really was. It was well enough, perhaps, he said to himself, to have the greatest possible number of persons present at the marriage, since their testimony might be used later on to prove the validity of the union; but it was dangerous, besides being utterly distasteful, to go about showing one's future wife to every man in town—as dangerous as to be exhibited oneself to every woman one might happen ever to have met. Suppose

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one happened to meet another girl for whom one took a violent fancy? Or suppose a man should fall in love with one's fiancée and carry her off?

At last the sun rose on the great day. Madame de Rosen had arranged that the wedding should take place at the Madeleine, that church being considered the most fashionably exclusive in Paris. To her intense delight, a missionary bishop who had known Ming-ni in China offered to give the nuptial benediction to the young couple. The priest's long white beard and the splendour of his pontifical insignia contributed to the ceremony the impressiveness of an outstanding event in the social life of the capital. Numerous photographers were sent by the illustrated papers to take snapshots. The crowd on the boulevards noticed their presence on the church steps and gathered to see what was about to happen. The policemen were obliged to telephone for reënforcements. A bright autumnal sun shone on the gold and purple of the awning set up from the door down to the curb. The invited guests, and many uninvited ones, crowded in, jamming the broad aisles. The young couple appeared at last. Ming-ni wore his full dress—a high bonnet of sables, with peacock feathers and fox-tails hanging on his shoulders, a heavy robe sparkling with jewels and golden embroidery. Monique, covered by her long veil of white lace, was simply dressed by comparison. The entire staff of the Embassy was there, in its richest official costumes. The effect was

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so splendid that the crowd broke into applause. Those who could not see pressed from behind against the front ranks of spectators. A woman fainted. A child was trampled. There were screams and remonstrances. Never before had a marriage caused such an agitation. For a week afterward the illustrated papers were filled with photographs, and the society papers gave long and more or less overwrought accounts of the occasion. In short, it was a huge success.

When the bridal procession went out after the benediction, there were shouts of acclamation. The reception which followed was given at the Embassy. The crowd seemed to be even greater there, and some had to wait in their carriages for more than two hours before they could step out under the yellow tiles of the verandah at the entrance. Utterly worn out, and feeling as if they were going to die the next moment, the young couple stayed on. They seemed so exhausted that at last the Ambassador humanely told Ming-ni to take his wife away.

Monique could hardly stand while her maid helped her change her dress. At length she was ready, and they started. When she found herself in the carriage alone with her husband, she had just enough strength left to grasp his hand, before sinking immediately into a deep sleep.

## V

ON the day after her daughter's wedding, Madame de Rosen also was exhausted. Having ordered her maid to buy all the newspapers, she decided to stay in bed. There, comfortably propped up, she began to read the reports of the wedding, skipping never a word. She was filled with a growing sense of her own importance. After she had gone through them all, she made a selection of the most fulsome reports, which she meant to leave negligently on a table in her drawing-room. In the afternoon the most intimate of her friends called. She read them the choicest extracts, which by this time she had practically memorized.

The next day she had the brilliant inspiration to buy an album in which to keep these and other such remembrances of a glorious day. Presently the weekly illustrated papers came to renew her pleasure. She had what was really a quite extraordinary collection, and many of her callers could hardly contain their jealousy. Some of them even went so far as to remark: "How everything is changed nowadays! In the old time it would have been thought quite vulgar to let such publicity be given one's name; whereas



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now the most respectable women have the same love of notoriety that actresses have.”

“Oh, yes,” Madame de Rosen would answer. “But you know that emperors, kings, and high personages generally have always attracted the public notice. Whatever our personal feelings may be, we cannot do anything without a crowd watching us, reporters taking notes, and photographers waiting at every corner.” And this pronouncement would arouse still more vindictive emotions in the souls of her friends.

The news from her daughter served to replenish conversation and at the same time changed, not unhappily, the current of her thoughts. Monique was in Italy, of course. The plain truth was that Madame de Rosen had begun to be anxious about her. The letters she received were short. At first she ascribed their brevity to the emotions of her daughter’s new status; and she remembered, with the soft pleasure which such images invariably evoke in the memories of the elderly, her own honeymoon trip, also to Italy. But at that point it occurred to her that things were not at all the same. Monique had married a Chinese. A Chinese—think of that! All her former narrow and silly prejudices came flooding back.

“Those Orientals have frightful habits,” she mused. “He certainly smokes opium. Who knows but he has a harem already? Monique may find herself sharing him with a negress, a Hottentot, and a Red Indian. And it is more than likely that he gambles.

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It is notorious that the Chinese are inveterate gamblers. All the books on China record extraordinary instances of this mania. And it seems they are terrible beyond words when anything offends them. They wait for years, and never forget or forgive. Oh, I ought never to have allowed this marriage! And there must be something wrong: otherwise Monique would have written long letters. My poor child! So loving, too, and so sweet! What am I to do?"

After two or three days of such self-torture, she stopped saying "What am I to do?" and acted. Her first act was to send a telegram:

Most anxious about you. Answer at once.

She received the answer that same evening:

Coming back tomorrow. Everything all right.

Madame de Rosen glowed with triumph. "I knew I must do something," she told herself. "It is always best to act with decision. Why, I may have saved my child's life—who knows?"

She could not sleep that night or the next. The travellers were to arrive by a train which reached Paris fairly late. In spite of her impatience she could hardly go to the station at two o'clock in the morning. But she was up with the dawn, waiting impatiently till the hour at which she could decently present herself at the Embassy. It came at last, and she hurried to the Rue de Babylon.

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Waiting in the quaintly furnished drawing-room, she fully expected to see her daughter appear thin and pale, perhaps bearing the visible marks of blows. What was her surprise, then, to see Monique tripping gaily toward her across the vast room, obviously her old self and extremely content. Madame de Rosen felt herself borne up on an enormous wave of relief.

But then, suddenly, it flashed across her that this daughter of hers was hers no longer. She was now the bride of a stranger, an alien—a Chinese! She, the mother, had lost every claim. Up to this day she had lived exclusively for her child. Now, almost in an instant, the world of their common memories and emotions had been swept away, or, worse still, had become the property of a stranger.

“He has at least been good to you, I trust?” she asked.

“Oh, yes indeed,” said Monique, laughing tenderly. “He is simply adorable—so chivalrous and good! I am very happy, mother.”

This was too much. Her daughter, the child she had reared, had been happy all the time, while she herself, the poor abandoned mother, had been undergoing tortures on her behalf. She thought of telling Monique what she had been imagining, and of adding a hint about the proverbial ingratitude of children. But she managed to restrain herself and to cloak her suffering in silence. The generous wine of her maternal love was beginning to turn into the vinegar of

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jealousy. She had equally strong impulses to say disagreeable things and not to say them.

Ming-ni was deeply shocked by this early call. He had understood the real significance of the telegram. Moreover, it was quite contrary to the customs and usages of both Eastern and Western civilizations that his mother-in-law should come to them. He was fully prepared to accompany his wife on her first visit to her mother—say, that afternoon. Now, to show his disapproval of such a breach of etiquette, he did not go down to see Madame de Rosen at all. In explanation to Monique, he affected to assume that so early an interview with his wife must be a private business one.

Madame de Rosen, not understanding his motive, saw in his non-appearance nothing but a deliberate affront, and she was mortally wounded. This Monique perceived. Later on, she mentioned it to her husband. It was the occasion of their very first tiff.

Truth to tell, Madame de Rosen had not a very well disciplined character. The atmosphere of Parisian society is deadly to those ideals, those inflexible unwritten rules governing the inward and secret parts of fine breeding, which in different countries or periods have crystallized as Honor, Chivalry, and the Japanese *Bushido*; which have formed in turn such different paragons as the knight of old and the highest type of modern gentleman. While the baroness had had her daughter with her, maternal affection

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had wrought in her that element of disinterestedness, of constant sympathy for the feelings of others, which forbids one to take pleasure in the suffering of another. Moreover, her life had been an easy one. She and her daughter had enjoyed constant success and social triumph. Hence she had had little cause for envy. Her vanity had always been agreeably tickled. But now she had not the same interested motives for giving or accepting hospitality; and accordingly she was left a good deal to herself. Her daughter, instead of bringing her an even flow of love and gratification, became the object of her deepest bitterness and jealousy. When Monique was affectionate, she thought it must be out of pity, and her pride resented it. When Monique, preoccupied by her new duties, did not come often enough or pay sufficient attention to her opinions, the older lady ascribed it to indifference. Worse still, she saw in it the prophecy of total future neglect.

In her loneliness she forged and sharpened a good many little barbed remarks to let fly at the first opportunity. Such remarks never seemed to pierce the armour of her son-in-law's unremitting correctness of behaviour; but they penetrated Monique's sensibilities deeply—the more deeply because Ming-ni's constant and meticulous politeness rendered it impossible for her to charge him with any responsibility for the strained relations. Whatever the provocation, he never once undertook to protest by any sign more ex-

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PLICIT than the expression of pained astonishment which would appear on the face of a host if he saw, say, the guest at his table commit some gross and outrageous breach of etiquette.

In order to put an end to the distressing situation, Monique prevented meetings between her husband and her mother whenever she could. But this only made matters worse. Madame de Rosen, no longer restrained by the presence of her son-in-law, could talk freely about him to her daughter. Her own mordant remarks about him served to convince her more and more that she was being mistreated. Her irritation grew by what it fed on. Monique, of course, was very disagreeably affected by the things her mother said. And she tried to explain to her mother how unreasonable she was being—as if one could order one's feelings by logic!

Some few of her mother's remarks were not absolutely devoid of truth, and these Monique was so foolish as to repeat to her husband, in the hope that he would put into her mouth an argument persuasive enough to change Madame de Rosen's attitude. Happily, Ming-ni possessed the marvellous faculty of self-command, fine fruit of the rigorous moral cultivation of the East. He had been taught that speech is the servant of politeness, useful only to lubricate social relationships. It must never be allowed to play the traitor and give away one's most intimate self to oth-

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ers, whoever they may be. Using language to bare one's inmost emotions is called in China "not speaking Reason"—*poo shwo li*. Children and illiterates may commit such an excess, but a true scholar will never do it. For this reason Ming-ni did not explain to Monique his full sense of the present difficulty. He contented himself with saying he was extremely sorry that any word or act of his should have annoyed and offended his mother-in-law. He added a promise to be even more scrupulously careful in future. In his own mind, though, he conceded that it was an awkward situation—one capable of making his wife most unhappy and, incidentally, of distracting him from his work.

Behind Ming-ni were several thousand years of a civilization based on reason and common sense. The unnumbered generations of his ancestors had been taught, as he had been, to sift everything in an effort to distinguish the truth (which one keeps for one's own profitable use) from the falsehood (which one passes on to others in lieu of truth if they be silly enough to accept it). He also knew that genuine feelings, sympathies and antipathies, will not be commanded. Such feelings never alter unless all the conditions happen to alter.

Since his mother-in-law appeared to be in the pink of health, there was no relief to be anticipated from her early demise. Moreover, the intensity of Moni-

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que's filial love rendered this outcome most undesirable anyway. Their early departure from Paris was the sole means of solving the difficulty.

On the day after he had taken this decision, Ming-ni entered the Ambassador's room wearing a very grave face, and announced that he had just received the news of the death of an uncle who had left no male descendant. "The sacrifices to the ancestors must, of course, be accomplished as soon as possible," he continued. "As I am the nearest to a descendant of the deceased, I must go at once to our native city and perform these duties. I shall come back without delay, and need not be away for more than a few months."

As it happened, the Duke knew Ming-ni's family tolerably well. He remembered clearly that the young man had no uncle. The pretext was palpably false. But the Ambassador also knew that Ming-ni was of a serious and dependable character. He inferred that behind his decision lay an errand which was at once urgent and secret. Ming-ni was entitled to the favour, and there was no possibility of refusing it. Accordingly he told Ming-ni with a grave face that he personally shared his grief; then he authorized him to start on his journey by the first steamer.

Ming-ni told the same story to his wife and her mother, knowing very well that Monique would decline to go if she knew his real motive. The suddenness of the plan and the necessity of hurrying their preparations prevented the two women from fully re-



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alizing the cruelty of their impending separation. Even the mother, assured that her daughter would soon return, could say nothing. She made a tentative offer to accompany the young couple; but Monique showed no enthusiasm, and as for Ming-ni, he answered by murmuring something about the weather.

The day of departure dawned at last. Many friends came to the station to wish them *bon voyage*. Madame de Rosen was flattered thereby, and her grief, though genuine enough, was softened. Only when the train started did she begin to feel the extent of her loss. Even then, she stood alternately waving her handkerchief and wiping her eyes. Monique, who had kept her head out of the window as long as her mother could be seen, sank into her seat with a sigh of contentment, even though there were still tears in her eyes.

Ming-ni was intensely pleased with his success. Well he knew that his wife's momentary sorrow would promptly be alleviated by the enchantments of the journey.

## VI

**I**T was raining heavily when they arrived at Marseilles. The streets and houses appeared to them as dirty and gloomy as those of any other Western city. But the old port was fairly picturesque, with its sail boats and tiny steam launches balancing on the ground swell, among cabbage leaves and other flotsam.

They went directly to their steamer, without making the classic excursion to Notre Dame-de-la-Garde, the golden statue of which they could descry on the hill through the rain. They arranged their luggage in their stateroom. Then, from the upper deck, they gave themselves to watching the newly arrived passengers struggling in the midst of innumerable boxes and trunks and embracing again and again the relatives and friends who had come to see them off.

The hour of departure struck at length. The last hawser was cast off, they moved away from the dock, and the big liner was got under way, to the tune of shouts and good-byes from the passengers and those whom they were leaving behind. To Ming-ni and Monique, who knew not a soul on the quay, the agitation of all these strangers and the tears which ran

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down many faces appeared extravagant, even ridiculous.

They had no more than left the shelter of the harbour when both of them began to experience that general weariness, mingled with anxiety, which too often deadens the first enjoyment of a sea voyage. The Mediterranean was still running high after a recent gale. They preferred to stay in their berths the greater part of the day, going on deck now and then to breathe the fresh and bracing air, free from all defilement by men and their civilization.

The enchantment began at Port Said. Monique had never been in the East. She knew nothing of the indescribable sunlight or of that perpetually warm and scented air which clears away every worry, every grief, relaxes the nerves, and makes it a sensuous delight to breathe, to see, to be alive.

The ship glided through the Suez Canal. Evening fell. A heavenly glow of blue, gold, and mauve light filled the sky to the boundless horizon. A line of pink flamingoes flapped lazily above the ship. On the pale sand by the margin of the waterway, camels laden with bright-coloured packets filed along, led calmly by biblical-looking drivers clad in dignified and flowing *burnoos*.

Monique recalled suddenly an image of the black crowd in a street of the metropolis: the top-hats, the umbrellas, the dirty papers on muddy pavement. It seemed to her that she had left a prison behind and

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was returning to a normally free existence. As for Ming-ni, he had that passionate love of nature, and that poetic comprehension of her beauties, which are characteristics of the Chinese temperament. For the first time, both of them forgot completely those differences of race and education which, in spite of their love, were always between them. Their intellectual delight added a powerful charm to their physical and moral happiness.

The month was March, when the monsoon changes from north-east to south-west. It often happens then that for a whole month hardly a breath of wind comes to disturb the calm of the water. They were lucky enough to cross the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean during one of these periods. For twenty days the sea remained a limitless sheet of ultramarine. In the shade of the awning which covered the deck, the burning darts of sunlight glinted from copper hooks. A mild breeze caressed the brow like an amorous breath. Flying-fishes passed swiftly; some even fell on the deck. The world and its cares were inexistent.

Each port of call brought its new wonder. Monique developed a poetic sensibility which gave her joys, delights, of an order hitherto unknown. In Ceylon they stayed for several days. The sweetness of the air, the smell of flowers and perfumes, mingled with the indefinable native odour which pervades the island, stirred her deeply. They remembered especially one night on which the moon rose before

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they left the hotel at Mount Lavinia, a few miles from Colombo. The white and mysterious light was so strong that they could distinctly make out the line of the coast. The surf broke in long, even waves on the sand beach. Behind, a forest of tall cocoanut trees bent toward the sea, their graceful heads slowly nodding in the wind. Under the trees, round a fire which now and then burst from smouldering into great flames, was a group of natives, some lying down, some erect and singing one of those vague and haunting melodies which infallibly set travelers dreaming, though they lose all their magic when performed to an opera-house audience.

A boatman offered to carry Ming-ni and Monique back to Colombo. They accepted his offer, and boarded the strange craft. The sail hoisted, they got under way, rocking gently on the swell. The silence of the nocturnal sea brooded over everything. In the sky a light, alternately white and red, flashed from the great lighthouse. Monique was nestled in the arms of her husband. She said softly, in an uneven voice: "We will never go back to Europe—never, never!"

Ming-ni, tactful and deft as ever, did not violate her mood. Against his shrewder judgment, he answered: "Never! We have finished with the lies and conventions of Western life."

The thousand lights of the city appeared. They ascended the gangway of the liner.

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More and more enchanted grew Monique. They followed the coast of the Sund Islands, from which drifted a smell of greenhouse and humus, prevailing all the ship. Next, Singapore with its broad avenues, its moist and rank vegetation. Then Saigon, the city of gardens, its river bordered with mangroves. Hong-kong at last, the Gate of China, the opening arch of this new world, with its harbour unique in all the world, shut in on one side by the curve of the high island, on which the houses seemed to be suspended in air against a background of trees, and on the other side by the low factories of Kowloon and the mainland.

Walking through the city, they came to the flower-market. Hundreds of Cantonese women were there, gaudily painted, dressed in lively colours—pink, blue, red, or green—behind their stalls. These were heaped with the most splendid flowers. The intoxication of their perfumes drenched the air. Buyers and sellers chattered gaily in the peculiar accent of the Cantonese, who invariably seem to be talking with whole swarms of crickets in their mouths.

The next day the steamer stopped at Amoy, set on its deep blue bay dotted with verdant islands. They arrived just as the sun was setting. All the junks of the fishermen were putting in. The wind filled their outlandish sails, made of straw matting in the form of bats' wings. Their lofty prows and poops were carved and painted. Enormous and staring

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white eyes were represented on each side of the bow—for how, without eyes, was a ship to see her way? The crew, half naked, thin and sinewy, pigtailed tied closely round their skulls, cheered the liner as they sailed by. Their savage faces frightened the European passengers. Fishermen in ordinary times, pirates on occasion, these folk of the coast have no homes on land. They are born, they live, they die on board their vessels. The authorities have no jurisdiction over them. They are the free citizens of the sea.

One more day brought the travellers to the mouth of the Yang-tse. The banks, low and grey, appeared just above the line of the viscous yellow waters. The steamer went up the Shanghai River. Soon the first houses, docks, factories, and other hideous excrescences of Western life came into view. A black pall of smoke and dust covered the city. Monique felt a curious sadness. It seemed to her that she was coming down to earth after a sojourn in paradise.

They went to a European hotel, where, until Ming-ni produced his card, they were received rather coldly. Monique was astonished. But she was still more surprised when, later, she saw at the gate of the Public Garden a signboard bearing the words, "Chinese keep out." She did not ask for an explanation, for fear of offending her husband; but she noticed how the Chinese seemed to be despised in their own country, and she was indignant. Ming-ni, an-

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swering her unexpressed thought, said simply: "We haven't enough warships and soldiers. Inferior men respect nothing but material strength—and our culture is based on hatred of armies and war. We shall have to suffer long before we have brought Europe up to our standard of civilization; before they abandon their present methods and manners of wild beasts."

On the same evening they embarked on one of the Chinese steamers which ply the Yang-tse. They were asleep when the steamer started. In the morning they were awakened by a knocking at the door of their stateroom. A Chinese servant in a long blue robe entered and obsequiously took their orders for breakfast. Their stateroom was on deck. Through its open door streamed the pure light of a clear and vivid day. Beside the yellow river, here almost two miles wide, rose rounded hills covered with a rusty grass. Over these silent and deserted shores reigned a supreme quietude. Sometimes a junk with high and narrow sails passed by. A pagoda appeared on a promontory, a temple in the shade of pines. When they neared the great cities, Nanking, Kiu Kiang, and the rest, the river traffic increased. Innumerable little craft plied up and down. The low houses on the banks began to be closely massed. Over the low, broad expanse of flat grey-tiled roofs towered the sombre battlements of the city walls.

After four days and nights they stopped at Hankow and transferred themselves to a smaller steamer.



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The river, still more than a mile wide, was covered with junks and boats of every description. Three more days and nights of this inland navigation brought them to Y-chrang.

## VII

**A**T Y-chrang they went to a Chinese inn. There it was that Monique made her first attempt to converse in Chinese. Since her marriage she had faithfully studied the language, guided and helped by her husband. Not being hampered by the official pedagogic methods to which the students in certain universities are indebted for their perfect ignorance of foreign tongues, even after ten years of conscientious effort, she had made rapid progress.

She was very happy at finding that she could make herself understood. While her husband was paying a call to the Governor of the city, she coaxed the inn-keeper's wife to go out and buy her a Chinese costume. On Ming-ni's return she surprised him with a Chinese dinner-table, presided over by a fair-haired pseudo-Chinese. She was so droll, with her dress too short and too small, that he could not help joining in her merriment. When they started on again, though, they resumed European dress, for Monique could find no suitable Chinese garments ready-made.

This time they chartered a seaworthy and comfortable junk, their quarters in which they could thoroughly enjoy. They had two cabins finished in

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carved, gilded, and varnished woodwork. Everything was of an immaculateness known only to sailors. Little window-like portholes opened no more than two or three feet above the water-line. On the fore-deck the men worked at oars or warping-line, or at the sails when the wind served.

Monique, in spite of her efforts, of course had not an extensive knowledge of either the language or the etiquette and customs. Ming-ni had occasion to be thankful that they had retained their foreign garb. He could read the eyes of the crew and of the passers-by on shore; and he knew that in every mind was the same thought: "These foreigners are mad. They do not know the first word of social usage or true righteousness. But so long as they are not dangerous, we don't care what they do or say." And the crew laughed indulgently when Monique tugged at the hawser along with the men at a stretch of rapids, or asked questions of the bystanders.

Her love for China became passionate. There was in her mind the perpetual contrast between the lives of her friends and her own life, between the depressing banality of Western streets and the vivacity of everything she saw here. The landscapes filled her with admiration and wonder—this immense river shimmering between its high banks; the rapids plunging in great combs over hidden rocks; the distant hills, each with a splendid pagoda perched on its summit. Everything instantly translated itself into terms of

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description for her letters to relatives and friends. Without realizing it, she was fully as much delighted to have seen what her family and acquaintances had not seen, and perhaps never would see, as to have beheld these exquisite and unforgettable landscapes for their own sake.

At Krei-chow-foo they left the river for the road. While they were waiting at the inn for their new means of conveyance, a servant announced a foreign missionary. A grey-bearded Catholic priest in a black cassock came in. He was taken aback at seeing Ming-ni. "Excuse me," he said in Chinese; "I was told that two foreigners had come. As I am alone here, I wanted to avail myself of such an opportunity to see countrymen of my own."

"Don't apologize, I beg of you," answered Ming-ni in French. "We are from France, and very pleased we are to see you. Pray be seated."

The servant brought a cup of tea. They chattered about themselves, about Europe. Then Ming-ni asked the priest for the latest news of the region.

"It is not too cheerful," said the old man. "The people of the province are not pleased about the projected railway. They are beginning to be very hostile to foreigners."

"And quite justifiably," said Monique. "It is really grotesque to impose these hideous Western ideas on such a splendid country."

The priest looked at her with visible amazement.

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“To be sure, very few countries in the world are so beautiful as this,” said Ming-ni. “Yet the railway, though dirty and ugly, is very useful—especially when it rains. Moreover, if His Majesty the Emperor (ten thousand times ten thousand years!) has decided on the construction of a railway here, then it is for the best. The rulers, when they have consulted together and decided, have done their duty as rulers. It is for the people to obey and say nothing. If the rulers did not employ the best of their faculties, Heaven would take back the power It has given them, and they would fall helpless.”

They invited the missionary to stay and dine with them. During the meal he could not forbear giving Monique a few pieces of prudent advice. “You are now about to go into the remotest part of China,” he said. “The people here have not yet acquired that equal indifference to good and to evil which characterizes the modern spirit. Their moral fibre and their courage are unimpaired. Very strict principles govern what one is to do and not do; and to these every one without exception must conform. When an action seems to them at variance with their code, whether it comes from a potentate or a plain citizen, they take the law into their own hands and forthwith punish the culprit.”

He went on to tell them how one of his own colleagues had been killed recently. “He came from the West, and at the very beginning of his stay he be-

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gan to preach vehemently against the absurd pretensions of the Buddhist priests to be able to procure rain by their pagan practices. The people were persuaded that he would displease the God of Rain, and—they stoned him to death.”

“How dreadful!” said Monique. “After all, he was quite right.”

“Of course he was right,” assented the missionary. “How could such heathen rites make any difference to the rainfall? But here, taught by previous experiences, we let them offer up their public sacrifices. Naturally, nothing happens. When the whole city has recognized as much, we announce that we too are going to offer prayers. We have a grand procession. Of course, it is not long before the results appear, the dry season being practically over by that time, anyway; the rain comes, and we get a good many converts.”

He went away at length, meditating a letter to that one of his colleagues who lived nearest to Ming-ni’s birthplace, to the end of procuring, if possible, the Christian baptism of any future children of the young couple.

The travellers started again on the morrow. The sedan-chair with its four porters seemed to Monique the most agreeable means of transport she had ever experienced. But the “Oh, *oh!*—oh, *oh!*” of the coolies and the gentle swaying motion of the chair sent her to sleep for the greater part of the time.

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Perhaps she had begun to grow accustomed to the scenery—the hills, the roads with their great stone slabs, the pagodas, the rice-fields—though her enthusiasm for them remained the same.

Her husband, meanwhile, was growing more and more apprehensive. He had almost forgotten the dangers of travel in that remote part of the country, where riot and brigandage are always going on, either separately or together. Brought up in this very region, he had thought of such a state of affairs as normal. He had always travelled alone before, and he was not afraid for himself now. But, for the first time, he was experiencing the sensation of constant anxiety for the well-being of another; of having to hide his fears from that other so that she should never know of them, to lie awake in order to watch over her. He remembered now, with sudden horror, the spectacle of a European traveller who, pursued by his insufficiently paid and enraged porters, had stumbled on the uneven ground, fallen, and been beaten to death with the long, heavy *pien-tang* with which the men carry their loads. But, as luck would have it, the floating population on the road was fairly calm. Their only unpleasant experience was being insulted by a group of muleteers whom they met in a narrow path.

They arrived at last at Chreng-krow, where the parents of Ming-ni lived in the luxurious privacy of their estate, The Palace of a Hundred Flowers. The young

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man began to breathe more freely—this long, trying journey was drawing to its end without mishap.

Monique surveyed with great curiosity this city of her husband's birth. The towering gates once passed, they proceeded along the main street. This thoroughfare cut the city into two distinct sections. It was the nucleus of all the life and activity of the place. The low houses, each with a diminutive story under its projecting roof, formed an uninterrupted vista of open shops, in which were displayed a thousand varieties of wares. The carved and gilded signboards, bearing poetic ideograms in relief, swung creaking in the breeze. It was market day. The entire population of the neighbourhood had turned out, some to sell their produce, others to buy; some carried their loads, others came with pack-animals, wheelbarrows, and a motley of conveyances. The passage was almost blocked by the chattering and good-natured populace. As it was afternoon, their faces were flushed with the fumes of the crude native alcohol. Voices were raised in lively altercation.

The bystanders paid no great attention to the screams of the porters, and several were jostled aside by the shafts of the two sedan-chairs. The curtains of the chairs had been lowered, and Ming-ni had ordered his *chrai-kwan* to put on the blue button, sign of his master's rank. The people, recognizing the presence of a high functionary, did not grumble much. As for the porters, they were in high feather.



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At last they had reached the end of their long and exacting journey. They had celebrated the day by one or two extra cups of liquor; and now they were exchanging rough jests among themselves and with the passers-by, and laughing boisterously.

In this state of exhilaration, they failed to notice an aged man who was crossing the street in front of them. They ran into him with the chair, and he fell down. Insults and high words were showered on the porters, and they were brought to a halt. The poor old man was unable to get up.

Nothing would have happened, probably, had not one of the porters foolishly called out: "Way! Give way for the Great Men of the Ocean!" At these unlucky words the clamour redoubled. A tall red-faced man, at least half drunk, tore down the curtain of Monique's chair and howled: "The Devils, the Devils of the Ocean! The red-haired Devils! Kill! Strike! Kill!"

An excited mob rarely resists an appeal to murder. The screams of "Kill, kill!" were taken up by everybody. The porters tried to start ahead, but found their way blocked by the crowd. One of them slipped on the smooth pavement and fell. That was enough. A villager struck him on the head with his stick as he was trying to get up; then the bystanders closed in round him.

As soon as he saw that the chairs were definitely blocked, Ming-ni jumped out, ran to Monique, helped

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her quickly down, and, holding her tightly by the hand, ran with all possible speed into a narrow side street, doubling almost immediately through another alley. In a trice they had shaken off the crowd. He had acted so promptly, taken such quick advantage of the commotion round the fallen porter, that few even noticed his action. Some stones whistled past their ears, but they only ran the faster, and presently they were alone together.

“And that poor porter?” asked Monique. “What will they do to him?”

“Kill him, most likely,” answered Ming-ni laconically.

“But we must go back, then, and save him,” she protested.

“They are a thousand, and we are two. I cannot see you fall into the hands of those drunken brutes. Besides, the porters ran over the old man: it is all their own fault. Let us get home as fast as we can.”

Monique could still not credit the idea that they were in actual danger. Also, she was reassured by her husband's calm presence. “This is not exactly the sort of reception they give one in France,” she said, half-laughingly.

“Oh, in Paris, too, it happens now and then. Just remember what happened to those two women who first appeared on the boulevards wearing those hideous tight skirts. They were handled pretty roughly, and if they hadn't run into a house and barred the door

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they would probably have been killed. Mobs are depraved and dangerous everywhere.”

He listened to the clamour, which still did not subside. A man passed them at a run, screaming “Kill, kill!” but was scared off by a gesture of Ming-ni, and disappeared. They picked their way as fast as they could toward the Palace, keeping to back streets and alleys. Then, suddenly, Ming-ni remembered that the sole entrance to his father’s house was on the great square which was crossed by the market street. The crowd would certainly have blocked the gate. He thought of asking shelter of a friend of his father. But who would recognize him, after ten years—especially in his foreign dress? No, their sole refuge was the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. His father’s wealth and prestige, and his retinue of domestics, would do most to quell the riot.

Anyway, it was unthinkable to linger in the streets. Already they were probably being pursued, and sooner or later they were sure to be discovered. He decided that their best course was to get as near the gate as possible without being seen, and then to rush across the square without giving the crowd time to collect its wits. He outlined his plan to Monique, who still persisted in taking the whole episode as a sort of game of hide-and-seek.

They passed, then, with the greatest caution, along the back streets until they were just opposite the Palace. Then, holding each other tightly by the hand,

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they turned the corner of the alley and ran for it, through the midst of a howling, roaring mob. The square was jammed with people.

Now, the porters, *chrai-kwan* and subordinates, on seeing the fate of one of their number, had immediately tried to plunge on to their destination, the Palace. The rioters had followed them, and now surrounded the gate, which the porters were trying in vain to force open. A terrific din greeted the arrival of the two fugitives. The thick wall of maddened humanity bore down upon them. It was too late now to turn back: they must somehow traverse the crowd and reach that gate, or die.

Ming-ni shouldered his way powerfully through the first ranks of people, who, cowed by his resoluteness and violence, gave way sullenly. But they closed behind the pair, and the other ranks ahead stood massed and unyielding. A villager clutched at Ming-ni's coat and tore the sleeve. Sticks and *pian-tang* were raised. Stones thrown from behind struck members of the crowd in front. A man raised his cudgel against Monique, who dodged it just in time. Ming-ni, in a rage, put his hand into his pocket, drew a revolver, and fired three shots point-blank into the mass. Three men fell.

Followed an instant of terror and fuddlement. The crowd opened. Ming-ni drew his wife forward. The porters, hearing the shots, understood that their master was there. They made a superhuman effort,

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pulling and pushing, shouldering and trampling, and with their aid the young couple at last reached the closed gate.

Ming-ni and the *chrai-kwan* shouted the gate-keeper's name. No one opened. Stones were raining on the little group. Several of the porters were cut and bleeding. Ming-ni used his own body as a screen for Monique, who was now thoroughly terrified. He ordered his men to burst in the gate; but despite their most frantic efforts the timbers remained immovable. The crowd, fearing the revolver, did not close in, but stones continued to fly. The situation looked desperate. Ming-ni, who feared the worst, retained two cartridges—one for Monique and one for himself. Presently, when the mob saw that he did not fire again, it began to edge closer.

The fateful moment had come. He gripped his weapon more tightly, strained his wife's body closer to his own with an encircling arm. . . .

## VIII

**I**N the garden of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers, at the moment when Ming-ni and his wife were entering the city, reigned the deep and unruffled serenity peculiar to those parts of the world in which the vain and febrile unrest of Western civilization has not yet had its way. Behind the three-tiered roof of the Great Gate, which stood wide open, the gate-keeper, in a blue gown, sat on a post, smoking and following with dreamy eyes the antics of his two little children as they played on the large grey square slabs below.

The first or outer courtyard was shaded by ancient pines, the twisted and writhing trunks of which harboured the nests of innumerable squirrels and little birds. Two sides of this courtyard were flanked by low houses and barns; these, closed now, were reserved for the servants of guests on days of ceremony. A portico with an ornate roof gave on a second courtyard, also planted with ancient trees, in which many servants were working leisurely. In one of the long rooms on the western side, behind open windows, a group of women were at their collective task of embroidering a huge design on silk. Their laughing

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chatter rose above even the crowing of some jackdaws which, perched on the walls and the peaks of the roofs, were settling their differences in spirited debate. In another building a maker of furniture was engaged in mending a chair. While he worked, his hammer tapped out the rhythm of the popular tune which he was whistling. In still another house, porters were suspending from slings a sedan-chair polished to the last degree of speckless lustre.

The third or "Cinabar" courtyard was surrounded by the most beautiful buildings of the estate. At its farther end was the great reception hall, whose high and heavy roof, covered with grey tiles, was supported on columns resplendent with black and red lacquer. The year being well advanced into spring, the high panels of trellis-work which formed the front of the hall had been taken away. In the shaded depths of the vast room shone heavy chairs of ebony, high screens chiselled and chased, and rare curios on strangely designed cabinets; and there was a *krang*, the capacious broad sofa on which low tables are commonly placed. The buildings on each side of the great hall were lower. They included the library, the drawing-rooms, the dining-room, and the private apartments of the master. In the middle of the wide yard a large square pond reflected trees, roofs, and blue sky—at least, it did so whenever the mirror of its waters was not ruffled by the play of the five-tailed fishes which lived in its depths. Among the trees,

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enormous porcelain basins of bright colours, placed on red lacquer stands, held plants, flowers, and fishes. A small door gave entrance to the apartments of the women. Each wife had her own pavilions surrounding her own courtyard.

Farther on were the gardens, so oddly planned and so labyrinthine that their owner, to his intense delight, was always getting lost in the intricacy of the paths. An artificial mountain, surrounded by a dark thicket of broad-leaved banana trees, was capped by a kiosk, from which was visible the whole extent of the garden, a vista of low roofs, and—beyond the crenelated city walls—a horizon of blue hills floating ethereally in the transparent light. At the foot of this artificial elevation was a large pool covered with lotus and nelumbo flowers. A clear brook meandered from the pool through a succession of quaint and delightful prospects under loftily arching willows; and it was spanned at intervals by red-lacquered arched bridges of the contour known as “camel’s-back.”

No delight was lacking in this place of delights. The birds, never molested, ate fearlessly from the hands of the women; they nested everywhere, and sang without ceasing. At dawn they celebrated the daylight by a general concert. Towards mid-day, when the heat was most enervating and soporific, they would still begin a twitter of melody, only to drowse and leave it unfinished. As dusk drew on, their ex-



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cited chatter made a confused noise like that of a whole orchestra tuning up.

On the east the gardens were bounded and dominated by the Temple of the Sacred Mountains. Its huge roof, covered with golden tiles, gleamed in the sun amidst the fresh green of the tall trees. A low wall, beautified by its trellised gallery, separated the sacred precincts from the garden. Roses of the most brilliant hues covered the base of this wall. Peonies of a hundred different species rivalled each other in beauty at its foot. One could find there the "Golden Pavilion" with its innumerable rays of fire on a purple background; the "Green Butterfly," cut into a thousand tiny blades; the "Blue Lion," with large blue stripes on violet petals; and the "Prince of Poets,"<sup>1</sup> all pink and golden.

In front of the peonies a white-bearded old man, tall and slender, was now meditatively smoking a pipe, the tiny bowl of which was at the extremity of a bamboo stem more than a yard long. A young girl with laughing eyes, clad in the blue linen of servants, stood beside him.

"Aya!" she was saying. "How lovely are your flowers! Well may my mistress be proud of her father."

"Ay," answered the old man softly, "I imagine the Lord Chen will be pleased."

<sup>1</sup> Or, literally, "Elegant Genius."

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"Pleased!" repeated the young girl indignantly. "The flowers you grow for him are his greatest pride. Don't forget that it was because of your talents that he changed the name of his abode to 'the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.'"

"Those peonies," resumed the old man, hardly listening to her, "really do have an intensity of color possessed by no others."

"And if the Lord Chen were not filled with respect for your admirable art," persisted the other hotly, "he would not deserve that the genii should let him have you as gardener—you, the celebrated poet who was accepted among the first rank of the 'Entered Scholars' after taking the examinations at the capital."

"Hush!" said the old man mildly, waving his hand. "Try not to awaken my literary ambitions. For thirty years they have slumbered, leaving me happy and careless the while. I grow the most beautiful flowers hereabout. And sometimes I make poems which are really not so bad. In such things lie true happiness. Help me, rather, with those ladders yonder. These roses must be tied up again."

"True happiness! True happiness!" grumbled the little maid, while she was placing the light bamboo ladders against the wall. "But in the meantime," she said, "your daughter Orchid is growing up. She is wise and virtuous, and the prettiest girl in the city. If she only had an official position, the Little Elder Sister would certainly find a noble and wealthy hus-

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band; whereas now you do not even see anybody.”

The old man, already mid-way of a ladder, stopped to muse. “My daughter Orchid—it is true. You are right. It would have been better for her, perhaps, if I had asked for an official position.—But no, you understand nothing of the matter. You talk just like a giddy young servant who objects to going to market on foot with a basket because she thinks she ought to go in a sedan-chair. The Sage reminds us: ‘Beauty, virtue, and moderation in desire are never without their reward; for to possess them is to possess the best of all things.’”

“If,” retorted the girl, “one could add a few dishes of swallows’ nests, *bêche-de-mer*, and bears’ paws, the reward would be more in evidence.”

“Red Peony, my child,” said the old man sententiously, “you are stupid. It is easy enough to see that you are a woman. For you, beauty consists in fatness and a great moon-face. And your happiness is solely an occasion for making your neighbors die with envy—more particularly, your neighbors’ wives.”

“Heigho!” replied the other, unabashed. “The proverb is not far wrong which says: ‘The envy of our neighbors is a mirror in which we perceive our own happiness!’”

The old man shrugged his shoulders. “Say no more. You make me tired. You had better go and fetch your mistress. And do you not forget that,

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because of my blameless life and our most wise laws, we are held in such great honor that Orchid my daughter, the daughter of the old gardener, may be chosen for the harem of the August Emperor Himself (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years!).”

At these words the girl knelt down mock-respectfully and, with a bow, said, laughing: “My deepest homage to the father of our Empress!”

The old man, between vexation and amusement, climbed down the ladder and raised his long pipe admonitorily, saying: “Run away, impudent little baggage! or I will have your ears cut off for speaking thus lightly of His Imperial Majesty, this Car of Light.”

The little servant rose and fled, still laughing. Turning her head to see if her master were following, she quite failed to notice a large fat gentleman who was approaching pompously, clad in a brocade gown and upheld under the arms by two men. He smoked a short silver pipe, the bowl of which was mounted above a flask of perfumed water, ornamented with precious stones. At each inhalation, the smoke gurgled through the liquid, coming fresh and sweet to the mouth. His round face beamed with contentment. A short grey pigtail hung from the back of his head; his forehead was clean-shaven. Red Peony, still looking back at her master and laughing, did not see the newcomer until she had run plump against his vast breast. Then she gave a little scream of sur-

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prise. The other gasped; then, recovering his breath, he smiled at the girl, who murmured excuses.

“Run away, little one,” he said playfully. “If I catch you, I will pull your hairs out one by one.” Then, greeting the old man: “Ah, my good friend Wang! Here is your slave up to some mischief again. Ten thousand happinesses, O Wise Elder Brother!”

The gardener, seeing him, put his dress to rights and made as if to kneel. “I touch my forehead to the ground,” he said. “And I wish you peace and prosperity.”

The other stopped him and, in his turn, threatened to kneel. “Rise! Rise, O Wise Friend! I also touch my forehead to the ground.”

“How could I stand and allow you to kneel before me?” said Wang hastily.

“Then let us put aside the rites, O Sage Wang. And how are you?”

“Thanks to your auspicious influence, my health is good. And that of the Great Man Chen?”

“Your protection has favored me.”

While they were exchanging these words, the two men, one thin and tall, the other short and fat, strolled toward the peonies. “And your latest marvels?” asked Chen. “Were you able to produce the delicate shades that you were experimenting for?”

“Here are the superlatively unsuccessful results of my wasted efforts,” answered the other, showing his plants with an assumed modesty.

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Chen raised his arms, and his round face registered overwhelming admiration. "What splendor! What exquisiteness!" he cried. "What a freshness in the tints! What infinite grace in the forms! You are indeed the Paragon of Gardeners. I shall have a temple built for you, where your statue shall receive fitting sacrifice to the sixtieth generation." He stopped suddenly with an inspired look, a finger on his temple. "But I feel the afflatus of poetry—" He counted on his fingers and, in an uneven but rhythmical voice, began:

"The peonies are red,  
The tuberoses white,  
The sky is blue; the shadow is black. . . ."

He stopped, repeating "The sky is blue; the shadow is black"; then he turned upon Wang a countenance full of melancholy. "What after that, O Wise Friend?" he asked. "Alas, my poetical inspirations never take me very far. I nearly always break down by the third verse."

The old man had listened to him with a polite attention. He bowed. "I see, I see," he said. "Your poem is admirable. I will try to finish it, if you will make allowance for my dullness." Then, without seeming effort, he went on in a simple and harmonious tone, and in perfect rhythm:

"The Palace of a Hundred Flowers  
Fills with sweetness all the city.

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Wafted from the bowers of its pleasaunce,  
The perfumes bring us anew their gift of loveliness.

“Pure honey is the odour of the peonies;  
The pungency of tuberoses  
Exhales itself as pious incense  
From earth’s lowly shadows to the blue arch of the sky.

“The empurpled lotus reflects in the great pool  
The pride of its sombre and slumbrous beauty;  
The jasmine and the rose, daughters of summertime,  
Trouble the hearts of the young girls dreaming at their  
windows.

“When the heat of the day is past,  
The Palace charges the evening breeze  
To carry to the Gods, well-spring of all power,  
The tender souls of the dead flowers.”

Wang’s fat master listened, nodding his head. He now exclaimed: “Marvellous! Marvellous! O Wise Friend, you give me wonderful inspirations! It is only when I am with you that I feel myself capable of great poetry.” Then, turning to one of his servants: “Did you hear? You are not to forget a word of this masterpiece. I must recite it to some friends this very evening, over a cup of lukewarm wine.” Then, turning once more to Wang, with deep feeling: “Oh, poetry! What an exercise for great souls! My heart was heavy when I came; and now it is light.”

“Your heart was heavy?” asked Wang sympa-

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thetically. "Evil spirits"—he spat quickly to right and then to left, murmuring "May they all perish!"—"have not been seen in the Palace?"

"Oh, no! My ancestors keep them from us. No. If I must tell you everything, my home is unendurable, for my First Wife renders my existence very bitter."

"Has the Virtuous Wife some secret illness? Women are often of a sour disposition when their health is not good."

"It is not that at all," answered Chen despondently. "That would be a nothing. She is simply anxious to see our eldest son, Ming-ni, who is on an official mission to the country of those Western savages—how do you call them?—the Fa-lang-hsi."

"Yes—or Fo-rang-sai.—But it is quite enough to upset one to know that one's son is among such wild and uncivilized people."

"But don't you think that I, the father, have a right to be as anxious as she is? I hide my feelings: yet I am exceedingly anxious. He has sent a message by the lightning-wires to announce his return. Since then, the moon has twice waxed and waned, and still he does not come."

"O Lord Chen," answered Wang gravely, "you must not forget that the winds and waters are capricious. If your distinguished heir has been able to escape hitherto the dangers of all the wild countries in which he has twice five times seen the spring



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blossom, he will be able to come back unscathed to the place of his Ancestral Temple."

"Such is my own feeling. But if it be easy for a scholar to control his own heart, it is more difficult for him to appease an irritable wife. Still, it will all come out happily, I trust."

"I promise myself much enjoyment," said Wang, "from the Young Lord's lively accounts of the customs of those barbarians, their houses, their food, and their primitive civilization in general. They are, in some particulars, little better than wild beasts, it appears!"

"It will be interesting to listen to him, sitting in one of the garden kiosks—the more so because, in one of his last letters, he mentions casually that he is to bring, among his effects, a foreign woman; probably the same one whom he took into his house some time ago."

"Really!" said Wang, with obvious curiosity. "A foreign woman? It will be fascinating to watch her—especially as the rites do not forbid us to watch the females of animals and of savage peoples."

"I wonder whether those barbarian women are pretty," mused Chen. "I almost regret not having asked him to bring one back for me. I must admit that, if I did not, it was only on account of the Thornbush, my First Wife. She has an invincible prejudice against what she knows nothing about, and particularly against strange persons. Do you remem-

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ber how she ordered her servants to strangle that little Annamese whom a friend from the Far South brought me once?"

"I believe you mentioned that little affair to me. I must admit that I used to have a pretty low opinion of all those Devils of the Ocean. But it seems that they are not all alike; and my own ideas have changed a good deal since I have seen so much of the foreigner—an Ing-ki-li-she, he calls himself—who lives in the temple beyond that wall."

"Ma-ken-hsi? The one who bores holes through the hills for the cars that spit fire? He who is about to begin the new road with two iron ruts?"

"Yes. Personally, he is incontestably civilized. He knows the rites, and every night the lamp which lights his open book is still burning when I get up at midnight to cover my delicate new plants."

"I take the greatest interest in his welfare," said Chen. "I should be extremely sorry if anything happened to him. You know, perhaps, O Elder Brother, that I am answerable for his life to the Governor of the city? If he dies, I die—or, at least, pay a heavy fine. Accordingly, I have him guarded day and night. It is a great source of anxiety to me. It seems the stupid populace is disaffected by this project of the railway. They say that the Dragon of the Earth will be vexed by such an undertaking. The muleteers and waggoners are also very angry, because they fear to lose their trade. Already the Governor

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has posted proclamations everywhere, strictly enjoining peace and order, under penalty of death. But in spite of everything, rioting has begun already."

"Bah!" said Wang disdainfully. "The ignorant people are angered and appeased as easily as boiling milk on the fire rises and subsides."

"Sometimes the milk boils over," commented Chen.

"The will of our Sacred Emperor always has been, and always will be, obeyed by those sheep; they are not worth bothering one's head about," answered Wang. "But about those barbarians: has the Young Lord written you of the strange marriage customs of the Far West? Our neighbour Ma-ken-hsi asserts—and for my part I can hardly believe him—that the bride's parents, so far from receiving in gifts the value of the girl whom they give away, have to offer a considerable sum of money with her. Thus, people without money are unable to get rid of their daughters at all."

"My son did allude to something of the sort, but I cannot believe it, either. Why, if it were true," added the fat old man, his rotund bulk shaking with laughter, "it would mean that they have completely solved the problem of marriage—palliating the woman by money, and administering the antidote along with the poison."

"Oh, Great Man Chen, how can you?" protested Wang with a mixture of sadness and indignation.

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"Are not women the great solace of our life? What should we do without them?"

"True, true!" assented the other, still laughing. "But you can afford to speak lightly of the subject. You have only a daughter, and she is known as a model of virtue, wisdom, and agreeable disposition."

"My daughter is silly and without grace or beauty," answered the gratified father politely. "But she has studied the doctrines of the Sage. She understands her duty to others."

"My Thorn-bush of a Wife knows better than anything the duty of others to herself, and to her family. And, by the way, she is up in arms because that barbarian woman whom my son has with him has not as yet given him a child."

"A barren woman is assuredly the curse of a family. How, without children, is the ancestral worship to be carried on? How can the family, which is the basis of society and of civilization itself, develop and prosper? Hence the obligation to keep second wives, in order to have as many children as possible."

"Of course, Wise Brother," said Chen. "But that is not the only motive. Your love of flowers has guarded you against other loves. You are oblivious of the pleasure of being surrounded by several second wives who outvie one another in attentiveness to their master, bringing cushions for his head and deftly preparing his fragrant opium-pipe."

"Yes, yes, I know!" said Wang. "A splendid poet

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has sung of such pleasures.” And he recited mellifluously:

“In the coolness of a sumptuously decorated hall  
The Emperor reclines, dressed in gold and in purple;  
Round about, his wives are standing, daring not to move—  
In the vast silence their very breathing is hushed.

“He opens his eyes. The favourite rises  
With languid grace. Her half-open dress  
Bares her shoulders of pink and white jade,  
Like to snowy peaks in the roseate dawn.

“Her slender fingers caress the great lute.  
The very birds, stricken with envy, intermit their songs to  
listen.  
Her Lord sits erect, looking at her with vaguely troubled  
eyes.

“Her voice rises and falls, tender, soft, and moving. . . .  
She has sung. A hush fills the hall once more.  
Yet her Lord listens still; and in his eyes there are tears.”

“But,” Wang added, “there are pleasures of which I, personally, am indeed forgetful. My wife was virtuous, but of no great beauty. She has long since left me for the Nether Regions below the Nine Springs. Since then, I am free.”

“Happy man! thrice and five times happy!” exclaimed Chen fervently. “Nevertheless,” he continued, “I am curious to know this foreigner, and I hope that the women of the Palace will be kind to her. Has not the Sage admonished us: ‘Be kind to those who come from afar?’”

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While he was pronouncing these words, the blond head of a Westerner appeared above the temple wall. His blue eyes were mild; on his fresh, clean-shaven face a grave and intellectual look made him appear somewhat older than he probably was. He was dressed in a khaki jacket and riding-breeches. He bowed to his neighbour, who had just noticed his presence, and said in correct Chinese: "May the home of the Great Sage be for ever praised! May his doctrine be studied all over the world, bringing with it Reason and peace! O Great Man Chen, ten thousand happinesses! O Elder Brother Wang, ten thousand happinesses to you also!"

The two bowed, waving their closed hands up and down and repeating: "Ten thousand felicities, O Lord of the Ocean!"

The foreigner leaned over the wall and said: "I was passing along this wall, dreaming idly, when a favourable wind brought to my ears the never sufficiently praised words of Krong Foo-tse. I could not resist the impulse to greet two sage scholars."

The two bowed again, and Chen answered with some gratification: "Humble student as I am, I am happy to greet you. Is your health still good? You must know that I take the greatest interest in the welfare of your person."

"I thank you. I thank you."

"And your work?" pursued Chen. "Do you find

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that you can go about freely? The ignorant populace does not interfere with you in any way?"

"By no means."

"It transpires that there is an increasing opposition to the carts-that-spit-fire and the iron roads."

"So I am informed," answered the Westerner. "But I have found only smiles and encouraging words everywhere. Assuredly I should have mentioned it to you, had it been otherwise. I know that your kindness has gone so far as to answer for my security. If only for your sake, I would do anything to prevent a mischance."

"My life has no importance whatever," said Chen negligently. "But, of course, my loss would fall heavily on my family."

"That I can very easily believe.—But what are these miracles which I see at the base of the wall? Another creation of Uncle Wang, our great and venerable artist whom the whole city looks up to!"

"Your praise far exceeds the truth," answered the old man.

During this interchange they were becoming increasingly aware of a din outside the wall. It reached their ears unmistakably on the quiet evening air. Chen listened a moment anxiously, but politeness constrained him to prolong the exchange of compliments. He said: "Are they not prodigious? Our Wang is an Immortal, and will some day fly

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away into the sky on a bright cloud. Look at those superb 'Blue Lions'!"

"Nothing could equal their beauty," said Mackensie. "These glorious flowers must inspire you to many a poem?"

"Not at this moment. My heart is anxious and my spirit troubled. My eldest son, the Little Dog of the House, whom I expect every day from your Precious Country, has not yet come. And I find myself wondering if he will be greatly changed."

"But, Great Man," said the foreigner, in a slightly protesting tone, "I assure you that we are not so uncivilized as some think. Of course, our recent culture could not compare with the ancient civilization of your own glorious nation. Nevertheless, among us there are artists, poets, and even illustrious gardeners whom kings have honoured." And he saluted Wang, who bowed in acknowledgment.

"But," said Chen, "you yourself have adopted our customs here. My son has probably done the same over there."

"All cultures are alike in so far as they contain the elements of true civilization. Your son, having learned the basic moral principles, has applied them in Europe in a different costume and with a different outward manner; but the principles remain the same."

While he was speaking, the noise outside redoubled. A revolver barked three times rapidly. This made



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the three stop talking and look at one another in alarm. Suddenly, precipitate steps sounded on the gravel. At the turning of the path appeared an elderly lady, stout and of authoritative manner. She was walking as fast as her dignity allowed her. Her bound feet gave her the mincing strut of a child on stilts. The flowers in her lustrous hair were quivering agitatedly. The flying skirts of her long, pale mauve silk pelisse revealed the thousand pleats of her blue skirt. Numerous servants of both sexes came behind her, chattering confusedly.

The old lady stopped short on sight of Chen, and said indignantly: "Of course, you would be here doing nothing! I have been looking for you everywhere."

Wang had knelt at once. Bowing his head, he said ceremoniously: "Ten thousand wishes of peace and prosperity to the Lady of the Palace!"

She knelt in turn, and responded: "Ten thousand felicities!"

Wang bowed again. "A thousand wishes of long life and good health!"

The First Wife seemed exasperated, but she answered: "Ten thousand good wishes and thanks." Then she checked herself and got up. "Enough! Let us forget the rites. There is a riot at the Palace gate—the stupid people are going to kill some passersby, and stones are raining on them. The passersby want to take refuge in our grounds."

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"I can't have them," said Chen promptly. "Tell them to go away."

"The gate-keeper was just in time to close the door.—Where is the absurd fellow? Where?"

The aged gate-keeper, who earlier in the afternoon had been blinking dreamily at his two children, now emerged instantly from the group and knelt down. "Having received from Your High Wisdom," he began—

But the First Wife interrupted him and, stamping impatiently, snapped: "None of your silly politeness! Hurry!"

The gate-keeper gazed at her with amazement and went on: "—the order to—"

"Will you cut it short or won't you?" screamed the old lady tempestuously. "Yes or no?"

"The Very Small One was standing, guarding the Precious Entrance, when suddenly a group of men came near, followed and stoned from behind by the mob. I was just in time to bolt the door before they reached the threshold. Disregarding the danger, I looked out through a chink. A few minutes afterward, I saw two foreign barbarians come through the crowd, shooting right and left, killing several hundred people—"

"Foreigners?" exclaimed Mackensie. "I must go to help them."

"Stop, stop!" screamed Chen in anguish. "Stop!"

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It's most dangerous. Don't forget that I am surety for you."

"But we have got to save them. Tell your man to open the door quickly."

"Do you hear?" said Chen to the gate-keeper. "Obey at once."

The man looked at the First Wife and did not budge. She had made such an authoritative gesture as would almost have stopped an express train going at full speed. She now turned on her husband. "How now? You would have the door opened? But if those people are killed here, we shall be ruined. And if the mob comes in, they will burn and loot everything. A fine example of your ignorant weakness, your criminal indifference to my health, my very life!—I am going to faint. . . ."

Chen did not exactly relish being scolded in public. He turned savagely to the servants: "And who are these foreigners? Did you ask them their names, their birthplace, the reason for their presence here?"

The gate-keeper, ordinarily responsible for the reception of visitors, replied humbly: "I did not think to ask them for their visiting cards; though, now that I think of it, they called me by my name. How could they know me? They must be sorcerers."

"If sorcerers," said Chen, suddenly discovering a ground of compromise with his wife, "they must stay outside. If they are killed, you must immediately

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drag their bodies right into the middle of the square, so that nobody shall be implicated in their death."

Mackensie indignantly interrupted him. "But, O Great Man, have your gate opened at once, I beg of you. I will go myself if it becomes necessary."

"No, no!" cried Chen. "Don't do that, whatever comes!"

He was spared the agony of finding a solution for himself, for at that instant the clamour increased and seemed to draw nearer. "Everything is lost!" screamed the First Wife. "The mob has broken in the door and is already in the Palace grounds. Let us fly!"

"But where to—where to?" asked Chen helplessly.

"Here!" said the old lady—and she started to climb up one of the ladders. "We will go into the temple."

Chen promptly started up the other ladder. Mackensie, on the other hand, was standing on the wall, about to jump down. The servants stood in a huddled group, howling and trembling, while Wang tried frantically to keep them from trampling all over his flower beds.

## IX

**M**ING-NI, shielding his wife with his own body, was asking himself desperately how he was to save her. Monique was naturally courageous. Protected by her husband, she regained her spirit and something of her curiosity. She looked alternately at their assailants, still wholesomely awed by the revolver, and at the door by the gate. And suddenly she saw, lying at her feet, one of the heavy bars of wood which are used to fasten the doors. It must have been left outside when the gate-keeper had so hurriedly shut out the fugitives. She showed it to Ming-ni and asked if it could not be used as a sort of ram to break in the door.

“Too small,” said Ming-ni, after one look. “It would take a much bigger one to stave the whole thing in. But,” he cried suddenly, “since this thing is out here, one of the small doors must be unbarred!”

He led his wife to one of the small side entrances which always open at either side of the main gateway. They dragged the log after them. Ming-ni made sure that there was indeed no bar on the inside; then, lifting the heavy piece of wood, they rammed it as hard as they could against the place where the

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small wooden latch must be. At the impact they heard an unmistakable noise of splintering wood. The lock was not strong enough to hold. They redoubled their exertions, and almost at once the door flew open. They dropped the log and darted in, followed by the jubilantly shouting porters. The frustrated mob roared behind them. The most inflamed members of the crowd, restrained by no respect for Chen, plunged in after the fugitives; but the majority very well knew the difference between assaulting an unknown foreigner in a public square, and invading the palace of a powerful local financier. They stopped and went back in sullen silence to their own affairs. Most of them were even discreet enough to go straight to their own homes.

Ming-ni, his face covered with blood, his clothes in shreds, was still clutching his wife, whose dress was also disheveled, but who had suffered hardly a scratch. He led her at once across the two outer courtyards to a small gate which opened on the gardens. He hoped to double quickly there and enter his father's quarters while his pursuers were still baffled among the intricate paths which he knew so well. Passing through the garden gate, he saw two or three servants running in front of him, and heard them screaming: "Great Man, the rioters are in the Palace! We can't hold them at bay!" Ming-ni called out to them, asking where his father was to be found. But they only ran the faster, still shouting.

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Concluding from their screams that they were bound for wherever old Chen might be, he followed them. In a moment he and Monique were in the midst of the weeping and quaking group of servants, confronting the family itself.

Chen was sitting on the wall, trying to hoist himself to his feet. The First Wife had missed a step of the ladder and was in a painful, precarious, and—it really must be added—embarrassing position, in which, nevertheless, she somehow managed to retain a good share of her dignity. Mackensie stood on the wall, revolver in hand, ready to shoot whoever laid a finger on the foreign refugees.

Stronger than the sense of danger was the habit of a lifetime. Ming-ni knelt obsequiously at the foot of the ladder on which his father was perched, and touched his forehead to the ground. Monique stood and stared, amazed at his behaviour. She had never before seen him in such a posture, though she knew that it was a customary mode of salutation.

The old couple had not in the least recognized their offspring. The First Wife, red with anger, howled at the top of her lungs: "Get away, Devils! Get away, Devils of the Ocean! Why do you come to pester me in my house?" Then she turned her head to look at the rioters, who had stopped short some distance off, as frightened of Chen as of Mackensie's pistol. "And you, murderers, bandits, robbers, be off at once! If you stay a minute more, I will have

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you all cut into a thousand pieces; I will have your guts ripped out! Be off with you!”

The less infuriated ones turned tail without waiting for a second injunction. The remaining ones kept on shrieking “Kill, kill! strike, strike!” but in weakening and spiritless voices. Another sharp command from the old lady convinced them that it might be dangerous to stay longer, and they slunk away as quickly as they could.

During this transaction, Ming-ni had continued to kneel at the foot of the ladder. Monique, standing beside him, was divided between efforts to restrain her laughter at the sight of her fat, stubby father-in-law perched on the wall, and a mounting shame at having exposed to the common curiosity her beautiful unbound fair hair and her general dishevelment.

As for the First Wife, she was still screaming shrilly: “Will you go away and leave us to ourselves, you Devils of the Ocean? And you,” she added to the servants, “throw them outside! I am not going to have such people here.”

But the *chrai-kwan*, an old servant of the household, had come forward and was also kneeling, touching his forehead to the ground and saying: “He is your Precious Heir, the Young Lord, O Great Nurse; he is the Young Lord!”

“I am your humble son, the Little Dog of the House, your Ming-ni,” said the young man. “It is I, O Father and Mother!”



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These words at last caught the attention of the two old people. They looked at Ming-ni.

"I recognize him!" cried Chen from aloft. "Ten thousand happinesses, my dear child! Ten thousand happinesses!"

"How now!" said the old lady, in stupefaction. "Is it indeed you? Where is your Chinese robe? And your hair? Stand up, stand up at once!"

The old man descended labouriously from his position on the ladder and, approaching, embraced his son, at the same time whispering in his ear: "This woman of yours is charming—charming, you rogue! But you are not very nice in that foreign disguise."

"How can you shake him like that?" demanded his wife indignantly. "Don't you see that he is wounded?" She had at last extricated herself from the ladder. She patted her son gently on the back. At the same time she said to him, *sotto voce*: "She is simply hideous, that woman! Why did you bring her? And she has no children? She must be ill."

Monique, who was beginning to be impatient, came to Ming-ni and touched his arm. "Don't you think it is high time you introduced me to your parents?" she asked.

Ming-ni took her hand, bowed to his parents, and said: "Here is the humble servant of your house." Then, to his wife: "Kneel quickly and touch your forehead to the ground nine times."

Monique was taken aback. She knew, of course,

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the forms of greeting used in China, but she had never quite realized that she might be expected to practise them. The habit of a lifetime, a sort of absurd shame at exhibiting herself in such a position—perhaps, too, something of the contrariety which lurks in all of her sex—prevented her from complying with her husband's order. She stepped forward instead, and held out her hand.

The First Wife, who knew nothing whatever of Western customs, looked curiously at the hand thus proffered and, turning to her son, asked: "What on earth does she want?"

"It is the most respectful form of greeting in Europe, mother. They shake hands."

Chen had observed the scene. He now held out his own plump fingers, saying: "Ten thousand days! Be welcome in our house." But the First Wife shook hands only with the greatest reluctance, saying: "Now go and wash your hurts. After that you will change into decent clothing. The Fifth Wife of your father, who is very tall, shall provide some gowns for this girl. Then we will go to the Hall of the Ancestors in order to announce your home-coming before the Sacred Tablets."

While Chen was chattering with Monique, the old lady, walking just behind her son, said to him: "I don't greatly admire her manners! You will please tell her to kneel down as all well-bred people do. If she refuses, you are to have her whipped."

## X

**A**FTER the crowd had retired from the gardens, Wang set his numerous assistants to work in the most seriously damaged parts of the shrubbery and flower-beds. He himself went, with his daughter and their little servant, to see what he could do for his peonies, some of which had been considerably trampled. The poor old fellow ran from one to another, almost in tears, lamenting his evil destiny.

“Don’t bemoan your fate,” said the little servant. “Your flowers are spoiled, true; but your daughter is alive!”

At these words, Wang looked at his daughter. Instantly his eyes filled with a deep and tender solicitude. His look rested like a caress on the delicately graceful oval of Orchid’s face—on her thin straight nose, her hair daintily tied in a high knot ornamented with flowers; above all, on her eyes—black, lustrous eyes, full of vivacity and charm, between thick and curling lashes. She wore a short, narrow pink jacket, tied at the waist by a carmine scarf, the broad ends of which were left floating. Her skirt was of a hundred colours and as many pleats; and these last opened and shut at every step, each revealing a new tint. Her hands were long and delicately tapering,

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and it was with deft and supple fingers that she now touched the splendid flowers, straightening the stems, pinching off the half-broken leaves. Her whole body was grace and animation and exquisite fragility.

"Red Peony is right," she said. "Let us be thankful that we have escaped the riot. When I think that those murderers were actually in the garden—! They had only to pass this cluster of trees to be in our own house. I was there, not knowing what was to be done to save us, and clutching a knife ready to kill myself if they had tried to touch me."

"Yes," said Red Peony, "but the first one who passed the threshold would have had his eyes plucked out—by me!"

"All was lost," answered Wang. "And then, suddenly, the mob stopped."

"No doubt," said Orchid piously, "we owe our escape to the shade of my mother. She always used to come here to see you at your work. Her lucky and miraculous influence it is that has saved us."

"Assuredly," said Red Peony, "their sudden flight was strange. Did you not notice, O Master?"

"I noticed nothing at all," answered Wang. "I was busy trying to protect my flowers."

"Men never do notice anything," grumbled the little maid.

"I should think they might well enough have been routed by the threats of the First Wife," said Wang as an afterthought.

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"It may be," said Orchid. "Anyway, it is my duty to offer a sacrifice to my mother in this place where her influence has manifested itself."

"Do, my dear child—and at the same time ask your mother to help you find a good husband."

"We have plenty of time to think of that: I am not yet nineteen. But do you, Red Peony, run to the house and bring back the table for the sacrifice. The sun is touching the horizon. We approach the hour in which the Shades are liberated."

The little servant went off as fast as her short legs would carry her. The old man, however, was still preoccupied with his plants. "We have nearly finished here," he said. "I will go and see if my assistants have done their work. Then I may go to see the Lord Chen."

"Do, father," answered Orchid softly. "I will wait for you at home."

When the old man had disappeared behind the bushes, his daughter, left alone, gazed dreamily at the scenery. The roses on the wall were nothing but nebulous patches of colour in the dusk. Beyond them the pines and cypresses of the monastery towered darkly. The temple itself held the last rays of the sun, and the yellow tiles of its lofty roof were a mass of burning gold. The path in front of Orchid sloped down between clumps of flowers and bushes straight to the carmine framework of a bridge and, beyond, to a little kiosk built on an islet in a pond.

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Glazed blue tiles crowned the quaint structure and shone iridescently in the red light of the sky. The clear verdancy of the bamboos harmonized softly with the silver-grey of willows, the dark purple of beech trees. An immensity of peace filled the air. One could hardly hear the distant city noises. A deep bell, slowly struck in the neighbouring temple, sent forth vast pulsating waves of lovely sound.

A delicious emotion took possession of Orchid, flooded her whole being. Occupied throughout the day with her household tasks and her study of the classics and the poets, she had spent her whole life in innocence and purity, companioned by her father, who talked with her of nothing but poems and flowers, and by her little servant, who adored her. On this evening, still disturbed by her excitement of the afternoon and by the memory of her mother's passionate caresses, she perceived with a new and peculiar softness of response the miracle of the sunset. She knew herself to be in intimate communion with nature; and her mind was haunted by poetic images, words in keeping with her mood.

Red Peony came back presently, carrying with some difficulty a small oblong table on which was the Sacred Tablet in a carved stand. There were also incense-burners and small cups holding white rice, butter, and chips of meat. The little servant helped arrange these sacred vessels in their proper order.

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Then she said, with ostensible indifference: "I met somebody today, Little Elder Sister."

"Ah! And whom did you meet?"

"The servant of the Man of the Ocean who lives there—in the temple on the other side of the wall."

"I hope you did not speak to him," said Orchid demurely.

"Oh, no!"

"What happened, then?"

"He spoke to me," answered Red Peony. "Oh, very respectfully, I assure you!"

"You did not listen to him? You hurried along?"

"Of course I followed the rites.—I heard what he said, though!"

"That was very wrong of you," said Orchid.—  
"And what did he say?"

"If it was so wrong, I ought not to repeat it," answered the little servant tantalizingly. But, as her mistress seemed to be ignoring this, she went on: "Since you insist, I will tell you that he greeted me most politely, saying: 'The Little One is called The Badger. My Elder Sister will perhaps allow me to carry that heavy basket? We are neighbours, and the rites bid neighbours help one another'."

"You did not give him your basket, I trust?"

"Oh, no," answered Red Peony. "He had already taken it."

"You should have taken it back from him."

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"I meant to, but—he began to talk about his master, and I forgot everything."

"I trust that you are not in love with that foreigner? that you have never seen him?"

"And why not?" answered the little maid. "He is a most scholarly person, and very handsome besides. Yes, I have seen him—and you, too. You have seen him."

"I have seen him? You are mad! Where on earth could I have seen him? I never go out."

"Little Elder Sister, I know that he has seen you, and I know that you have seen him. I was there the other day while he was looking at you over the wall. I noticed that you were aware of being looked at."

"Will you never stop that little snake's tongue of yours?—My little Red Peony," she went on tenderly, "you must not say a word about this to anybody. I was dying of curiosity to see a foreigner—and how is it possible to see without being seen? You know yourself that he is very handsome, even if he has not the long dark hair of our race."

"He is handsome and wise and scholarly. He is the Phœnix and the Dragon."

"You vex me," interrupted Orchid in a tone of pretended exasperation. "Let us proceed with our sacrifice." She knelt before the table. Red Peony, sitting on her heels, touched a great lute, beginning with simple and sombre chords. Orchid leaned forward and touched her forehead to the ground. Then



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she placed her long, slender hands meticulously on her knees and began to sing in a sweet, pure, and liquid voice the magnificent traditional "Hymn to the Shades," the simple words and perfect melody of which have been transmitted, generation by generation, from remotest antiquity.—

"When the last rays of the dying day  
Have yielded Nature up to the triumphing night,  
The shades of those who on earth had our love  
Hover round us, timid and shy.  
They try to help us in our trouble, but they show themselves  
To faithful souls alone.  
They are here, round us, waiting  
For a thought, for a summons — for by this gate only can  
they mingle  
With our pleasures, with our sorrows."

While she was still singing, Mackensie's head appeared above the wall. Beside him was his servant, who said softly: "Did I not tell you that you had better come, O Great Man? As soon as I heard the singing I warned you. Was I wrong?"

"Indeed, you were not, Little Badger," answered his master. "What we are doing now is, of course, altogether incorrect. But how am I to see her without being incorrect?"

"You well know, O Master," said the servant, as one having authority, "that the rites may be either followed or passed over. Today, for instance, I took the liberty of speaking to the maid."

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“So! And what did she say?”

“That her name was Red Peony.”

“‘Red Peony’! What an exquisite name and how well it suits her!”

“No, no!” interrupted the other hastily. “It is the maid who is named Red Peony. The mistress’s name is Orchid.”

“Even prettier!”

“I think ‘Red Peony’ is pretty enough. But then, I am only an illiterate person.”

Meanwhile, Orchid had once more touched her forehead to the ground, at the same time waving little bundles of burning incense-sticks in order to frighten away evil influences. Again she sang:

“Oh, come near me, Beloved Shades!  
As a faithful sign of my love for you,  
Here are gifts. May their incense please you!  
May their perfumes seem sweet in your nostrils!  
Here is the wine in the three-legged cup;  
Here the rice; and here the paper money  
Which, burned in the fire, is transmitted to you.”

She rose and, taking a huge heap of imitation gold and silver ingots, burned them. Since the Shades are spiritual, the odour of the dishes is sufficient for their food, and the smoke of the paper money supplies them with all the currency they need in the other world, where fortune is as much respected as in this.

Mackensie, leaning toward his servant, asked: “What else did she say?”

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"That her mistress was neither married nor betrothed."

"Good!"

"But that she was as good as in love with somebody."

"Ha! One of those young Chinese lords, doubtless. Then all is lost."

"She told me that it was somebody—"

"But who? Speak!"

"Sh! they will hear us."

"Who?" asked Mackensie again, after a silence.

"A neighbour."

"What neighbour?"

"A neighbour who looked at her over the wall while she was walking in the garden."

"You villain! Are you trying to torture me?"  
Shall I show you whether my stick is light or heavy?"

"If you beat me I won't talk with the maid any more. Sh! This time, she really has seen us."

Red Peony had in fact raised her head and detected them. She responded with a smile to the signal of silence that Little Badger made her. Meanwhile, Orchid went on with her sacrifice, offering in turn the cups of rice and meat, and making obeisance several times over. "Pay attention, will you?" she now said, a little sharply, to her assistant. "Now give me the other incense-sticks, and light them. We are to bid farewell to the Shades. I am afraid that

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the crowing of the cock may frighten them away. Let us hasten."

Then, sitting as before, hands on knees, she sang:

"O Sacred Shades, fare ye well!  
May my modest offerings and my pious aspirations  
Be pleasing in your sight! And hear my prayers!  
Abandon me not! Come and watch over me in my dreams!  
Be ever present to guard me from harm.  
For without truce or rest, the Spirits of Evil are on our track.  
Protect us!"

As she finished the ceremony, Mackensie leaned once more toward Little Badger. "How am I to have speech with her? The opportunity is unexcelled; but it is exceedingly incorrect."

"If it is so incorrect, you had better not speak to her."

"True enough, of course," agreed Mackensie. "But I shall attempt it, just the same."

"I can't answer for how she will take it. But you are a man of culture; you must find a way for yourself."

"It is very perplexing. Suppose she should be angry?"

Orchid was now arranging the cups on the table. Red Peony, helping her, said in a whisper: "There they are!"

"Who?" asked Orchid in surprise.

"Our neighbours from over the wall. Don't look!"

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“Let us go away at once,” said Orchid—without, however, making any motion to go.

“It would be a pity, the night is so lovely,” suggested the other tentatively.

“Yes—the moon is shining, and the cool breeze murmuring in the bamboos woos us to poetry. It is really very tempting.”

“A marvellous night, indeed.”

“As marvellous as that described in that poem of my father’s: do you know it?”

“Which one?”

“Why—er—this one:

“The immense vault of Heaven  
Is carved out of dark jade;  
A silver stream goes across,  
Suffusing it with a milky glimmer.  
Stars above and men below  
Have conquered the night with their million lamps.”

From the top of the wall Mackensie heard her words, and immediately recognized a poem by old Wang, one which had been posted all over the city by the Governor’s order, as a model for writers and poets of the region. He seized the offered opportunity and sang, with a tolerably correct accent, the second stanza of the same poem.—

“From the garden wherein the moon pours out its splendour  
Rise to me sombre and sweet perfumes.  
One by one the flowers have closed their chalices,  
Whispering softly ‘I love you!’ to the zephyr.”

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“He knows our poetry,” said Orchid in a low voice.  
“And how beautifully he sings it!”

“Let us go now—shall we?” suggested Red Peony impishly.

The young man went on with the poem, more and more moved by the sight of the girl and fired with hope of speaking to her face to face.—

“The passer by is charmed; he stops on his way;  
He feels his heart swelling with love.  
Will he dare to bend his head low like the flowers  
And also say ‘I love you!’ in his turn?”

Orchid listened with her heart in her eyes. Brought up in the solitude of the garden, she had hardly ever seen a man in her whole life. The significant glances of this foreigner had vaguely stirred her many times—for she had more than once seen Mackensie watching her from over the wall. She knew that it was her duty to go at once; but that knowledge did not deter her from singing the fourth stanza herself.—

“Show me the flower that ever refused to yield her perfume!  
She exhales her soul, ecstatic because she is loved,  
Until, one day, fainting and worn and wan,  
She drops her dying petals and they fall for ever.”

While she sang, her face turned toward the gardens, Little Badger had silently mounted the wall and climbed down a ladder toward Red Peony, who instantly started up the pathway as if running away

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from him. In a trice they were lost from sight behind the shrubbery. Mackensie imitated his example. But he was not so agile, and the young girl turned and caught sight of him while he was still on the ladder.

She stretched out her hand imploringly. "Oh, don't come down: I am lost!" she said.

He stopped. "Don't be afraid," he pleaded softly. "We are guarded well, and nobody is going to see us. I pray you, don't run away from me! I have lived so long in the unconscious yet terrifying hope of the day when I should meet face to face her whom I have always beheld in my dreams! And here you are, but quivering and afraid. Have no fear of me. I will never do anything you do not wish me to do. See, I have stopped as you bid me. Let the poor passerby intoxicate himself with the perfume of the flower he adores!"

Orchid was still fighting against him, against herself. "The passerby has come from afar," she said in a low tone. "He will go on his way, forgetting that which will have been to him no more than a light moment's pleasure. And the flower which bloomed for him will wither and die, solitary, dishonoured."

With an exultant sense that her resolution was already yielding, he slipped hastily down the ladder and took her hand. "Since when," he protested, "is it the fashion for husband and wife to part? Have

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you ever seen the swallow abandoning his mate? If I am to go away, you will come with me, beyond the last wave of the azure sea to the Western lands. There you shall see the cities in which husbands are the devoted slaves of their wives, working for them only. You shall see shops as big as whole towns, in which everything there is for those wives, their pleasure and their adornment; and we shall be always together."

She lifted up her face toward him in such tenderness and trust that he was moved to the depth of his being. All she said was: "True love cares not for all the marvels of the world. All the happiness, the joy, is in the souls of those who love honestly and with their whole hearts."

"You love me, then!" ventured Mackensie instantly. "Can it be?"

"And you?" she answered. "Your eyes, blue like the sea—are they not also as treacherous as the sea is? Are you not one of the Immortals? Your eyes burn like fire."

"I am no spirit," he answered tenderly, "but a man who loves you, who will always love you. From this hour and until the end of our lives we will be to each other what the baby is to the grandmother, the sister to the brother, the mother to the child."

"Ah, but say no more!" she commanded him. "What does it matter? When a hurricane blows and piles the waters of the sea on the shore, everything



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is swept away. When the tempest of passion blows upon the soul, it breaks everything there also—filial respect, long years of training, even fear and common prudence.”

While she was speaking he had gently captured her other hand. She submitted without a movement, without a cry, to this fate which set up inwardly so wild a tumult of emotion. Capable of no further effort to resist the blind impulse of her own nature, she abandoned herself to her destiny.

The flooding moonlight cast across their shoulders a veil of silver brocade on which the shadows of leaves drew constantly shifting patterns. Grave odours of flowers, of the earth beneath their feet, intoxicated them. Oblivious of all except their happiness, they were but two delicately and sensitively responsive souls lost together in a boundless ecstasy. No sound troubled the serenity of the garden, of the night. He beheld her dreamlike beauty, heard the quick fluttering of her heart. He drew her close; his arms tightened about the slender perfection which was her body. She lifted her face. Their lips met.

Trembling and dizzy, they drew then a little apart, holding each other still by the hand, silent. What had happened between them was so deep in its implication, so perfect in its mutuality, that no words could have added anything.

At that moment Little Badger and Red Peony came hurrying back. Other footfalls approached from the

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silence behind them. The little servant led her mistress back toward the house, while once more the neighbour and his manservant were clambering over the wall.

## XI

**T**HE news of Ming-ni's return spread like wild-fire. His foreign wife proved to be such an attraction that any person who could claim even the remotest relationship or the most casual friendship with one of the residents of the Palace came at once to gratify his curiosity, and if possible to see and touch.

Monique was overpowered. Already she had been compelled, beginning with the very day of arrival, to pay the customary calls on each of her husband's relatives: her father-in-law, her mother-in-law, her father-in-law's five secondary wives (whom, by the way, she at first assumed to be his cousins or sisters); then the sisters of her father-in-law and of her mother-in-law, and the wives of their brothers; then the sisters' families and the brother-in-law of her husbands' parents, and so on endlessly. For a month without stopping, she was occupied from ten o'clock in the morning until evening. When night came, she must receive calls from those whom she had visited, and from all the members of the younger brothers' and sisters' families, as well as from the innumerable guests and friends.

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In China each degree of relationship has its special name. The elder and younger brothers of one's father are not merely uncles: they are *po* or *shoo*, *po-po* or *shoo-shoo*, according to their ages. There are special names for every gradation of aunt and cousin, brother-in-law and sister-in-law. And the families are huge. The custom of taking many second wives (each with a special title), each of whom may have several children (each with a special denomination), increases the complexity to an extent which can hardly be conceived of by a Westerner. Moreover, people marry very young, and keep on having children until they die; so that it can easily happen that one has a great-uncle younger than oneself. Monique simply could not master these complications all at once. She made the most frightful mistakes, and in a few days, of course, had all the womenfolk of Ming-ni's family up in arms against her.

When she discovered that she had called on the second wives of her father-in-law—women who, according to her Western notions, were simply the old man's mistresses—she was outraged. It took all Ming-ni's tact and patience to prevent her openly cutting the poor ladies.

The perfect politeness and the interminable formulæ of etiquette imposed by Chinese rites struck her at first as the ultimate fine flower of civilized breeding. But when she had to go through it all day after day, she almost went mad, and it became to her

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the most awful trial of fortitude that a fiendish ingenuity had ever invented.

On the first night, and every night thereafter, she dined with the women of the family. One wall of the dining-room was replaced by latticed frames covered with translucent paper, through which the moon poured her light. The big hall was furnished with a long table of black and gold lacquer. Heavy carved chairs of lacquered wood were disposed in readiness for the diners. Along the rear wall were hung beautiful pictures and quotations from the sages and poets. There were small tables on which stood rare curios or vases containing flowers. The whole dinner was set on the table at once. A multitude of big bowls containing food of every description were placed haphazard on its polished surface. Of these, only one had an established position: ham, the dish of honour, was invariably set before the oldest lady present. The unshaded light of thick candles, set on the points of heavy brass candlesticks, was reflected from the lacquered table.

There were innumerable women, young and old. The old lady who presided at the dinner table was Mrs. Chen's grandmother. She was a little deaf, and she had, beneath beautiful white hair pulled tight and ornately arranged, a small, yellow, wizened face. She was a sore trial to Monique, for night after night she persisted in asking the same questions about Western food. The use of forks was the subject of in-

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cessant questioning on her part. She could never understand how any one was able to make use of such extraordinary implements, when little sticks were obviously so much more easy to handle. The five secondary wives were there, too, all very pretty and very young, all trying in vain to maintain the severe and rigid demeanour which is considered as correct, not to say politic, in the presence of the old. Ming-ni's sisters and his sisters-in-law were there, too, as well as a considerable number of relatives, friends, and concubines.

Politeness at table consists in indefatigably filling one's guest's bowl with the choicest morsels. One's own sticks are used for picking such dainties out of the common dish and conveying them to their destination. Some go so far as to introduce them by force into their guest's mouth; but this is considered to be slightly overdoing good manners. It is an unequivocal insult not to eat all that is so offered one. This Monique knew, and on the first night she nearly died of indigestion. Some of the dishes tried her rather severely, too—for example, the celebrated preserved eggs, buried sometimes for three years in the ground before being put on the table. These have the look—and the flavour—of certain Western cheeses of high and pungent repute. Small fried worms also imposed a degree of self-mastery.

Fortunately, at the beginning and again at the end of each meal, servants offered one a small serviette,

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dipping it first in a chased gold basin filled with scalding water. One passed the serviette over one's face, and then the servant poured hot water on one's hands from a long, thin gold ewer. When, at last, dinner was over, tea was brought in, and the white-haired old lady gave the signal for dispersal by putting her cup to her lips. There are no after-dinner social entertainments in China. As soon as tea is served, the guests depart. Monique approved of this custom; she even debated the possibility of introducing it at home. Here, it enabled her to return at once to the pavilion which had been assigned to her and Ming-ni. This was situated in the gardens, in the midst of dense shrubbery and bamboos which screened it from prying eyes. An open verandah ran round the little building. On the ground floor were their reception-rooms and library; on the second floor, their bedrooms and baths.

Every night, before she and Ming-ni had been alone for more than a few minutes, callers were announced. Her knowledge of Chinese being still scanty, the pleasure of these calls was soon exhausted. A fixed and meaningless smile overspread her face, and she kept bowing incessantly to compliments guessed rather than understood. In the morning after such an evening, she got up with extreme difficulty. Both body and mind were sore, numbed. Yet, in a fundamental way, she was still interested and not unhappy. China had not disappointed her.

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The ladies of the household, however, were less and less enthusiastic about Monique and about Western folk and customs in general. The fact that Monique had not as yet presented her husband with an heir was considered in itself as sufficiently compromising; and her frequent social errors made matters worse. Ming-ni was troubled to observe the increasing hostility. He tried to enlighten her about some of the dangers which she might have to face. He requested her to avoid going to the shops, and to wait, instead, for the merchants to come to her house with their wares, as is the custom of ladies of rank. But she saw no harm in what she was doing, and she kept on with it. They had more than one argument on the subject. She could not as yet penetrate to the underlying realities of Chinese life; each aspect of it ranked in her mind with the characteristic subjects of musical comedy. China seemed to her very much as a French poet of a bygone era described it:

“China is to me as a land in a dream.

All over it there are lakes, and on each sport waterfowl of curious breeds.

On the bank, where slumbers a great bronze buffalo,

Towers a lofty pagoda of porcelain,

Its colours vivid against the blue of the sky.

In that far land the light is always serene and pure,

And always the full moon is hung aloft in the night.

Fruit in the orchards is ripe and sweet the year round;

Every ploughman is dressed in splendid robes,



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And follows his bullocks in the field with mincing and fastidious gait,  
While a child with shaven poll goads them to their work.  
In that land, in a palace set about with wondrous jade columns,  
We shall drink together cup after cup of slag wine,  
Whilst little singers, ringing us round,  
Raise their voices in a piping chorus,  
Playing the while on lute and tambour."

Monique was still under this spell when Ming-ni received the order to pay a visit to the Governor of the province. The Ambassador had recommended him for the rank of Minister attached to his Embassy, and the promotion had been conferred without delay. Thus the Duke of Krong had found means to recall his secretary, whose excellent services he could not hope to replace. He knew Ming-ni's value, and was willing to pay for it. The custom, in China, is not to give faithful service in exchange for promises which may not even be fulfilled; neither is it to pay in advance those notoriously incompetent and inefficient persons who can never be really useful. Ming-ni was obliged, then, to go to the capital of the province in order to receive his official investiture of rank. The distance being considerable and the means of transport slow, he expected to be gone two months.

He thought of taking Monique with him. But gangs of highwaymen infested the region; moreover,

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the foreign appearance of his fair-haired young wife and her forthright manners were very dangerous, if not to their lives, at least to the reputation and future career of the diplomat. He decided, all things considered, that he must leave her at the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. This decision he found exceedingly hard to take. But, for a true disciple of Krong Foo-tse, Reason must always dominate the wild impulsion of the feelings. So he announced his determination to Monique.

She, of course, was downcast, and could not help showing that she was. The whole family were deeply shocked by such lack of breeding on her part. A Chinese, in order not to trouble the minds of his friends, will always smile benignantly when he tells them that he has suffered some great misfortune, such as the loss of a parent or a child. It is only on certain specified occasions and at prescribed moments that the rites authorize manifestations of sorrow. For example, it is recommended to orphans that they faint several times during the burial of their parents. Such compression of genuine emotions is far from diminishing them. Many who suffer thus, without a word, contract a sort of stupor. They experience the most ungovernable antipathy to everybody and everything. Unable to eat or drink, they stay in bed until they die, or until the cause of their sorrow is removed. A slow fever burns them day and night, and no medicine can stop it. Foreign

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doctors classify such illnesses as neurasthenia. Chinese doctors call it *se y che ping*—"illness of the thoughts and feelings."

Monique did not contract such an ailment, but she remained silent and perpetually sad. At meals she hardly opened her mouth. She even became irritable. She went out more frequently alone and on foot, hoping to banish her sadness by the spectacle of the streets with their gaily chattering throngs, or by visiting shops rich in embroideries and silks. But, soon tired of all this, she took to moping in the gardens.

It was thus that she made the acquaintance of Orchid, whom she met beside the peonies, helping her father with his exacting work. It was the immeasurable love of Wang for his daughter which first touched her.

One day at dinner she spoke of the gardener, and quoted what he had said of his daughter: "She is a poet, a gardener, a true sage, and withal as beautiful as the celebrated Si-she." The First Wife, who seldom spoke to Monique at all, now asked her innumerable questions about Orchid. "Dear me!" mused the old lady to herself, "I did not know that this girl was so beautiful and gifted as all that. I ought to have guessed it, however. Wang is one of the glories of our city, and the greatest poet of the whole region. I must see her for myself.—You will profit by seeing her often," she said aloud to Monique.

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“The daughter of a gardener?” asked Monique, astonished.

“Gardener today, tomorrow a Viceroy if it please His Imperial Majesty (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years!). Anyhow, a living example of all the virtues, and the most respected man in the city. The Governor always returns his call on New Year. I should not be surprised to see him a ‘Cedar in the Forest of Brushes,’ which would give him the rank of Minister of State and Prince.”

“But—a gardener?”

“His work has nothing to do with his deserts or the high qualities of his character. Our station in life is given to us by fate, but our moral and intellectual worth alone is meritorious, since it alone depends on our personal efforts. The Sage has said: ‘Those who, understanding the nature of all things, nevertheless go on working and thinking, are true Sages. Those who, not being so gifted, nevertheless work and succeed, come after. Those who work to the end, but never succeed, come still lower. The lowest degree is reserved to those who never make an effort to attain virtue, but live like animals, in the lowest material thoughts and pleasures.’”

## XII

**T**WO months had gone by. A messenger had just come, preceding Ming-ni by only a few hours. The whole Palace was astir over the return of the newly invested dignitary.

Old Wang, tired by his exertions of the morning, was enjoying his siesta on the huge *krang*, a combination of bed and sofa, the principal piece of furniture in every Chinese home. He was slumbering peacefully, a book in his hands, when Red Peony entered and woke him up. "A servant asks if you will receive the Lord Chen," she said.

"Admit him," answered Wang, without moving.

"But the Great Man comes on a formal visit," objected the little servant.

"Oh! Then do not admit him," said Wang hastily, jumping off the *krang*. "Go tell him to wait, and then come and bring me my hat and official dress.—What! aren't you ready to help me yet?"

Red Peony ran into an inner chamber while the old man was tidying his hair. She returned in a moment, bringing a long gown of dark violet silk with a narrow pale blue collar and sleeves of the model known as "horses'-hoofs," embroidered on breast and

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back with a design in gold and colour. She also carried a pointed straw hat covered with red silk plaits and surmounted by a crystal button.

"Well," said Wang, when he had finished putting on his official costume, "now open the door."

A servant who was on the other side of the door saw it open and, perceiving Wang ready in the room, screamed pompously at the top of his lungs: "Attend! the Great Man is expected!"

Wang, assuming the correct formal gait, stalked with dignity to the left side of the entrance, his arms and shoulders carefully balanced. A sedan-chair appeared beyond the low flower-covered wall which ran round the house. It turned into a narrow walk leading up to the house, and was deposited by its four stalwart porters just in front of the door. Chen stepped out of it, lowering his head and lifting his feet to do so. He, too, was dressed in his formal robes. On his hat was the coral button of a dignitary of the second order.

The two old men made deep curtseys to each other, bending the right knee very low and touching the ground with the closed left hand, the right hand and left leg extended behind. "Peace be with you and your house," said Chen at last.

"I rely on your good influence," responded Wang. "May it please you to enter and illumine with your presence this my despicable hovel."

"How could I venture?"

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"Do, I pray you."

"I dare not, I dare not!" protested Chen, nevertheless stepping in at last. But he stopped at once.

"Take the higher place," Wang hastened to say. "Really, you must take the superior place," he repeated, indicating the right end of the sofa.

"Oh, but assuredly not! I must sit in the lower place."

"How could you think of doing me such an injury? I touch my head to the floor. Do not refuse me this favour."

"I must obey your orders, O Lord Wang! But you make me forget the rites." With a grunt of satisfaction he dropped at last into the place which Wang had indicated.

"I remain standing in order to wait upon you," said his host.

"In that case I stand also," answered his fat guest, threatening to move.

"Then I shall have to yield to you on every point," said Wang, sitting down at last at his guest's left hand.

There was a brief silence; then Chen turned his rubicund face toward his host. "Well, friend Wang, and how are you? I mean"—he corrected himself hastily—"is the Lord Wang in good health?"

"Your invaluable friendship has protected me, O Great Man. And yourself?"

"As well as ever, thank you."

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While these formalities were being exchanged, Chen's servants entered from behind. They now surrounded him. One held his pipe, another lighted it, and a third held a fan which he waved gently. Red Peony had brought two dainty tea bowls and, lifting their exquisitely decorated lids, poured boiling water over the leaves.

"And the Precious Jewels? The Inestimable Treasure, your First Wife? And the Incomparable Lords, your Sons?"

"The female of the house and my little puppies are well. And the valuable ornament of this noble palace, your daughter?"

"We humbly accept your solicitude."

Chen lifted the cup of tea to his lips and sipped. Wang imitated him.

"I must not waste your precious time, O Great Maternal Uncle. I must deprive myself of a society which has not its equal," said Chen. And he rose, his host again following his example. They went slowly toward the door. "But now I bethink me," exclaimed Chen, stopping, "I have something to say to you. O Elder Brother—"

"Be pleased to tell me everything."

They sat down once more.

"Dear friend and elder brother, I must put aside the rites and speak plainly. Have I your leave?"

"Assuredly, yes—pray do."

"The Honourable Marriage Intermediary who



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came yesterday to see you has told us that your charming daughter was neither engaged nor the subject of any promise."

"Quite correct," said Wang.

"And that you would have no objection to seeing her married to a young man of an honourable family, provided he possessed at least the literary rank of 'distinguished talent.' May I continue?"

"Assuredly, yes. All is correct so far."

"Then I must formally apprise you that the Honourable Intermediary was sent by my First Wife and myself."

"I am honoured exceedingly, and I thank you both."

"Today," continued the fat man importantly, "I have come to ask you if you would consent to the marriage of your daughter with my son Ming-ni. We should be most delighted with such a union, and most proud."

"This is a great honour for my family, and for myself, O Elder Brother!" answered Wang gravely. "And my ancestors up to the twentieth generation will be most gratified. I can accept with joy so honourable a match for my daughter."

"Then it is all settled," said Chen, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes.—There are, however, one or two points which I feel bound to mention. Your son has brought back from Europe a native wife—"

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“Ah! Don’t speak of her to me!” said Chen wearily. “My Thorn-bush hates her, and of course I am considered as responsible for all her blunders and her absent-mindedness. My life is really intolerable. I find no more taste in the lukewarm wine. As for women, they all weary me.”

“Yes. But what of this foreigner?”

“Your daughter will be the First Wife of my son. She shall do as she likes with the foreign woman—sell her in the market, or do whatever else she deems best.”

“It is a fact that your son has married her according to the customs of those barbarian tribes. Such a marriage does not exist in the wise laws of the Flowery Kingdom.”

“She is a mere favourite slave,” reaffirmed Chen. “And I must admit that my son’s fancy for her yellow hair is easy to understand. But it cannot last long. Pending the day when he will have wearied of her, we shall install her in a distant pavilion and not allow her to come into the house. She is too ignorant of the rites, anyway. Life is impossible in such conditions.”

“Without the rites,” said Wang sententiously, “men would be like dogs, always growling and snapping and ready to fight for a meatless bone.”

“Not only that, but she is sure to bring great difficulties on our house. She is always going about alone on foot in the city, among the populace.”

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“Is it possible? Must she not be a little mad?”

“Doubtless, for she has not the slightest feeling of honour. Another woman would long ago have killed herself rather than submit to the outrages to which the First Wife subjects her every day. She does not even seem to perceive them, and, of course, that makes the Thorn-bush all the more enraged. Moreover, this woman has borne no children, and that is a grave matter. So that, in order to uphold the honour of our name, we thought to ask your help, your consent to such an illustrious marriage as that which has just been settled between us.”

“You honour me too much!” murmured old Wang gratefully.

“Now, as you have said, we fancy that this barbarian woman is a little mad. My son is so submissive to her whims that we are afraid to let him know beforehand of this marriage with your daughter, lest he upset our plans.”

“Most wisely taken into account,” assented Wang with a nod.

“If we celebrate the marriage some days hence, she will learn of it beforehand. He will tell her, and we shall have dreadful scenes to put up with. What do you say to celebrating the marriage tonight? My son will arrive just in time, and it is quite customary to send invitations to the witnesses on the same day.”

“Why,” said Wang deliberately, “there is nothing contrary to the rites in that. It is perfectly correct,

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and nobody can utter a word of objection. Then let us proceed at once with the various ceremonies. And, first, the most important procedure, the exchange of the billets of the eight ideograms."

"I have brought the red paper for the billets." And the fat man drew from his high velvet boot a portfolio. Opening it, he took out a folded sheet of red paper covered with golden flowers. This he gave to Wang, who went to a table. There the poet-gardener took the "four treasures of writing"—paper, brush, water, and ink-stone. He put on his large round spectacles rimmed with tortoiseshell, and began to rub the brush delicately on the ink-stone.

"Let me see," he said. And he wrote: "Orchid . . . born in the hour of the Hens . . . in the day of the Horse . . . in the moon of the Plum-trees . . . in the year of the Buffalo."

"Only nineteen!" said the guest, standing up. "And here is the billet of my son."

The two men, each holding in both hands the billet of his child, knelt facing each other. They bowed gravely several times; then, having exchanged the little booklets, they bowed once more and stood up. Then they both put the papers into their high boots.

"Now that the marriage is concluded," said Chen, "I must return home to settle the final details and prepare the house so that the young bride may be able to cross its threshold according to the rites.—Have you spoken to your daughter?"

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"How could I have done so, when nothing had been arranged?" answered Wang.

"Quite so! One must not draw water out of the well if one is not certain to drink it. It only stirs up the well to no purpose. Neither have I written to my son. Directly he returns, I will tell him to put on his formal dress. However, may I not see your daughter and offer her my congratulations?"

"Indeed, yes. Red Peony," said Wang to the little servant, "run and tell your mistress to come."

The maid, who had witnessed and overheard the whole interview with a dazed stupefaction, went to the door of the women's apartment, returning a few moments later with Orchid.

The young girl was astonished and bewildered. In spite of the considerable intimacy between her father and Chen, it was not customary for the owner of the Palace to ask to see her. She went to him, dropped a deep curtsey, and said: "I wish all peace and happiness to the Great Man."

Chen stopped her at once by saying: "Rise! Rise at once, my charming child." Then, to Wang: "She is exquisite. When I used to see her, still a little girl playing about the garden, with her short pig-tail intertwined with red threads, I did not dream that she would grow up to be so beautiful."

"Little girls grow. Flower buds open," answered her father, flattered.

"Come nearer to me, my child. What a perfect

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complexion? And—her teeth when she smiles! Like grains of rice!”

“But, father!” protested Orchid in a shocked tone. “You had me—”

“Yes, yes, my dear, just so. You must be surprised. I have had as yet no leisure to tell you. Be happy, then! we have given you in marriage.”

“In marriage?” cried Orchid, stupefied.

“Yes. The billets of the eight ideograms are already exchanged.”

“But—to whom?” she asked, in sudden terror.

“To my eldest son,” said Chen. “Sit down, my charming daughter, and don’t be afraid. He is very gentle, very handsome—”

“My dear child,” interrupted Wang testily, “you must *kow-tow* to your father-in-law. The rites must be observed.”

Orchid knelt mechanically, and repeated the “great salute,” which she had learned long ago, as all little girls learn it. “I touch my forehead to the ground, O father of my husband. I will always be your faithful servant, your help, and your consolation. I deem you the equal of my own father, since he who is my husband is your son.”

“What an admirable education!” cried Chen, helping her get up. “My dear child, I will always be a father to you and love you as my own daughter, since you are the wife of my son.” Then, to Wang: “Ah, my dear friend, you may well be proud of your

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daughter. Very few women nowadays could without preparation recite the formulæ which our wise ancestors have prescribed for all the circumstances of our life. My son is going to be very happy. The First Wife will adore you, my child. My house will become at last a celestial abode of peace and pleasure."

"These are most exaggerated praises," said Wang with assumed modesty.

"By no means. They are the exact expression of truth. But I must let you talk with your father and make yourself ready for the ceremony, my child.—For she is already my daughter, without ceasing to be yours, O Elder Brother!"

"The father of the husband must be loved before all," said the frail old man ceremoniously.

"Well, good-bye. This time I am really off! No, don't accompany me."

"How could I so forget the rites?—You have tired the horses of your coach!"

"Not at all. Do not come!"

Seeing their masters standing, the servants rushed to the door. In the midst of the general agitation, the porters brought the sedan-chair to the threshold. Chen lowered his head, raised his foot, and succeeded in getting in. He waved an affectionate farewell with his two closed hands, and Wang bowed with punctilious correctness.

The sedan-chair had no more than disappeared before Red Peony shut the door. Orchid, still in a

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blank amazement, said to her father: "But, *Tieh-tieh*, it is not possible! I am not married!"

"Have no fear, my child: the marriage is all concluded," said Wang soothingly.

"That is just what she is afraid of—its being concluded," interrupted the little servant tartly. "And she has not even seen her husband!"

"Be silent, you silly chit! You know very well that the rites forbid the affianced pair to see each other before the wedding ceremony."

"Yes, father," interrupted Orchid, "I know perfectly well that the custom is to conclude the marriage of one's children without warning. But I think you might have asked my opinion, or told me that you had a match in view for me." And, throwing herself on the *krang*, she burst into tears.

"Now, now!" said her father, between annoyance and distress. "Be calm! I perceive that the surprise, the joy, of this great event—"

"No, it is not that," said poor Orchid sadly.

"Of course it isn't!" said Red Peony hotly. "My poor mistress! Who could have believed that you would ever be treated in such a fashion? Aya!"

"What? Not the joy?" demanded the astonished old man. "But you are to marry the finest young man in the whole province. He is learned, he is in good health and handsome. He is young; he has high rank and a considerable fortune. His family has the highest reputation: his father, though not, in-



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deed, a great scholar, is a most worthy man." He patted his weeping daughter on the shoulder.

"Ah, *Tieh-tieh!*" she answered, "I am too unhappy! I shall throw myself into a well. Oh, can you not undo this marriage?"

"Undo the marriage! How can you think of such a thing? Why, the billets of the eight ideograms have been exchanged. It would be a frightful scandal. We should be dishonoured and ruined."

"Then I shall throw myself into a well!"

"She will do it, too," affirmed Red Peony. "And I will throw myself in after her."

"These females will drive me mad! Reason is not in them," stormed the old man. "Now, what is it that you think you want?"

"I don't want to be married. I want to go into a temple, cut off my hair, and be a *ni-koo*."

"A priestess of Buddha! You! Dear, dear!" mused Wang. "Now, I have had no great experience of such matters, but I have always heard it said that when a woman refuses to marry an eligible man, it is because she has a great inclination to marry another man. Is that it?"

"Of course," interrupted the little servant sarcastically. "You imagine—"

"Be quiet," commanded Orchid, wiping her eyes and sitting up. "Yes, it is true. I love another, and I have promised him that I will be his wife."

"You! My daughter!" Wang lifted up his arms

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in incredulous despair. "You! You have seen a man without my consent? You have spoken to him? You have promised to be his wife? You bring dishonour on my white hair."

"I was there," said Red Peony. "And, after all, it was no great matter."

"But, at least, nobody saw you? Nobody knows anything about it?" demanded Wang eagerly.

"That goes without saying," answered Red Peony with disdain. "We are not so stupid as to dishonour ourselves."

"Then, if nobody knows of it," said the old man, vastly relieved, "it does not exist. Why mention it at all?"

"Because I love him!" sobbed the young girl. "I love him, and I want to marry him."

"But you are married already!—But, tell me, who is this man?"

"You know him—a neighbour."

"A neighbour? I know him?"

"Yes. It is the foreign lord who lives in the temple."

"A foreigner!" cried the old man. "My daughter infatuated with a Barbarian of the Ocean! The daughter of a scholar of the First Degree! What are we coming to, O Sage Krong Foo-tse? And what wouldst thou do in such case?"

"I know what they say about this new husband of yours," said Red Peony biting. "He has brought

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a First Wife back from Europe, and my mistress is to be her servant."

"You know nothing whatever about it. He did not marry that woman according to our laws. He is not married to her. And the great red sedan-chair of first wives is going to take my daughter away to-night."

"Tonight!" exclaimed the two girls in equal dismay.

"Tonight," he repeated inexorably.

"Then I am going away," said Red Peony, starting toward the door, "and I will never, never come back."

"Let her go: she is daft," said Wang to Orchid, who had jumped from the *krang* in order to cling to her servant.

Red Peony simulated resistance. Under cover of the pretended struggle which followed, she whispered: "We must prevent this at any cost. I will go and tell *him*." Then, aloud: "I will stay, then, but you shall never see me outside the kitchen again."

"So much the better," mumbled Wang.

The little maid went out, banging the door.

"Yes," said Wang, "the sedan-chair comes to-night. The gifts, the jewels, and the robes will arrive in a few minutes. You will see, when the silken garments are in a heap on the table—when the golden bracelets, the rings sparkling with precious stones, the necklaces, and the pearl head-dresses glitter before your eyes—you will see that then you will very easily forget your foreigner."

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"Never, father. Never."

"Moreover, all this evil comes from the wrong you yourself have done. If you had followed the rites, if you had concealed nothing from me, then, if you had told me that you loved some one, I would have said so to the Honourable Intermediary."

"I know it was wrong," she confessed humbly. "But it happened so suddenly and unexpectedly!"

"And this foreigner is not so bad. He is as learned as your husband. He would have made a very tolerable son-in-law. But what can I do? The rites were devised precisely to prevent such painful occurrences as this. If we do not obey them, we must take the consequences of our acts. We all have to accept our fate when we cannot do otherwise. Now, you had better wipe your eyes and make yourself ready. The marriage gifts will be here any minute. As for me, I will go and look after my flowers. They are more reasonable than a good many human beings."

And, deeply troubled by his daughter's sorrow, old Wang went out, not forgetting, however, to leave his formal robe and hat on a chair behind him.

### XIII

ORCHID remained on the *krang* for a long time, leaning her smooth forehead pensively on the white jade fingers of her hand. "What can I do?" she asked herself over and over. "If the billets of the eight ideograms have been exchanged, the marriage is consummated. My father and the Chen family alone know it, true—they and the Honourable Intermediary. But the contract is one that cannot be broken. My father would be dishonoured. There is nothing we can do: appearances must be kept up. After the wedding, some day, I will just discreetly die. So many brides do that, that no one will be astonished. Alas, I was so happy, though! And now I must die, and I don't want to die. How unstable and transient everything is! One day poor, on the morrow rich. In the morning, happy; in the evening, filled with despair!" The tears coursed slowly down her cheeks.

Suddenly the door opened. Mackensie entered with Red Peony. He rushed to her. "Orchid, my love!" he cried. "Is it true? that they want to give you to another? But it is impossible! We have exchanged sacred promises, we are plighted to each other."

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"Don't come near me," said Orchid, disengaging her hand from his grasp. "Don't touch me! I am married. Alas, we are lost."

"Married! It is not possible. Your father would surely have told you beforehand. Even in China it is not done so precipitately as that."

"They had to hurry things for fear of the foreign woman," explained Red Peony. "They don't wish the Young Lord to be influenced by her. That is why the presentation to the witnesses is to be made this evening as soon as the new husband returns."

"There is nothing that can be done," said Orchid sadly. "The billets have been exchanged: my marriage is a fact."

"A fact, yes, but it has not been celebrated," objected Red Peony. "The foreign lady may yet have something to say."

"Not one word," admitted Mackensie. "Her marriage in Europe has made her a Chinese."

"Alas," cried Orchid again, "we are torn apart! We shall never be able to go away together, alone together, ignoring everything else in a long, happy dream, knowing no pleasures except each other's. I shall never link my arm in yours, enjoying all things with you, happy to see you, to listen to your voice, intoxicated by the bliss that would come from your presence, and trying to give it back to you. We shall never be together, cheek pressed against cheek, silent because we are too happy to speak."

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“No, no!” answered Mackensie firmly. “Our happiness shall flow along like the pure waters of a river, lost now for a moment underground, but coming out into the sunlight again after a little. We are bound to each other for ever. The eternal stars have been our witnesses. The breeze has borne our pledges to the Shades who people the night. The moon, shining through the leaves, has covered us together with the sheen of its silver veil. You are my bride, and I will not let you go.”

Orchid, listening to his voice, his words, lost all realizing sense of the fact of her marriage. Besides, he had taken her into his arms.

Red Peony, with characteristically discreet forethought, had stationed herself by the door. She now interrupted the lovers suddenly by exclaiming: “Sh! Somebody! Go away! Hurry!”

Mackensie, fearing to compromise Orchid, ran to the door. But Red Peony stopped him. “No, no, not that way! Too late! Hide yourself somewhere. Come.” And she pushed him quickly into the women’s apartments, the door of which she then shut quickly to. “Just in time,” she breathed. “A minute more, and there would have been a fine scandal.—It is the foreign lady who is coming, Little Elder Sister. Keep her here while I try to help him get away unseen.” And she, too, disappeared silently through the door of the women’s apartments.

Orchid went slowly to the door. With rigid self-

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mastery, she regained the leisurely and graceful languor of her natural carriage. The thousand pleats of her multi-coloured skirt showed as she walked.

Monique was at the threshold. She entered, saying hastily: "Peace be with you, my charming Orchid! I came as quickly as I could, in order to speak to you about an extraordinary story—"

"Peace be with you," interrupted Orchid.

"—A story which concerns both of us."

"Pray be seated," Orchid continued non-committally, indicating a place on the *krang*.

"My husband, who is absent, returns this evening. Just now a servant whom we had with us in Europe told me the most incredible tale. He said that you—that my husband—in short, that my father-in-law is to give tonight a reception in honour of your marriage to my husband. Do you know anything about this?"

"My father has just informed me that he has this day concluded my marriage to the eldest son of our Lord Chen," answered Orchid, still guardedly.

"But—impossible! My husband is married to *me*.—Yes—it is true—in China, polygamy is legal. But—why, it is maddening! I will never allow such a thing! And my husband—what will he say when they tell him?"

"He knows nothing of it yet, they tell me."

"He knows nothing of it! Then how on earth can



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they imagine that he will let himself be married to you tonight?"

"But his marriage has already been concluded—this morning. His father and mine exchanged the necessary formal documents."

"Married without knowing it? That is simply beyond belief."

"Surely you have been long enough among us to know that the parents alone arrange and conclude a marriage. Sometimes they celebrate the marriage of children still in their cradles."

"Then my husband *is* married to you!" Monique laughed hysterically. "Then you and I are—what do they call this new relationship: co-wives?—And the marriage is actually irrevocable?"

"Tonight, after the presentation to the witnesses, it will be irrevocable. Alas!"

"You say 'alas.' Did you not, then, wish this union?" asked Monique.

"Wish it! I should say not! But what can I do? Parents are the absolute masters of their children. They can sell them, kill them; children must obey—and, if they are unhappy, die."

"Then you are not in love with my husband?"

"In love with him! Indeed I am not!—Oh, excuse me! I did not mean to be rude. But I have never seen him."

"Then—if my husband—you and I—we—do not want this union, nobody can force us into it."

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“The marriage is already concluded,” repeated Orchid wearily. “And tonight there will be the presentation to the witnesses.”

“Yes—my husband once told me about that. The bride is covered with a great thick veil which is not lifted until the end of the ceremony. What an agony for the man who has actually never seen his bride—and what a shock! Thank you, I prefer our customs. That thick veil might cover *any* face—”

“The spirit, the soul, is alone important to the family,” answered Orchid gravely. “The body and the features only trouble our senses and unbalance the judgment. They cause all the worst of our errors.”

“All that is true enough, little sage,” agreed Monique affectionately. “But, anyway, I prefer to keep my husband for myself. Believe me, I feel the greatest sympathy for you. You are adorable, and I am very fond of you. Only I cannot admit that my husband ought to be yours, too. No Western woman would ever accept any such arrangement.”

“Yet there is nothing in it to be disturbed about,” said Orchid. “I assure you that, here, few women suffer from the practice. For example, I should hardly care to be the only wife of my husband.”

“Thank you for the ‘husband’,” said Monique ironically.

“He is not always at home, and when there is no other wife you are alone the whole day long. More-

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over, if there are no children, the house is as still as a tomb."

"But—love?"

"It is not everything. And if the wives like one another, that is happiness. Think of the pleasure it is to live all the time with a true friend, nearer than a sister, with whom one shares one's joys and sorrows; in whom one can confide when in trouble, and with whom one has everything in common—riches, honours, children—"

"*And* her husband! the most important item of all, to one who loves. But you cannot understand that: you have never loved."

"Never loved?" answered Orchid mournfully. "Alas, it is because I love that I am so unhappy."

"You *do* love! And not my husband?"

"Oh, no! Again, excuse me—"

"And this you can tell me, his wife!"

"What can it matter? My life is not to be a long one."

"Is it so desperate as that? Don't be afraid. You know me. I will keep your secret. But tell me—whom do you love?"

"One of your race."

"A foreigner? There is only one in the whole region. Mackensie, then?"

"Yes," said Orchid. Her head drooped, and once more the tears ran down her pallid cheeks.

"My poor child!" Monique took both the girl's

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hands between her own, looking down at her compassionately. "And he loves you?"

"Yes—I am sure of it. He said so, and—I know it. Oh, if you could only help us to break this marriage! You Westerners are such magicians."

"Help you? My own happiness, too, is at stake. But what can we do? I am hated by my mother-in-law, and all round me there is a hostility which vents itself in a thousand ways. When my husband comes back, everything will be straightened out, I am confident.—But this Mr. Mackensie knows China well: he might hit upon some way. What does he propose?"

"You ought to see him," suggested Orchid.

"I could not go to his house, nor could he come to mine. Either, I know, would be very dangerous."

"Well," said Orchid, haltingly and with a blush, "will you promise me not to tell a soul what I am going to confide to you? Above all, not to your husband?"

"More secrets?" asked Monique, smiling. "Yes, I promise."

"Mr. Mackensie was here a minute ago," said Orchid, making an end of the mystery. "He hid in my room when you came."

"Little deceiver!" exclaimed Monique, amused in spite of herself. "Ah, ah! Chinese women are not different from their Western sisters when love is lead-

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ing them. No, don't be angry with me! and send for your friend at once."

Orchid hesitated for only an instant, her large, silently imploring eyes lifted toward Monique. The level and loyal regard of the European woman reassured her. She went forthwith to the door of her room and called softly. Red Peony appeared. "Tell him to come," commanded Orchid.

"Here? where the foreign woman is?" asked the little servant, astonished.

"Yes. And hurry! I have told her all."

Red Peony went into the room. Almost instantly Mackensie appeared. He bowed silently to Monique.

He was the first European she had seen since leaving the last foreign settlement. She was exceedingly embarrassed for a moment; then, prompted by an inexplicable trust, she frankly held out her hand. "In the circumstances," she said, "I think we had better speak openly and without loss of time. Orchid has told me all about you. And you know all about us. My husband will be back tonight, just in time for the ceremony, and too late to help us out of danger. He would know how to stop all this tragi-comedy if he were here. You want to marry Orchid. I am resolved to make a scene or a scandal rather than accept the proposed situation. My husband can be counted on to approve whatever we do. But what can we do?"

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"This marriage drives me to desperation," answered Mackensie, "and I, too, am completely determined to do anything whatever to stop it, even at the risk of my life. But it is my duty to tell you that we are in a very precarious position, and that I cannot guarantee your life if we fail. We are in a country in which they do not take certain things as laughing matters. Just now, for instance, if any one should enter and see us together—"

"Yes?" she encouraged him.

"—It would be enough to get us both sentenced to death for adultery."

"Oh! Is it possible?"

"Quite. So, you see, we must think before we act."

"But, even so, we must do something. There is no time to write to the Consul—"

"The Consul?" repeated Mackensie. "But by your marriage you have lost your nationality. You are Chinese, and amenable to Chinese laws only."

"Then what are we to do? You are not too encouraging! Do let us hurry, I implore you. Think up a plan. You must know what to do: you have been here in China a long time."

Mackensie shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

At that moment Red Peony, who had again posted herself on guard at the door, interrupted them. "Run away! Quickly! Here come the wedding presents!"

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Mackensie again started for the women's apartments, but Red Peony stopped him. "No, not there! The presents will be put in that room, according to custom, and the Little Elder Sister must receive them. If you are seen, all is lost."

"But where shall I go?"

"Leave the house at once, by the front door. They will think that you came to see the master. Hurry!"

The young man had already opened the door and crossed the threshold. But while he was still holding the doorknob, the others heard voices from outside. "Too late!" exclaimed Red Peony. "Let us at least save the Little Sister." And she hurriedly pushed her mistress into the inner room.

Simultaneously there appeared at the door a man in formal dress, holding aloft a long strip of red paper. Monique recognized him as the Steward of the Palace. "O Lord Wang!" he cried at the top of his lungs, "O Great Maternal Uncle! The Auspicious Presents, the Honourable Presents! Who receives them?" Behind him appeared a procession of porters carrying two by two, with their long poles, innumerable boxes and pieces of furniture tied with red cord.

Pushing them aside, Wang entered hastily. "Here I am. I saw the procession from afar, but my old legs would not carry me fast enough. Wait a minute: I must dress and repair to the ceremonial place."

While he was hurriedly donning his formal robe

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and hat—the same which he had earlier left on a chair in the room—he caught sight of Monique. He stared at her, aghast. “You! Is it you, O Great Nurse, who accompany the presents for the new wife of your husband? Oh, truly, this is excess of virtue on your part. Let me kneel before you!”

“No, no—I did not—,” interrupted Monique stammeringly.

“Yes, yes, I really must do it,” repeated the old man. “To accompany the wedding presents of your husband’s new wife! Such nobility of soul, such lofty feelings have never before been recorded. I must report it to the Governor of the City. He will cite you as an example to the whole Empire.”

“But I assure you—”

The old man was not to be suppressed. “And what a propitious omen for the future happiness of my daughter! And to think that I feared your influence! Ah, these Westerners really are different from us, and sometimes they are wonderful.”

All this time Mackensie had been standing irresolute near the door. Wang now saw him, too, and greeted him with the words: “Ten thousand felicities, O Great Man!”

“Ten thousand congratulations and good wishes,” responded Mackensie. “I came to offer you my felicitations and best hopes.”

“You have tired the horses of your coach, and I am overcome.”



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"I beg of you, no rites between neighbours.—But please to receive the presents now: I know you must not keep them waiting."

"Since you allow me, then," said Wang. Turning to the steward, he put on a solemn face. The other knelt and presented his long strip of red paper. "Here is the list of the most Honourable Presents," said the man. "Please examine and compare."

"It is perfectly correct," answered Wang, mechanically and without looking, knowing very well that a good many of the gifts had mysteriously disappeared *en route*. "Wait," he added, drawing a silver ingot from his sleeve. "Here is a trifling gift to distribute among the porters."

"Impossible to accept it," answered the steward, rising. "They have been paid."

"The custom is to accept—"

"How could I take such an enormous sum?" insisted the fellow, taking the ingot and putting it into his own sleeve. Then, turning to the porters: "Hurry up, there, you! Bring the robes and jewels for the new bride, and be quick about it."

The porters crossed the threshold. "Where is the Secret Apartment, that I may take the presents to it?" asked the steward.

"There, directly in front of you," answered Wang.

"And you others, go and fetch the nuptial sedan-chair," added the steward. "O Great Man Wang, the Master said that you would arrange everything for

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the bridal procession, and that I was to follow your instructions."

Mackensie interrupted at this point, saying: "You are occupied; I will go."

"No, no! Stay, do. Just excuse me for one minute, and I will be with you."

Eight porters had brought before the door an enormous closed box covered with red silk. The panels of its sides were painted with gaudy scenes, and its top was adorned with garlands and designs in embroidery. The old man turned round this huge object, the bridal sedan-chair, examining it to make sure that all the ritual details had been observed.

Meanwhile Red Peony, standing at the entrance to the women's apartments, made a sign to Mackensie. He came toward her and bent over so that she could whisper in his ear. He listened with an air of profound amazement. Then, with Red Peony, he went quickly to Monique and said under his breath: "This little girl has an idea. It is very perilous, and if it should not succeed, that would be the end for us all. But we are hopelessly compromised already. Let us make the attempt. Do exactly as she tells you."

"But—," asked Monique, eager to know what the scheme was.

"Sh!" he said, stepping back to the door. "She will tell you. Let her take you aside."

Red Peony was already tugging at Monique's

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sleeve. She conducted her now into the women's apartments.

Wang returned with the steward. "You understand?" he was saying. "The fluteplayers are to go ahead."

"Yes, O Great Man."

"Then half of the men with red lanterns; then the musical instruments; then the other half of the men with red lanterns."

"I will see to it."

The porters now brought the sedan-chair into the room, an operation not of the easiest, judging by their grunts and objurgations. "Hi, there! move on, you fishbone!" said one. "Stop where you are, you devil!" responded the other. "That's a pretty trick—speaking of devils in the bride's house! You squashed dog!"

"Silence, you curs!" shouted the steward. "The first to speak dies under the bamboo sticks."

"All right, all right!" grumbled the porters. "Who's saying a word?"

Wang resumed his instructions to the steward. "And be careful to have the procession pass through all the principal streets, according to the custom—in front of the Governor's Palace, the High School, and the Temple of Literature."

"It shall be so, O Great Man."

"Oh! and mind the heralds. Let them clearly proclaim 'Marriage of the Wang family with the Chen

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family.' They must not alter the names. It brings bad luck."

"It shall be seen to."

"Mind you don't let them go too fast.—Now I must dress. You are to go as quickly as possible and inform the Lord Chen, so that everything may be ready for the witnesses before the sedan-chair arrives."

"Oh, we shall not be back for two hours at the least."

The musicians of the procession had already grouped themselves on either side of the door, and were tuning their instruments. Neighbours, attracted by the news or wishing to manifest their respect for Wang, as well as naturally keen to witness a minor festival, had come in fairly large numbers and now stood outside, laughing and chatting. A current of gaiety and goodwill ran through the assemblage.

"The Great Western Nurse is in the women's apartments?" asked Wang of Mackensie.

"She said she would help with the toilet of your Precious Jewel," answered the Englishman.

"Admirable, admirable!" exclaimed Wang, with an accent of profound conviction.

Just then Red Peony showed her head through the half-opened door, and asked: "Is the sedan-chair here? Are the players ready?"

"Yes, yes," answered the steward. "Everything is ready."

"Then let them begin to pipe and pluck."

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The twenty musicians, who had been only waiting for a signal, immediately struck up the Wedding March, that ancient and entrancing melody which shouted: "Ten thousand felicities to the bride! nobody can hear without delight. The neighbours May the Star of Joy shine on her house! Happiness and Peace! Luck and Pleasure!" Red Peony, flushed and excited, emerged at last, holding open the door of the apartments within. A woman, wholly covered by an immense red silk veil embroidered with gold and pearls, followed her slowly to the sedan-chair. Wang opened the red silk door and, with a grave and happy countenance, shut it again as soon as all the pleats of the skirt had been carefully tucked in.

"Congratulations and myriads of good wishes, my dear child!" he murmured.

And, to the invariable chanted and rhythmic "Oh, *oh!*—oh, *oh!*—oh, *oh!*" of their occupation, the eight porters picked up their heavy and exquisite burden and took their place in the wedding procession.

#### XIV

**W**HEN this same day had drawn to its close and twilight set in, the Reception Hall in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers had become a wondrous spectacle. On each of the small tables set about among the chairs stood heavy gold or silver candlesticks. The thick candles, already lighted, cast a brilliant light on the priceless porcelain vases beside them, on the carved and gilded panellings of the walls. Huge bunches of aromatic flowers filled the room with perfumes. A low carved balustrade ran along the open side of the hall.

Out in the courtyard, enormous globe-like lanterns covered with red gauze cast a ruddy light on the sombre foliage of the ancient cedars and multiplied the shadows of fantastic bronze animals disposed in rows on either side of the central path. The illumination, though on a scale commensurate with the occasion, had artfully been kept to a subdued brilliancy which doubled its effectiveness. It suppressed the mystery of night, communicated the pleasure and security of being outside it, without suppressing the night itself. Shadows lurked in the corners and, by contrast, gave the bystanders a keener sense of the

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lighted parts, enhancing so the inherent contrast between day's gaiety and night's grimness.

Within the hall, the First Wife was darting from one point to another, scolding the servants, arranging plates laden with fruits, or changing the position of a cup filled with cakes. She was covered with jewels. On her head was a complicated edifice of pearls. Round her neck were several ranks of precious stones—emeralds, rubies, enormous pearls. Bracelets almost concealed her wrists. Her fingers were covered with magnificent rings. Her robe was decorated with the variegated and intricate embroideries prescribed for her rank. The pleats of her skirt were stiffened with flowers of gold.

Chen was dressed in his robe of state, and as he walked his short fat body was supported by two servants. A man of his position in life must not walk alone. Chen's face wore, just now, a look of troubled apprehension. "Is everything ready?" he asked his wife.

She wheeled toward him as if something had bitten her. "That's it!" she snapped. "Find fault! Make unpleasant remarks! You don't do anything, you have no responsibility. You come round when everything is all done, and then you complain!"

"But, my dear," he protested, "I'm not complaining. On the contrary, I think everything is splendid. I am admiring it. And, indeed, it is admirable. It is going to be a beautiful party. It's perfect. I

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merely asked if the preparations were all finished."

"You needn't ask any questions at all. It will be just as well," retorted the old lady drily.

"My dear First Wife, aren't you the least bit nervous this evening? Just what is the matter?"

"Nothing whatever. But you men—oh, you are hateful. I manage every single thing in this Palace; I am up at daylight; and when night has come and curfew sounded, I have to go the rounds and make sure that everything is closed for the night and that the watchmen are not sleeping on their job. And what do I get for it all? Nothing but disagreeable comments! 'Is it ready? What! not yet finished?' I have had enough of it! Repudiate me if you like. Send me away—if you dare. After tonight, I won't look after one single thing."

"There, there, my dear!" said her fat husband wheedlingly, going to her and patting her shoulder. "There! do be calm. You have done a little too much today and got yourself tired out. What you need is a little rest."

"A rest? Is that so!" sneered the First Wife. "And who is to take my place, I want to know?—Let me alone! You never cared anything about me, anyway. Have I ever forgotten my duties for a moment? Have I ever caused public opinion to be ill-disposed toward your house? And your receptions—aren't they praised as being the finest in the province?"



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"They certainly are," affirmed Chen with conviction. "And you do me an injustice, my dear, for I have always rendered the most devout homage to your virtues, your abilities, your tireless energy."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that!" fumed his wife. "You have rendered the most devout homage to my virtues by having seven secondary wives—different ones every month!"

"But, my dear! a few mere servants without either beauty or wit!"

"Now, if I had been as shameless as your friend Pong's wife—"

"Sh, sh!" Chen looked round guardedly.

"Yes, that's it! You want me to keep my mouth shut—me, the faithful wife. Those others get all the consideration."

"Here you are, now, red in the face and angry," said Chen, aggrieved. "Something must be the matter. Won't you tell me about it?"

"There's nothing at all, I tell you. Now stop pestering me." But after a moment's silence, she took her husband's arm, motioned away the servants, and said in a low voice: "Well, yes, there *is* something."

"I knew it, I knew it!" said Chen good-naturedly. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"On the contrary, it's very serious indeed."

"You frighten me. Is the Viceroy going to degrade me?"

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“No!” she exploded. “Always thinking about yourself—”

“What is it, then? Speak!”

“You are going to have to sentence a member of your family to death,” said the old lady gloomily.

“Oh, is that all?” said Chen, vastly relieved. “A slave has smashed some porcelain plates, I suppose.”

“I’ll thank you not to joke about it, if you please. You are stupid. I ought not to have mentioned it to you at all. I ought to have done as I did last time. Then you would have had to be serious about it.”

“Ouch! Please don’t try that sort of thing again,” said Chen, worried. “I had to give the Chief of Police a hundred ounces of silver to keep him from turning in a report of the matter. No, I thank you! Executing people without an official sentence! These aren’t the good old days of my youth. Now the Chief of Police has to be present when sentence is passed, and he must approve of it: otherwise, we are not entitled to behead or strangle a slave who pilfers or speaks impudently. All our private liberties are being taken away nowadays.—But in the meantime, will you tell me what it is—yes or no?”

“Well, then: Today our steward escorted the procession which took the wedding presents to our new daughter-in-law—”

“And a very charming daughter-in-law you are going to find in her,” interrupted the old man. “She knows the rites to perfection.”

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"Don't you suppose I know it? Otherwise, I shouldn't have picked her out."

"Well, go on: the steward—?"

"—Saw, in Wang's house, the young barbarian woman whom your son brought back from Europe." Her manner was portentous.

"Well?"

"Well, she was alone in the reception-room with the foreigner who lives in the pagoda—you know whom I mean? the one for whom you are responsible."

"Oh, dear!" said Chen wearily. "Won't the damned steward hold his tongue? We shall have to give him a few ounces of silver, I suppose."

"He has already told the other servants all about it. The whole city probably knows it by this time."

"Aya, aya! what a mess!" groaned the old man. "A scandal—and when everything was going so smoothly, too! Now we have got to have her strangled. And what will our son say? Anyhow, we can have that steward given a hundred strokes with the bamboo. That will teach him to hold his tongue hereafter. He must have been stark mad to blab that way, in a case of life and death. What a slimy piece of offal he is!"

"Oh, he shall have his hundred strokes, right enough; an example must be made of him. But the other must be strangled, and right away. I knew it would turn out this way!" she added omnisciently.

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“The hare always runs back to his first cover, and the lost wild duck always finds the birds of his feather. This barbarian was bound to compromise herself with the first foreigner she happened to meet. It was fated.”

“But what a nuisance! *What* a nuisance! Still, luckily enough, this Mackensie is not subject to our laws, and we can't touch him. Fancy being obliged to strangle a man for whom you have made yourself personally responsible!”

“We haven't any grudge against him, anyway. There is going to be a scandal. We must stop it by giving a sop to public opinion. That means the death of the girl.”

“I detest these judgments!” grumbled Chen. “The accused are always crying and groaning, and it distresses me and makes it hard for me to think of more important considerations. Besides, your son is sure to make all sorts of difficulties. He seems to worship that girl. And he has only just got back, they tell me. Have you spoken to him about it?”

“Not yet. I only told him about the Viceroy's attitude.”

“That is really much more important than this silly mishap.”

“Then suppose you break it to him—the woman's death, I mean.”

“I? Well, I should say not!” he protested. “I know nothing whatever about it. You will do it

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much better than I could, anyway. You have to be pretty clever to handle an affair like this as it should be handled."

"That is just why you must be the one to do it. Besides, it is a mere trifle, just as you said. Tonight he will have another wife, and an adorable one, too. There is no reason to pity him.—Oh! I ought to have told you that I sent for the Chief of Police as soon as I heard this story. He may be here any minute now. You must get it all settled before the guests arrive."

"You sent for him?" repeated the amazed old man. "And what if I had refused to pass sentence on the woman?"

"You haven't refused," she retorted matter-of-factly. "What is the sense of talking about what might have happened? In such an important matter as this, we have to act without delay, so that the whole city may know nothing about the crime until they also hear of the punishment. That is the only way of improving the moral sense of the community."

"You are right, there—quite right," he assented.

He had no more than got these words out of his mouth when Ming-ni appeared, formally dressed. He started to kneel; but Chen stopped him. "Rise, my dear child. It is my duty, rather, to bow down to your new dignity."

"A superior never bows first, and you will always be my superior. Mother, I have greeted you already. But where is Monique? I have been looking for

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her everywhere. They told me she was with you in the women's apartments. I went there, but I did not find her. Where is she?"

"Chen threw his wife a glance of helpless anxiety and apprehension, and said: "Why, where can she be?"

"Just a moment," continued Ming-ni. "I will take advantage of her absence to say a word to you about her. When I went away, she was not on good terms with any of you here. When I got back, I heard almost the first thing that the irritation of the household against her had grown. I am afraid that none of you understand her very well, and that she does not quite know how to win your affection."

The First Wife immediately assumed such a cold and forbidding expression that Chen, who was opening his mouth to protest, shut it again forthwith, yielding to a discretion blameworthy, perhaps, but certainly strategic.

"I would never dream of criticizing your attitude toward her," Ming-ni went on blandly, saying the exact opposite of what he meant in order to make it more emphatic.

"I should hope so!" snapped the First Wife from between pinched lips.

"Still," her son went on with outrageous temerity, "I noticed several times, before I went away, that you seemed a trifle unsympathetic in your treatment of her. You showed her no tenderness, no soft-

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ness, as you so well know how to do with other women of the household.”

“Did you expect me to be running after her all day long?” asked his mother sarcastically. “‘My little darling’ here; ‘my sweet flower’ there! When a girl ignores common courtesy and the rites as she does, she can hardly expect much from her mother-in-law.”

“But, mother! I assure you she is very polite, according to the Western idea.”

“A nice idea!” sneered the First Wife. She gave a grotesque imitation of a hand-shake and the foreign greeting. “‘Goo-dee Mo-ling’! And you say that is a proper greeting? No! Say what you like, when a woman does not know the rites, she is without the moral self-control to behave herself decently. But all this is nothing. It pleased you to bring back from those barbarous places a little servant; she afforded you a few days’ pleasure. That is all that is required of her.”

“You must excuse me, mother, I—”

“Yes, it is as I say,” she insisted, not letting him answer. “A concubine comes into the house. Presently she is sold again, or turned over to a friend. It is of no consequence. The only thing that is really grave and serious is marriage, the union of two families—the First Wife! Is it not so, O Master?” she demanded of Chen.

“Assuredly,” he answered.

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"But Monique is my First Wife!" exclaimed Ming-ni.

"That woman? Your First Wife? You jest. Do we know this woman's family? Have we exchanged with them the billets of the eight ideograms? And will you have the goodness to inform me when the honourable witnesses lifted the nuptial veil in our presence? You are not married to her at all! And the best proof," added the old lady, incensed beyond self-control, "is that you are going to be married this very night."

"I?" asked Ming-ni, dazed.

"Yes, you! Is it not so, O Master?" Again she was appealing to Chen.

"This reception is indeed for your wedding," answered the old man, not without a trace of embarrassment.

"Oh!" cried Ming-ni then. "But you know very well that I am already married to Monique.—And now I want to know where she is.—Ah! I begin to understand why she is not here," he added, with sudden agitation. "You have locked her into some distant room. Where is she? I must know at once."

"Be silent!" thundered Chen suddenly, shocked and affronted by the independent tone and defiant bearing of his son. "Have you forgotten the rites? You have no business to express any desire of your own or assert your will in my presence. Here, I alone have the right to will or not to will."



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"Splendid!" applauded the First Wife. "Now you speak like the real head of the family."

"I pray you, O Father," said Ming-ni, instantly regaining his self-control, "tell me where you have put her?"

"I have not put her anywhere, I assure you," answered Chen diplomatically. He had, nevertheless, some private suspicions of his own as to what the First Wife might have done on her own responsibility.

"Just the same," said the old lady, "she deserves to be locked up somewhere. As it happens, we shall have to find her, because she has got to appear soon and answer for herself."

"Appear? Answer for herself? Before whom? Why? O Father, I pray you—if you don't speak frankly, I shall be unable to control myself. I shall forget the rites."

"Wretched boy!" said Chen authoritatively, "am I to pass sentence on you, too?—As for Monique," he went on more gently, "this is what has happened: the steward who accompanied the presents sent to your new bride saw Monique alone with the foreigner Mackensie."

"Oh, is that all?" said Ming-ni, relieved. "You must remember, father, that foreign usage sanctions that. It is nothing. All you have to do is to give the steward a few ounces of silver in order to keep his mouth shut."

"So?" answered the First Wife, taking a malignant

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satisfaction. "It happens that he has already confided his discovery to the rest of the servants and the whole city."

"Good heavens!" cried Ming-ni, understanding at last. "What a trouble has come upon us! This is terrible! What can be done to stop the scandal?"

"You see, I hope, that we had no choice but to act," said his father. "If we failed to punish her, we should be reported as indulging immorality and setting a bad example to the lower classes. It would mean the ruin of the family."

"Whatever comes," said Ming-ni with sudden fury, "that steward shall die under the bamboo sticks.—I will go and hunt for Monique. We start for Europe tonight. I can live in this nightmare of a country no longer." He strode toward the door.

But his father's voice stopped him. "I forbid you to leave this room. Again I assure you that we have made as yet no final decision about her. Do not be anxious. But you are to stay here. In a few minutes the guests will come, and it is absolutely imperative—imperative, do you hear?—that you, the bridegroom, be here to receive them."

"Bridegroom!" his son burst out savagely. "I don't even know who this bride is, to whom you are giving me, and I won't accept her."

"Those barbarian countries have completely spoiled you," said his mother bitterly. "The most

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elementary and sacred decencies of life seem to have become an insupportable burden to you. Oh, how rightly they are called 'devils,' these accursed foreigners who come even here to vex our happy and peaceful life!"

"There, there, my dear," said Chen soothingly, "let us follow the Doctrine of the Middle Course, so urgently recommended by the Sage, and not go to excess." Then, turning to his son: "Whatever happens, I trust you not to bring shame upon my white hair, and to conduct yourself as a dignitary of your rank must do. Think of your own future, if you were to be the subject of any scandal! And think of our Ancestors!"

"You assure me that Monique is not being confined or otherwise mistreated?" asked Ming-ni again, facing his mother.

"I tell you that we have done nothing to her," she reiterated doggedly.

"We will never lift a finger against her without warning you," added Chen. "Anyway, my boy, let me remind you that you are being somewhat ridiculous to make such a fuss over any woman that ever breathed. If I had stirred up such a scene every time I had to part with a girl—!—For my part, wouldn't I like to be in your place, you lucky dog! Your new turtle-dove is ravishing. She has eyes—!" —he audibly smacked his lips—"and a mouth!"

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“—And ears, and a nose!” added the First Wife sarcastically. “And legs and arms, too, I hope. Men—faugh! I am going away.”

Just as she was turning to go, a servant entered the room. “The Chief of Police,” he announced.

“Show him in,” answered the old lady. “We will see him at once.”

The Redoubtable Hunter of Criminals (to give him his official title) entered, with a mixture of pride in the importance of his function and humility before the exalted personages who had summoned him. He was dressed in a dark blue coat made of cotton, tied at the waist with a scarf. On his breast were embroidered in scarlet thread the words “Pursue and Seize.” In his hand he carried a heavy bludgeon, with which he was expected to stun those who tried to resist arrest. He wore a short grey moustache, very stiff and bristly. A blue turban enveloped his head, hiding his ears, of which one, it may as well be disclosed, had been cut off as a punishment for his once having exceeded his authority. This man was a respected functionary, for his duties comprised those usually distributed, in Europe, among the Attorney-General, the examining magistrate, and the criminal courts. Such an agent must be letter-perfect in his knowledge of the text of the laws.

The Chief made a deep curtsey to Chen, but without kneeling. “Ten thousand felicitations, O Great Man!” he said.

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"Peace and happiness be with you, O Chief of Justice!"

"I respectfully salute the Great Nurse and the Honorable Young Lord."

"Ten thousand felicities!" answered Ming-ni and his mother together.

The functionary came to the point at once. "The Great Man has sent for me," he said.

"Yes," said Chen, trying to be casual. "On a matter of no particular consequence.—You!" he belled at the servants, who had swarmed about every entrance in order to see what was going on. "Go away, or I will have every last one of you whipped!" When they were alone, he resumed: "Yes—a rather trifling matter. A barbarian woman whom my son brought back from Europe was seen by the Palace steward—where is the rascal, by the way? Come here!"

A servant appeared with a celerity which suggested that he had been not far off, and that he was making good use of his ears. "Tell the steward to come here at once," ordered Chen. "That is all." The man went off at a run, and Chen continued: "—was seen by the Palace steward in the house of my son's new bride."

"Ah!" commented the Chief of Police simply.

"Yes. She was seen. She was not alone."

"Ah!" commented the other once more.

"No. She was talking with a certain friend of

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ours—one of her own countrymen. You know him, perhaps—the Great Man Mackensie?”

“Now that the facts have been set forth,” answered the official guardedly, “I recall that a report on it had just been put before me when the messenger from the Palace entered. I knew that I should be in request,” he added with a bow.

The First Wife darted a significant glance at her son.

“And I perceive,” the officer went on, “that you have called me to participate in the judgment by the family, as public morality requires. It is a most simple case. The adultery was public. Article 368 of the law, concerning ‘Unlawful Relations’, provides that both accomplices shall be beheaded.”

“Never! Never!” cried Ming-ni explosively. “The adultery is not in the least proved. The whole thing is absurd.”

“Indeed, Excellency,” assented the Chief with a bow, “my report does not mention that the adultery is proved.”

“Not proved?” asked the First Wife stormily. “You know very well that the fact of a public rumour is proof in such a case. It is the scandal which is punished. The facts are neither here nor there.”

“Precisely my view, O Great Nurse,” declared the Hunter of Criminals, with another bow. “We have no right whatever to judge anybody. We punish the scandal in order to maintain our country’s present

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high standard of morality. A woman about whom there has been a public rumour must die. That is the only way to purify the community and make everybody avoid even the appearance of evil."

"But suppose my wife had acted on my instructions?" asked Ming-ni, "or in consideration of a higher interest?"

"In that event, Excellency, there would be no fault."

"Why are you talking about 'instructions' and 'higher interests'?" asked the First Wife, shrugging her shoulders scornfully. "You were a hundred leagues away."

"All this is very well, but it is not at all to the point," interposed Chen. "It is the scandal alone which demands our notice. The city gossips are already busy over this story. For the sake of public morality, they must promptly learn that the proper punishment has been meted out, whether there is actual culpability or not."

"The Great Man sees the problem in exactly the right light, and the lofty disinterestedness of his views is admirable," decreed the Chief of Police.

Just then the steward came in, very much wrought up and repenting bitterly of having taken what he had supposed at the time was a most cunning way to ingratiate himself with the First Wife, to his own subsequent profit.

Ming-ni rushed at him, gripped his arm, and sent

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him reeling about by jabbing him viciously in the loins with his knees. "Aha, you!" he shouted furiously. "Let me at him! This is the real villain. Come here, you cur!" And he kicked the fellow's shins. "Get down on your knees before your betters, you miserable scandal-monger! I will have your guts ripped out and your limbs cut into bits, you dog.—Now tell us what it was you saw."

"I saw—nothing, nothing at all!" moaned the fellow piteously, quaking like a leaf in a storm.

"What! You saw nothing?" screamed the First Wife. "Have them bring the bamboo sticks directly, and let that dog be slowly beaten to death. That will teach him to lie—and the others, too!"

The servants who had gathered about widened their circle. One, utterly terror-stricken, slipped discreetly away, went out of the Palace, and was never seen again.

"Have mercy, O Mistress! Take pity!" cried the unlucky steward, perceiving that he was caught between two mill-stones. He did not know whether it were safer for him to lie in the one direction or in the other, or, perchance, to tell the truth.

"Then tell me instantly what you saw."

"Having received from the Master," he began haltingly, "instructions to accompany the distinguished presents to the honourable house of the virtuous and sage bride—"



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"Hurry up; get on with it," interrupted Chen curtly.

"—I gave the presents into the keeping of the Venerable Uncle Wang," the steward ended in panic.

"You hear?" said Ming-ni triumphantly. "He saw nothing whatever. It was all a put-up story."

"Just a minute, just a minute," commanded Chen importantly. "It is I who give orders here, and I who judge." Walking to the prostrate and cowering body of the steward, he refreshed the fellow's memory with a violent jolt in the face, given with his knee. "Now speak, and speak straight!" he said sharply. "Give us the facts, and without wasting a syllable. If we don't get it out of you this minute, the Chief of Police is going to take you away and tear out your tongue and cut off your nose, by way of punishment for your slanders."

"Libel, as a matter of fact," said the Chief succinctly, "is punishable by doubling the penalty to which the falsely accused innocent would have been sentenced. Article 336, on 'False and Malignant Accusations'. Torture, with lingering death."

"I don't know anything more!" moaned the poor steward, scared out of his wits. "I have forgotten everything. I had rather die than be beaten."

"Will you answer—yes or no?" said Chen savagely.

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"I—I did—," spluttered the steward.

"You did what?"

"I—I don't know."

"Bring the pincers," roared the Chief of Police to one of his men, "and tear off his nose."

"I will! I will speak! I remember now," said the steward hastily. "I saw the foreign woman speaking to the barbarian who lives in the temple. They were together in the Central Hall of the Lord Wang's Palace."

"There was nobody with them?" demanded the Chief of Police.

"Nobody."

"In that case, an example must be made."

"Indeed!" said Ming-ni, white with rage. "Have the kindness to take away this dog that bites his master's hand, and see that he is exposed in a cage on the public square until he dies of starvation."

"Very well, Excellency," agreed the Hunter of Criminals. "The slave who denounces his master is indeed liable to be sentenced to a lingering death. Article 337, on 'Accusations Against one's own Family'."

"Have pity! O Lord and Master, O Great Nurse, have mercy!" The wretched steward's voice rose to a screech. "I have always been a faithful servant! Only let me be beheaded or strangled—but not the lingering death, not—"

"No mercy! He had none for my wife," an-

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swered Ming-ni in a voice hard as flint. "I would not grant you mercy if I had to burn the whole city down to have you tortured."

"There, there—enough," said Chen. "Your anger shall be appeased. They shall take him away. He shall be carved into thin slices if you like, and everything shall be made right. Is it not so, Redoubtable Hunter?"

"Your orders shall be carried out, O Great Man. Holà, you! Come here! Put that carrion in chains and take it away to prison. Tomorrow at daylight he shall be carved into a hundred pieces."

His minions rushed at the steward as a man-eating tiger springs on its prey. In a trice they had chained him and shoved him out, kicking and belabouring him the while. The screams of the victim ululated through the tranquil night, rendering it hideous.

Chen turned to the Chief. "It is all clear now? Whatever may be the terms of my sentence upon the woman, and whatever sequel may follow, the law has been respected, as is attested by your presence at the judgment. You will incorporate this fact in your report?"

"I will, Excellency. Everything has been done most correctly. Ten thousand congratulations." He turned away with dignity, though he had received from Ming-ni only a contemptuous bow and from the old lady a slight nod.

"Now that everything is finished," said Chen, heav-

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ing a sigh of relief, "let us welcome our guests and make merry."

"My poor Monique!" mused Ming-ni desperately. "Unless I can find some way of saving you, you are indeed lost."

"My poor boy!" said the old man, putting his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder, "don't take this little accident so to heart! We are not responsible for our destiny: well, then, let us rise above it by acknowledging only the good and never minding about the evil. Besides," he added, "your sorrow is preposterously exaggerated. I will find you ten women prettier than this Monique of yours, and if you want barbarian women, why, we can have two or three sent to you. Believe me, the secret of happiness lies not in giving oneself to a woman or any other toy, as a slave sells his body to a master."

"You can say that because you have never loved."

"Never loved!" said Chen. "Why, what else have I been doing all my life?"

"Just so: you have never loved."

"You are both simply absurd," said the First Wife tartly. "I am going to the women's apartments to receive our guests' wives and daughters. And now, my son, in honour of your marriage, and if you promise me to behave tonight as a dignitary of your rank ought, I promise on my part to leave Monique at liberty until tomorrow morning, and to do nothing against her without first apprising you."

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“But what if she should have killed herself today? I cannot bear the suspense. I must know where she is.”

“Your duty must come before your feeling,” said Chen severely. “When the ceremony is over, I will help you find the creature. But I forbid you, in the name of our family’s honour, in the name of your brothers, and in the name of your sons-to-be, to do anything which could impair our reputation or endanger the standing of the family.”

CHEN kept on explaining to his son how extremely improper it would be for him, as a functionary, not to be present at his own wedding, and how impossible such a solecism would be to hide or to palliate. Ming-ni listened sullenly, enraged at being compelled to let himself be married to another while his own wife was lost and nowhere to be found. He considered all sorts of plans to save her, but without hitting on any that seemed practicable. At one moment he resolved simply to run away with her; but at the next, when he weighed the certainty of pursuit, he gave this over for some other equally wild scheme. He speculated about the possibility of finding a woman who would consent to die in Monique's stead, but this also he abandoned hopelessly. A man is sometimes found who, for a sum sufficient to ensure the future comfort of his wife and children, will take the place of a condemned criminal. In certain cases the law authorizes this substitution. But it is not recorded that any woman has ever consented to the playing of so disinterested a rôle.

He was still deliberating, hardly listening to the sensible advice of his father, when old Wang, gaunt

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and tall as ever, appeared in his formal robes, hurrying in order to receive the guests simultaneously with the father of his new son-in-law. Ming-ni, in spite of his trouble and preoccupation, noticed him sufficiently to be startled by his arriving through the back door and so early. He said as much to his father.

"But he is not a guest tonight," answered Chen.

"Not a guest? How is that?"

"Why, of course he isn't. He is your father-in-law."

Before Ming-ni had had time to take this in, his fat and amiable father had stepped forward to meet his old friend. "No hurry," he said. "We are not behind-hand. The guests have not come yet." Then, noticing that his son had made no movement, he said to him in a low but threatening voice: "Are you mad? Get down instantly in front of your father-in-law."

Disciplined since his childhood to rigid observance of the rites, Ming-ni knelt almost automatically before the old gardener. "I touch my forehead to the ground thrice three times before the father of my new wife."

Wang immediately helped him rise, saying: "No, no! No rites: we are now one household."

"Well, my friend," remarked Chen genially, "I hope that we are going to empty a good many cups of the lukewarm wine, and compose at least a few

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immortal lyrics. I have already sketched out an impromptu subject or two."

"And I," responded the gardener, "I, too, feel in my head the bubbling-up of poetic inspiration. Flowers, the moon, willows tenderly leaning toward each other and mingling their leaves, the rushes swaying and murmuring to the evening zephyr, the birds *Yn* and *Yang*, which die when separated, the phoenix and the dragon—all such images whirl together in my head before taking their flight in stanzas which crave perfection."

"Ah, my friend Wang, you are a true poet!" sighed Chen admiringly and with an artless envy. "Poetry and mellow wine are a man's greatest joys under the sky."

"The intoxication of the mind is best of all," said Wang somewhat sententiously.

They were interrupted by a considerable din. A sedan-chair, escorted by numerous bustling and shouting servants with lanterns, crossed the raised portal and entered the courtyard. A *chrai-kwan* arrived, holding aloft a red calling-card and bellowing: "The Great Man Ping!"

"May he deign to enter," replied the host's *chrai-kwan*.

From the sedan-chair, now deposited near the three steps leading to the entrance, emerged a man dressed in the blue silk gown of a scholar. "Ten thousand wishes of happiness!" he said, bending one knee in a



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curtsey, "and as many congratulations to the bridegroom's father, to the honourable father of the bride, and to the bridegroom himself."

The three hosts descended the steps and dropped curtseys in return.

"Lord Wang," said the newcomer, "I am happy to be the first to announce to you a great new honour of which you are the recipient."

"What honour is that?" asked the three hosts together.

"The Governor of the City has just had ten of your best poems posted on the walls. Already the scholars are gathering round to copy the verses on their fans."

"Ah! How undeserved!" exclaimed the old man, intensely gratified.

"What an honour for us all!" said Chen, taking the occurrence as if indeed he felt himself honoured by it. There was a buzz of compliments. Then Ping turned to Ming-ni to ask: "In the Far West have they any notion of literature? Does the Government there post the works of the great poets on the walls?"

"No. But they print, and post everywhere, the best speeches on political subjects delivered in a hall reserved for that use."

"Well, that is literature, too," admitted Ping. "Very inferior to poetry, of course, but still literature. Those red-haired savages are not so illiterate as some say. Perhaps, little by little, they will be

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taught what civilization is by the agents our Government is now sending among them. Yours is really a most humanitarian task, O Lord Minister Plenipotentiary. To live in the midst of wild tribes in order to elevate them to higher standards of civilization; to share with them the fruits of our own richer experience of the social life—it is indeed an admirable task.”

The arrival of several new guests interrupted the flow of compliments—which had not for an instant prevented Ming-ni's thoughts from dwelling on Monique. There ensued a brisk interchange of curtsseys and greetings, each of the guests deeming it imperative to use to the utmost extent so rare an occasion for displaying his familiarity with complicated social usages and his consummate understanding of the situation.

The Governor of the City arrived last of all, as befitted his rank. All the guests fell into two ranks and made a profound curtsy as he passed between, after having answered the greetings of the three hosts. He balanced his arms and shoulders meticulously as he walked, smiling at this one, addressing a compliment to that, carefully and tactfully distributing his official politeness.

Near the place of honour, at the far end of the hall, began a new contest of courtesy. “Your presence illuminates my thatched hovel,” said Chen. “Pray be seated.”

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"My personal reputation is enhanced by my being received in your Palace," answered the Governor.

"Be pleased to sit by the places reserved for the young couple, O Protector of the City."

"But how could I sit there, when all these lords are an hundred times worthier than I?"

"The insignificant ones are without any merit whatsoever," murmured the flattered guests.

Eventually some one had to sit down. The struggle having lasted long enough, the Governor lapsed into the armchair indicated; but he did it as if overwhelmed with humility. Then, carefully disposing his multi-coloured robes, he put his hands on his knees and heaved a sigh of contentment.

"The Protector of the City has conferred a great honour on our family," said Chen, "and the posting of our honourable friend Wang's poems on this day is a glorious seal of distinction upon his talents."

"Say, rather, his genius is the glory of our city," replied the Governor with gravity. "We must ever venerate those who are inspired. They see that to which we are blind, and guide us aright on the difficult way to justice, to perfect civilization. The influence of the Lord Wang's genius inspires in the people their highest aspirations; and thus their minds are turned from lower material things toward the heavenly, the eternal."

A silence ensued, as if everybody were absorbedly mastering the sentiment expressed in these words.

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Then Chen tried another gambit: "Are the public affairs numerous and exacting?"

"There is nothing tremendously important just now. Public morality seems to be eminently satisfactory at this moment. Earlier in the week, we had to strangle a petty trader. He deceived his customers as to the quality of his goods, in order to obtain a higher price than the ordinary valuation."

Ming-ni could not help thinking of Europe, and asking himself how many traders there would be left alive if such treatment were meted out to all the Western merchants who committed the same offence.

"Speaking of morality," said Ping in a low voice to his immediate neighbour, "it appears that the foreign woman who was brought here by the bridegroom has just been detected in commerce with the barbarian of the temple. They will have her unobtrusively strangled, I take it."

"So it is to be hoped. The woman's conduct was flagrant. Why, our own wives are already playing with the idea of imitating her and going about alone on foot, unveiled."

"It is precisely in that way that morality and wise social usages are lost. It is easier to go downhill than up. One bad example destroys the plodding progress of years."

"What luck for the bride!" said Ping's neighbour meaningly.

At that moment was heard a noise, at first indistinct,

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but waxing as it approached. Suddenly, from the outermost courtyard, sounded the melody of the Wedding March. The guests rose to their feet, saying: "The sedan-chair! The sedan-chair!" Almost at once the bridal procession began to appear, mingling its own music with that of the Palace musicians, balancing its numerous red lanterns aloft, and filling the great courtyard with extraordinary noise and gaiety. All the guests chorused their welcome, with cries of "Ten thousand times ten thousand felicities to the new bride!" "May the Star of Fortune shine on her house!" "May the scented breezes of Spring blow for ever in her abode!" "And may the moonlight shine upon them for ever!"

Suddenly a series of loud explosions set the air vibrating. Fire-crackers of every sort and size were touched off simultaneously, producing such a thunder that all those evil spirits who lurk in darkness and silence must assuredly have been put to rout and driven a thousand miles away.

The shouting porters deposited the heavy red sedan-chair in front of the marble steps. By the back door of the Hall the First Wife appeared, making quick little bows to her guests, dropping a curtsey to the Governor. She had to be present at the ceremony in order to attest the validity of the marriage. Chen strode pompously down the steps, followed by his son, and opened the door of the sedan-chair; then he stopped and, turning toward the assembled witnesses,

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said solemnly: "O Sage Scholars, O Noble Old Men, O You my Elders, O You Powerful Governor of the City: be our witnesses. Today in the hour of the Dragon, in this auspicious day of the Acacias' moon, in the year of the Cock, the New Bride crosses the threshold of her new abode."

"We are your witnesses. The wedding is being consummated. May joy reign in this house," said the Governor. "May their happiness endure for ever!" echoed the guests.

A feminine figure, covered from head to foot by the red veil worn by brides, stepped from the sedan-chair.

Ming-ni, despite his anxiety for his wife, had been to some extent reassured by his parents' promises. Though completely resolved to consider the present ceremony as non-existent, he had no choice but to play his part as the situation dictated; and (shall we add?) he could not help feeling a certain curiosity as to the personal appearance of the bride who was thus being imposed upon him. His eyes were fixed on her while she was lifting her feet and bending her head to leave the chair. Obeying the rites, he made as if to take her in his arms at the instant of "crossing the threshold," the ceremony whereby a man recognizes a woman as his lawful wife. But he merely put his arm round her waist, at the same time holding her hand through the veil. He was startled by the firm strength of the hand as it answered to his pressure.

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But there was no more time to formulate conjectures about the bride's appearance. Chen was announcing with solemn gravity: "In the name of my venerated ancestors, in the presence of my First Wife and of the honourable witnesses, I receive this day the New Bride, and I authorize my son, her husband, to lead her to the seats prepared."

Ming-ni, followed by his parents and Wang, slowly and gravely escorted the New Bride to the two gilded armchairs which had been placed at the extreme end of the Hall. He bowed to right and left, and they all sat down.

"And now," Chen proclaimed, "let the dancers and choral singers, by rhythmic movement and sacred song, exorcise for ever all evil spirits. Let them invoke the presence in this house of all those happy influences which bring luck upon our actions and confer success on all our undertakings."

In the courtyard, under the gnarled and twisted cedars, a space had been cleared. Two or three ranks of huge red lanterns surrounded the place thus left vacant. Beyond the little pool had been stationed an orchestra of stringed instruments, two-stringed fiddles, great guitars, and the like; together with two superposed ranks of sounding stones, bronze plates, little bells, and cymbals; and flutes, ocarinas, long trumpets, and other wind instruments. The leader of the orchestra, a musician dressed in a long red robe with broad sleeves, gave the signal by scraping his baton on

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the huge back of a sonorous wooden tiger. The orchestra began softly, the instruments playing in unison, but producing an extraordinarily rich and ravishing effect because of the vibrant concord of so many different *timbres*.

Soon the leader began to sing a low and haunting melody, utterly unlike the discordant shrillness of popular songs.

“Let us hymn that solemn union  
Which fulfils the law of the Universe.  
The union of the Two Principals is here renewed.  
May the happy pair, like evergreen trees,  
Live long in the love and obedience of their sons and  
grandsons.”

A choir of children's voices, fresh and soft, took up the same melody in an accelerated rhythm; and sixty tiny dancers in long and flowing robes of palest blue, with hanging sleeves, formed in a square like that of a battalion, holding aloft great peacock plumes which they slowly waved. They separated, rejoined, interwove, and turned about, tracing the set pattern of an immemorial and comely tradition. Then the leader of the orchestra sang alone:

“May their beloved ancestors,  
Invoked by our singing and our dancing,  
Be apprised of this conjunction.  
Let us woo them by our choring,  
And may their wardship  
Shield us for ever from spirits of evil.”



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This time it was a choir of deep and sonorous voices which answered. Sixty men in dark orange robes entered in a whirling dance, carrying streaming pennants of vivid colours and shields of wood which gave out strange and unearthly clangors when rhythmically struck. The dancing children and this new *corps de ballet* intermingled, separated, crossed and re-crossed, as if in mortal combat with the evil spirits; then they knelt reverently, as if beholding the shades of the ancestors whom their song had invoked. Again the leader sang alone:

“Ye mysterious Shades  
Who appear when evening falls  
And hover round us until into the sky  
Light is summoned once more by the crowing cock,  
Be propitious to this bridal pair!  
Remove every stone from their pathway;  
And may their dreams, thronged with your presence,  
Warn them of future ills and give them present joy.”

At this juncture some of the guests noticed that Ming-ni and his new wife were speaking inaudibly together. They smiled indulgently, and Chen and the First Wife exchanged a knowing look, expressive of vast relief.

A troop of sixty women in violet gowns appeared, each carrying a bunch of flowers. They danced gracefully to the steps of the hall itself and stood there, offering their nosegays. The dancers behind them stood motionless. The leader paused a mo-

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ment, silencing the instruments. The hush was momentous, almost oppressive. At its deepest intensity, the leader began the "Great Prayer":

"And thou above all, O powerful spirit,  
God of the Rain and the Wind,  
By whose will all efforts succeed or fail,  
By whose aid we blundering mortals oft achieve  
What the strongest and wisest fall short of —  
All-powerful God, thou God of Luck!  
Ever preserve this pair at the top of thy wheel  
Hear my prayer; hearken to my reverent singing."

The hundred and eighty dancers prostrated themselves, uttering moans and lamentations addressed to the God of Luck, that inscrutable and capricious force which governs the universe, and by which every enterprise is prospered or thwarted; which no man can either anticipate or control; which may in a single day cast down the most exalted or at a stroke bestow fullness of prosperity on the most wretched; which crowns with success the most foolhardy projects and wrecks the most elaborately contrived. Luck it is, in the last analysis, which decides whether we shall be born to all manner of great endowments in a king's palace or, indifferently, to the most damning mental and physical defects in a city slum. It is from Luck alone that each of us has to accept his ultimate destiny.

The dances and prayers ended on a last sombre cadence from the orchestra. In the courtyard

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reigned an absolute hush. Chen rose from his seat and proclaimed: "The solemn moment has come. According to our immemorial usage, and in order that the honourable witnesses may know with their own eyes the identity of the couple whose marriage is hereby consecrated, the bride, by lawful exception to the canons of modesty ordinarily obtaining, will now lift up her veil and uncover her face."

Ming-ni then rose and, bowing to the assembled company, said: "O Venerable Witnesses, my bride, here present under this veil, and I myself, are, then, incontestably and indissolubly made one?"

"Beyond any possible doubt. Strange question!" answered the Governor.

"And you, O my Parents, your expressed will is that I shall be for ever united with this woman?" asked Ming-ni again.

"To be sure it is our will," answered the First Wife energetically.

"Then, O you my Parents, and you, O Witnesses, you have consecrated according to our rites my marriage to the Little Elder Sister Monique de Rosen. Our wedding has already been celebrated according to the custom of the Western countries. Today you have made it indissoluble in our country also."

And, raising the long red silken veil, he disclosed the lovely and smiling face of Monique. From head to foot she was dressed and bejewelled in the most orthodox Chinese fashion.

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For an instant, consternation showed on every face. "She, the foreign woman!" cried the First Wife, stupefied. "How can this be? I knew the Devils of the Ocean were sorcerers, but—"

Chen interrupted her sharply: "Whatever may have happened, no scandal!" Then, smiling, he leaned toward his son and said: "Was it in the Western countries that you learned to play such tricks on your old parents?"

"The Jade Emperor who rules over the hidden world," answered Ming-ni artlessly, "undoubtedly wanted to reward me for my perfect obedience to your commands. He has transformed my bride."

The Governor, perceiving that the head of the family seemed to countenance the dénouement, now rose labouriously and said for all to hear: "Admirable! He wanted to legitimize his marriage. What a remarkable fidelity to the rites!" And then all the witnesses, who had been waiting to take their cue from the Governor, likewise rose and applauded.

Wang alone gave no sign, but sat on, smiling in a happy abstraction. He was deep in the composition of a new poem.

## XVI

**W**HILE the witnesses were still on their feet, the Nuptial March was heard once more from the outer courtyard; and, while it filled the Palace with its entrancing melody, a new bridal procession appeared before the astonished witnesses. The ranks of dancers opened, and a second wedding sedan-chair was brought in and set down at the foot of the marble steps. Wang, disturbed in his reverie by the bustle and noise, leaned over to his nearest neighbour and asked: "Have I been dreaming? I had it in my mind that the sedan-chair had arrived some time ago, and that the wedding was all over."

His neighbour, a little embarrassed, searched his mind vainly for an appropriate answer. He could find none. Ming-ni crossed the Hall to the old man and, taking his arm, led him to the Governor. This worthy functionary looked up at Chen and the First Wife for an explanation of the mystery, but they seemed to be as baffled as he was. Ming-ni bowed to the Governor, to his parents, and to the witnesses. Then he said loudly: "O Honourable Elders, deign now to be the witnesses of a second wedding. My noble father has been made responsible for the for-

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eign Lord Mackensie, whom we all know and respect, and is thus a second father to him—”

“Quite true,” said the Governor with a nod.

“My father, acting in that capacity in the name of the Great Foreign Lord, has exchanged the billets of the eight ideograms with our illustrious poet Wang, glory of our City and pride of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.”

“But you never told me a word of all this,” said Wang in a low voice to Chen.

“I didn’t know it myself—I didn’t understand,” muttered Chen. “But what does it matter? Mackensie’s life is as dear to me as my own—almost.”

“But—,” objected the old man, hesitating.

“Your daughter loves him,” said Monique from behind the two.

“Besides, it is too late now,” added Ming-ni. “There would be a scandal.”

On a signal from the young man, a servant ushered in Mackensie. He wore evening clothes, and the sight of this strange costume plunged the audience into an amazement akin to awe. The young foreigner dropped a quite correct curtsy before the Governor and said: “I bow to the Father and the Mother of the People, to the guardian of the peace and prosperity of the region, to the representative of the highest authorities.”

“Ten thousand wishes of happiness and as many congratulations!” answered the complimented digni-

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tary; and all the audience echoed his words. The outcome was settled, since local authority had sanctioned it. Accordingly, Wang said to Chen: "It is, in fact, quite correct and in keeping with our customs. Everything is perfect."

Mackensie bowed to the guests. "I salute the honourable witnesses, whose virtue, justice, and social gifts make this city the abode of happiness and delight."

"We bow to the Venerable Foreign Lord," murmured the guests, won over in turn.

Ming-ni now said to his father in a low voice: "Attend him, as you would a son."

Chen looked at the First Wife. What could he do? The Governor had sanctioned the affair: if he refused to, there would be a scandal. He submitted with good grace to the exigency of the occasion. "Come, O my Son," he said to Mackensie, smiling; and the two went down the steps together.

By this time the sedan-chair had got across the courtyard. They were just in time to receive it with the ceremonial which had been used before. Chen made formal announcement of the "crossing of the threshold," and himself led the young couple to the two gilded armchairs, vacated now by Ming-ni and Monique. But this time, in order that the witnesses might be reassured as to the identity of the new bride, Mackensie immediately performed the ceremony of the unveiling, and revealed to the admiration of those

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present the blushing face of Orchid. Monique and Orchid smiled affection and relief at each other.

The First Wife had suffered one more indignity than she could bear. She got up and went grimly out of the room.

At a signal from Chen, the propitiatory songs and dances began again, while the servants filled the cups of the witnesses with a perfumed lukewarm wine and placed on the tables fresh plates heaped with dainties. Each guest's body-servant stood behind his master, preparing his silver *yea-trai*, or long thin pipe, and lighting it. Private conversations were carried on freely, for, among the rationalist adherents of Confucianism, respect for even the most solemn observances is not excessive. Poets exchanged their impromptu verses (most of them prepared long beforehand) and their mutual praises of each other's genius, couched in terms hardly less lyrical than the poems themselves. A few simple souls played "fists," each of the two contestants lowering one hand suddenly at a given instant, and saying aloud the number which he believed would represent the fingers open or shut on his opponent's hand; after which the loser must empty his cup of wine and exhibit the bottom of it, saying: "*Kan pei*"—"I have drained the cup." From the first and second courtyards came the laughter and chatter of the innumerable men who had formed the escorts, and who were now drinking and eating as much as they could. Among the witnesses



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there reigned more and more an untrammelled though gentile gaiety. It was, as the phrase has it, a feast of "noise and movement"—"*Shoo-nao*."

The prayers and ceremonies were over at last. The time had come for the two brides to enter the secret apartments in the rear and undergo the "women's examination"—a most trying ordeal, for the custom is to allow all sorts of remarks upon the examinee, even the most insulting. Perhaps this is considered good discipline for living together in the same household. Tongues were particularly sharp at Monique's expense. The curiosity caused by her original appearance had long ago subsided, whereas the memory of her numerous social errors was fresh. The Chief of Police's call and the fact of the sentence of death were known to everybody, the servants having spread the news. Moreover, blue eyes and light hair are not in high favour among those who call themselves *li min*, "the folk who have black hair." "Tonight married, tomorrow strangled!" said one. "That will teach her manners!" "And look at this other one who marries a foreigner! She must be crazy." "They say, though, that he is a great scholar. Even the *tao-she* and the Buddhist priests consult him on doctrinal points." "But he isn't a Chinese official." "He is almost an adoptive son of the Lord Chen. Besides, the Venerable Wang would never have authorized the wedding if everything had not been correct." "You may say what you like, all

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this would never have happened in the good old days. Such marriages are contrary to our sacred tradition." "Anyhow, I wish I knew how they are going to kill the barbarian."

These more or less caustic remarks, and others like them, though made in low voices, reached the ears of the two brides, as indeed they were intended to do. Orchid, knowing Chinese ideas and customs, was really alarmed. She made a sign to Red Peony, who had come to witness the success or failure of her stratagem and now stood valiantly behind her mistress, ready to defend her or die with her. "Red Peony," said Orchid in a quick whisper, "did you hear? They have sentenced her to death! Why? What have we done? And what shall we do now?"

"It is not because of the exchange of brides that she is condemned. She was seen with your husband when the presents were brought in, and the Chief of Police was called in for the judgment. What we have done tonight has often been done before. Read the *Rao-Tsioo chwan*: the whole novel is the story of a bride changed for another at the last minute. Who would protest and raise a scandal for such a thing?"

"No one. But Monique—"

"We have the whole night ahead of us. They say that nothing is to be done until the Lord Chen and the First Wife give the order, tomorrow."

"Yes, but—suppose they should already have poisoned her?"

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Monique was beginning to be thoroughly frightened. At first she had been relieved, triumphant, at the success of their daring scheme. But this mysterious and constantly reiterated threat of death, this story of a sentence passed upon her in her absence, recalled to her mind innumerable urgent warnings from her husband and his earlier anxiety on her account. Moreover, these women in their vari-coloured dresses, turning their strange painted faces upon her coldly, blazing with jewels and reeking with the perfumes of strongly scented flowers, dizzied her with their continuous and rapid gesticulation, the shrill chatter of their voices. She began to feel her strength abandoning her. All at once she had a sensation as of slipping fast, faster, down a precipitous incline. Then she closed her eyes. "Mother!" she heard herself call in a weak moan; and the next moment she had fainted dead away.

Orchid and Red Peony were just in time to prevent her from falling. They called servants, gave curt orders; and before any one else could say or do anything, Orchid bade the slaves help her carry her unconscious charge to her own pavilion.

Even in that moment of hysterical excitement, she did not forget to take her leave of the company; and not the most captious could have picked a flaw in the unremitting propriety of her demeanour as she addressed to them her parting salutations and acknowledgments.

## XVII

WHEN the Governor had taken his departure, the guests did not sit down again. They left the house in a body, according to the custom. Ming-ni, in spite of the stress of his feelings, could not but stay with them to the last. It was his inexorable social duty. But as soon as the last witness was seated in his sedan-chair, the young man hurried to the women's apartments. There he encountered his mother. She told him, with her most scornful air, that Monique had fainted and been carried to her pavilion.

"They have poisoned her," said Ming-ni instantly. Poisoning is the most discreet mode of execution in such family dramas; the most humane, too, for if the poison is strong enough the victim dies almost instantly, without even being aware what has happened.

"Poisoned, is she? Not by me," said the old lady, with transparent regret. "I told you I would do nothing without forewarning you. As for your poor father," she added contemptuously, "he is not the man to have done such a thing."

"She may have poisoned herself," said Ming-ni. "What has she eaten here tonight?"

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"Nothing at all. And I don't give her credit for enough sense of honor to kill herself. If she had had any self-respect, she would not have waited to be sentenced. What I did and said to her would have been enough, not to mention what all the women in the family told her.—If you had only heard the goings-on in the women's apartments!"

"We can talk that over some other time," said her son hurriedly. "Goodnight, Mother."

"Goodnight, my poor deluded child—"

He ran to the pavilion. There, on the terrace under the projecting roof, he came upon Mackensie, who had come straight to the pavilion to wait for him.

"Don't be alarmed: it is nothing," said the engineer, as Ming-ni approached. "She is much better, and my wife is with her." The two went in together.

Monique had quickly recovered from her fainting spell. She had opened her eyes and seen Orchid bending over her, gently taking off her head ornaments and necklaces. Monique had heaved a deep sigh and murmured: "I am so tired!" Then, recalling the occurrences of the evening and her own terror: "Is it true that they wish to kill me?"

"Don't let yourself be troubled about anything," said Orchid tenderly. "We have contrived to arrange both our weddings as we wished, just when it seemed as if we might be separated for ever from those whom we love. We will save you from the present danger as well."

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"But what have I done? They cannot sentence a person without hearing him in his own defence."

Orchid could not repress a smile. "It is useless to discuss one's fate," she said stoically. "But we can try to evade it when it is unbearable, so long as evasion is possible."

It was at that point that Mackensie had arrived. Orchid told him the situation briefly, and he went outside to wait for Ming-ni and to think out, if possible, some way of escape. The two men now entered together. The young diplomat rushed to the couch on which his wife lay, and knelt by it with such a convulsive tenderness that Monique, feeble as she was, felt herself in the clutch of a new force. She threw her arms round his neck and cried: "Save me! They are going to kill me."

"Don't be afraid," he answered gently. "You shall not die.—But we have no time to lose." Then, to the others: "My parents have promised not to do anything before tomorrow. We have the whole night before us for action. Tomorrow it will be too late. My mother will never forgive us for this substitution of one bride for another. I was even inclined to suspect her of having poisoned Monique. Neither are you two safe, in spite of my father's guarantee. If any one of us were really poisoned, it would only be a question of a few ounces of gold to buy off the medical examiner, the *woo-tso* whom the Governor would send. He would declare that you died a natural

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death, and no one would dare gainsay him. My poor father, despite his personal feelings, would rather do that than stand the constant wrath and, still worse, the constant nagging of my mother."

"Then what do you advise?" asked Mackensie.

"We must fly at once. I will write a note to my father. He will find some way of delaying the pursuit, if my mother starts one. In time, they may forget everything."

"Fly? I had thought of it myself. But how? And when? We have no porters, no travelling chairs, no horses—"

"You forget: the men with whom I have just returned must be still in the Palace grounds. If they are not dead drunk, they will be able to start at a moment's notice. It is only a question of pay." He called his servant and, without explanation, told him to fetch in at once the *mafoo-trow*, or head muleteer. Then he rapidly helped the others pack their few absolutely indispensable belongings.

The muleteer appeared, tidying his blue linen blouse, which was tied at the waist with a scarf, and unrolling his long plaited pigtail from his shaven head as a mark of respect. Ming-ni met him on the terrace. "Your men and horses are in the Palace?" he asked.

"Yes, O Great Man."

"They have eaten and drunk—and not too much?"

"Yes—no, O Great Man."

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"I have just received an order to start on an official mission. I must start at once, and travel by double stages."

"But, O Great Man," objected the muleteer, who had heard some of the stories current in the Palace and was afraid of finding himself implicated in some illicit transaction, "my men and beasts are tired, and they cannot start again without rest."

"Instead of the regular pay, I will give your men double. And here are ten ounces of silver for you yourself," said Ming-ni, who had foreseen his objections. He drew from his sleeve a silver ingot and handed it to the man, who took it into his hand and weighed it deliberately. "And there will be another like it for you," added Ming-ni, "if we reach Weihsien in time. But if you are not ready in ten minutes, I shall report you tomorrow for breach of discipline during our last journey."

"I obey, O Great Man, I obey," answered the fellow hastily, pocketing his ingot. "Just the same, the men are very tired," he added hypocritically. "Also, they would like to leave something behind for their families here."

"Here are five ounces for them," said Ming-ni. This demand also he had foreseen. "But hurry." Then, to his servant: "We must have two sedan-chairs and two saddle-horses. The foreign lord and his wife accompany us. Have everything got ready in silence, and in the square outside the Palace. I



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prefer not to disturb the rest of my venerated parents."

"I understand," said the servant; and he hurried off with the muleteer.

Inside the pavilion, the travelling-boxes were already packed. The two young women had withdrawn into their own rooms to change into suitable travelling clothes. Mackensie started to run over to his room part in the evening's events had been no less effective in the temple, but the faithful Little Badger, whose for being silent, displayed a trunk and a handbag, ready in the outer room of the pavilion. "I had no great confidence in the upshot of this affair," explained Little Badger, "and I packed the more valuable belongings. Will the Great Man make sure that everything is here?"

Mackensie looked at him with unstinted admiration. "And to think that I have sometimes called you a little fool!" he said.

"Please, will the Great Man change his clothes rapidly?" said the servant, deeply gratified. "Here is a travelling suit."

A few minutes later, when the muleteers came for the luggage, everybody was ready and waiting. A crescent moon lighted their way as they noiselessly crossed the gardens and the courtyards. They went out through the Palace gate. The mules and horses were huddled in a group in the large open square, their heads drooping. The men, half asleep them-

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selves, tied the boxes on the pack-saddles without the usual accompaniment of swearing and screaming. Everybody except the travellers seemed to be asleep, both in the Palace and in the whole city. All the houses were shut, and the whole place was like the deserted city of a dream. Now and again a dog set up a furious barking; neighbouring dogs answered; then all was silent as before. From the Palace gardens sounded the *clap-clap-clap* of a watchman beating his little wooden drum in order to inform any possible burglars that he was on the job and that they had better think twice.

The travellers were ready at last. Monique and Orchid sat together in one sedan-chair; in the other was little Red Peony with their personal belongings. They started along the streets, where the horses' hoofs, striking on the slippery stone slabs, awakened echoes in the shut and barred shops by the way. Ming-ni had with him the passport of a high functionary on an official mission; it had been delivered to him before his immediately preceding journey. This he showed to the guard at the City Gate, who, seeing that it was all in order, allowed them to pass through. They were out at last, on the road to safety and freedom.

The city lay in a fairly broad valley surrounded by high hills. A thick mist, rising from the flooded rice fields, smothered the pale light of the young moon. Luckily, the roads round the city were in good repair,

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and in spite of the obscurity they were able to make very respectable progress. When the first grey of dawn outlined the crests of the hills and turned to a tender green the black mass of the uncultivated slopes, they were already in a chaotic group of hills well outside the valley.

## XVIII

WHEN the sun had risen, they stopped a few minutes for breakfast. Then they plunged on. Hours passed; the leagues piled up behind them. They began to believe themselves out of reach of pursuit. Then, behind them on the sinuous pathway which followed the curve of the hills, they saw a single horseman galloping.

Ming-ni, constantly turning his head back to see whether they were followed, was the first to notice the distant apparition. Calling Mackensie's attention to it, he said: "We are lost!"

The engineer looked. "But he seems to be alone and without escort," he said. "We will buy him off, or kill him if necessary. If we must die, better die for something worth it. But if there is an escort, we are indeed lost."

The horseman overtook them at length. It was a servant of the Palace. He saluted Ming-ni respectfully and said: "Peace and prosperity, O Great Man. The Lord has entrusted me with this missive for you." From his high boot he drew a long envelope sealed with a red paper band, and gave it to the young man. Ming-ni looked at it a moment; then,

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having recognized his father's handwriting, he broke the band and pulled out a thin sheet of flowered paper covered with ideograms. What he read was this:

To the Lord Imperial Envoy to the Foreign Countries, his father sends these words:

In the desire not to trouble the bliss of newly wedded couples, I availed myself yesterday of a moment when, all our guests having departed, I found myself alone with the First Wife. I informed her that during the feast a messenger had brought you the order from a most wise Government to start again without a moment's delay and to return to your post in Europe.

The First Wife could scarce believe me. She even wanted to see you immediately and ask you your intentions. I had to use all my authority to prevent her. She consented to wait till morning. What was her surprise when your pavilion was found to be empty. She was very angry that, in your haste to obey the Imperial order, you should have taken away with you your wife, from whom, it appears, certain explanations were desired. I had again to tell her that it would be insulting the Imperial Majesty Himself to pursue and stop on his way an Imperial Envoy.

The friend for whose life I am responsible had, I am told, some work to survey at the other end of the projected road with double ruts of steel. He has, of course, taken this opportunity of travelling with you, and I am sure that you will prevent him from committing any useless imprudence. It appears also that his work will keep him away for some two or three months.

Everything, in short, has arranged itself admirably. And your unexpected departure, though painful to our hearts, will, I trust, tend only to your future happiness and success in life.

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After a certain time, all rough things become smooth again. The boiling stream of anger having flowed away, the solid rocks of affection emerge.

I trust that the Star of Happiness will shine ceaselessly on your way, and that a favourable wind will carry you to your destination. I trust also that you will be promoted in rank, that you will attain to a great longevity, and that you will have many sons to perpetuate our family and the sacrifices to our ancestors.

Ming-ni, considerably relieved and deeply grateful to his father, hastened to explain to Mackensie and to the ladies how they had been shielded. Old Chen's artful hints were understood and appreciated. "Yes," said Ming-ni, "but my mother is not quite so easily managed. She may very well change her mind yet, and send an armed troop after us, without even telling my father about it. Let us get on as fast as we can."

"Whatever comes, we shall die together," said Orchid. It was characteristic of her not to be able to conceive of any other mode of escape from difficulties.

They had to resort to no such extremity. Whether the rapidity of their march had rendered an actual pursuit fruitless, or whether the First Wife had, for once in her life, obeyed her husband, they never knew. They had merely the pleasure of a very comfortable journey. The gangs of bandits for which the region was notorious had probably been dispersed by recent military operations. In any event, every one on the

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way reported that the whole district was now very quiet.

Monique and Orchid, constantly together and bound to each other by their vivid common memory of recent events, felt their instinctive sympathy grow quickly into a deep affection. Monique pointed out to her friend scene after scene of her own earlier trip. She recalled, too, her former enchantment, and was surprised because she was not now moved as deeply. Rather, the landscapes and the cities caused her a sort of inexplicable anguish.

“Perhaps it is unconscious regret at leaving them behind,” suggested Orchid.

“But,” said Monique, “this is not my own country. How could I regret leaving it, when I was not in the least sorry to leave France?”

At Krei-chow-foo Ming-ni and Monique had to part with their companions. They were going to take a house-boat down the river; Mackensie and Orchid had to stay in the city. Work on the railway line had begun. The threatened revolts had been so vigorously suppressed that muleteers and teamsters had thought it preferable to do nothing and lose their livelihood, rather than to rebel and lose their lives. Many of them had already found profitable employment in the new construction work. They sighed for their past freedom, and they did not particularly enjoy their monotonous labour—but what could they do about it?

The parting of the friends was painful. They had

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grown to trust each other implicitly in the common danger, and such a basis for affection is not easily forgotten.

"I shall study as hard as I can, in order to be able to write to you myself," said Monique.

"And I shall study your language in order to be able to talk to you in it when you come back!" answered Orchid.

The moment came for Ming-ni and his wife to start. The two women kissed each other with tears in their eyes. Orchid and Mackensie went ashore to the bank. The *lao-ta* signalled to the boatmen; the last rope was let go; the boat was pushed away from the vessels moored together in the harbour; the sail was hoisted, and they began to glide down with the current. Orchid and Mackensie, on the bank, were soon two little indistinct figures, and then they were nothing.

Monique travelled in Chinese clothes. Her fair hair she hid under ornaments of flowers and jewels. Whether because of her sadness, or because of the effect of the six months she had passed in Oriental surroundings, or, perhaps, because of the lessons taught her by the events just past, she never thought of leaving her cabin. She sat there reading, studying, or doing needlework. Ming-ni could hardly persuade her to go out even when the boatmen were having their meals and there was no one on deck.

Arrived at Hankow, they had to leave their com-



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fortable house-boat for one of the river steamers. In order to avoid the rough remarks and rude glances of the foreigners, they then resolved to change to European dress. This was, to Monique, a painful experience. She could hardly walk at all with the high heels of aforetime. Her hat would not stay on her head. Many other details of her toilet seemed to her the acme of discomfort and barbarity.

Ming-ni had to go to Peking to pay visits to some members of the *Wai-woo-poo*, or Foreign Office. The details of the journey did not remain in Monique's mind. She recalled only two or three days in a steamer, then the train, rolling through an immensity of grey flatlands, and suddenly, in the midst of these, a gigantic black crenelated wall with high, strange edifices set at regular intervals, and, in the far distance, a half-circle of blue and mauve hills. She remembered, too, a number of splendid palaces and temples, moats and walls, deep gates and strange archways, immensely broad avenues, groups of Tartar horsemen galloping, dressed in rough furs, and escorts of Chinese functionaries cantering along in gorgeous silken robes. All these details were jumbled and confused in her memory. One fact, though, stood out with clarity: the nondescript buildings of the foreign legations quite failed to strike her as artistically superior.

From Peking they started again by train, rolling day and night for a fortnight, at first through grey

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autumnal plains, then through the Great Wall, along the seaboard, and again through plains—those of Manchuria. Seated comfortably in the armchairs of the trans-Siberian, they saw stretches of the great forest, the *taiga*; Irkutsk the White; then the western moors, the *tundras*; the fir-clad Ural hills; and next the black earth of the Russian plains.

Moscow they found already spoiled by modern construction. Of the admirable ancient quarter, very little remained. The low wooden houses of old time, with their quaint pink, green, or blue façades, had been replaced by sombre grey, hideously ugly modern buildings in the Berlin style—that unsightly architectural mode which is spreading through the modern city and ruining its potential beauty as a cancer ruins the beauty of the human body.

## XIX

ARRIVING in Paris, they found Madame de Rosen and a group of her friends awaiting them. Ming-ni and Monique had been absent for less than ten months all told—not long enough to have been entirely forgotten. Mother and daughter kissed each other affectionately. The separation and the pleasure of reunion had obliterated their misunderstandings of the past. Madame de Rosen even felt a considerable pleasure in seeing her son-in-law again. She had always had a sort of notion that he was going to subject Monique to the most frightful indignities, and she was both happy and a little surprised to discover that she had been in error. She lost then a little of the awe with which Ming-ni had once inspired her; and this was well. “Those Chinese are not so mysterious, after all!” she concluded. “He is just like other people, though less vivacious.”

As for the friends, they all chattered at once without waiting for answers, as is the Parisian habit. “I received your letters, you know,” said one. “I showed them to everybody. You have seen the most astonishing things! But, of course, you must have exaggerated a little—didn’t you?” “Is it true that you had to eat with small sticks?” asked another.

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“How could you manage the rice with them? You must show me how it is done.” “And do you not miss your marvellous Garden of a Hundred Flowers? Was it really as beautiful as you described?” “And your father- and mother-in-law?” asked another, seizing a discreet moment when Ming-ni was standing apart with some friends of his from the Embassy. “Were they very nice to you? Did they speak good French? What! No French at all? But of course you speak Chinese, now that you have been in China. Oh! just say a few words, to show us what it is like.”

The little group left the station at last and entered various means of conveyance to go to Madame de Rosen's house, to which Monique's most intimate friends had been asked, and in which the travellers intended to stay for a few days. Monique, in a carriage with her mother, experienced a happy calm which she had not known for a long time past. It was a tremendous relief to know that she was free and immune from any attempt on her life; it helped to give her the sense of a return to normality. The sight of a policeman suggested dim concepts of social order, justice, civilized courts of law. The dinginess of streets and houses awoke only her more sympathetic memories. She actually almost admired the mixed style of the Grand Palais and the Petit-Palais on the Champs Élysées, though she smiled at their Greek columns under this smoky modern sky and at their gigantic gates, copied from Mosques of the Land of the

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Sun and ridiculously out of place in the grey, cold atmosphere of the North. The groups of horses jumping into space from the corners of the Palace roof and the winged steeds on the columns of the bridge pleased her with their meaningless absurdity. Did any one ever see horses galloping on a roof? The movement and bustle in the streets, the hooting of motor-horns, the women with their bizarre costumes in the newest mode, all claimed her absorption. She asked: "Is there something going on today, to bring such crowds into the streets?"

The chattering and incessant questioning of her friends in Madame de Rosen's drawing-room made her almost dizzy, though; and she was startled by the smallness and stuffiness of the rooms, which had figured in her memory as rather notably large.

Madame de Rosen and the guests left the two travellers alone at last. "After such a long trip, you must be simply tired out," they said. As a fact, Ming-ni and Monique had never been less tired in their lives.

The next day Ming-ni went back to the Embassy and resumed his work. The Ambassador was delighted to see him. He waved aside the thanks that Ming-ni tried to formulate for his patronage. "Not at all, not at all," said the old man. "I had to reward both your inherent merits and your industry. But tell me, now, did you get there in time for those funeral ceremonies?"

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Happily, Ming-ni had not forgotten his original pretext for leaving France. "Alas, no, O Great Man," he said. "I was too late. But the proper sacrifices have been rendered by me before the sacred tablets, and I hope that the shades of our ancestors are placated."

"And your uncle's family?" the Duke persisted. "Did he leave a great number of wives and daughters? There was no male descendant, of course, since you had to go yourself to perform the ceremonies."

"No. He left no one behind—neither wives nor daughters," said Ming-ni, thus ruthlessly restoring to non-existence a whole branch of his family, invented once to serve a moment's need.

"Heart-rending!" said the Duke, very decorously, but with a suspicion of archness. "He was very young, I take it?"

"Yes, extremely young." The subject dismissed, Ming-ni's life settled promptly into its ordinary groove.

Monique found herself suddenly surrounded and sought out by hosts of the curious. Her friends were glad to see her again, and of course they were fascinated by her numerous anecdotes of Chinese life and customs. Her gaiety, her beauty, her native charm, and a new quality of winsomeness which she had acquired were of enormous social value in her circle. She became more and more appreciated; she even achieved a degree of celebrity. She had become

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“the beautiful and charming Viscountess of Lin.” No reception of travelled illuminati was complete without her. It was suggested to her more than once that she ought to publish a book on her experiences—though she had been prudent enough to keep strictly to herself the most momentous of her adventures. Her new success gave her an increased pleasure in social functions. She had not lost her sense of others’ futility, but as her own superiority was tacitly recognized, she made allowances for other people’s shortcomings, and derived a kind of inexplicable satisfaction from their ingratiating flattery of herself.

Her mother now attended her constantly. She was proud of her daughter’s success, and as this was due in part to the name and position of her son-in-law, she was all smiles and solicitude to him. Dinners, teas, receptions, and long calls on dressmakers filled once more, with a gay and unfailing regularity, the nights and days of the two ladies.

A year after Ming-ni’s return, the Duke of Krong went back to China. He had succeeded in getting Ming-ni appointed in his place. The young couple now had to themselves the splendid hôtel in the Rue de Babylon. For Monique, this was the topmost rung of the ladder of social success.

She had well-nigh forgotten Orchid. The memories of her sojourn in China had become reduced to the due Parisian scale of a collection of pat phrases

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such as would revive the interest of a dull encounter or lend renewed zest to a moribund conversation. "The Yang-tse rapids . . . the shimmering water . . . the chains of coolies pulling at the junks . . . the mountains, the narrow winding paths made of large stone slabs . . . the strings of laden mules. . . ." Or, sometimes, it would be: "Our house and gardens over there, the Palace of a Hundred Flowers . . . my friend Orchid—" And then some one would ask: "Orchid! what a charming name. Do all Chinese women have the names of flowers?"

"You ought to go to Peking for the autumn, instead of to the country," she would say to her friends. "It is so near now, with the trans-Siberian—only fourteen days—"

"And did you wear Chinese dress?" some one would interrupt.

"Of course. . . ." And if her friends were in the Embassy, they would look at the robes and jewels, try on the pearl head-dresses.

Two years elapsed in this fashion. Monique's success, however, diminished by hardly perceptible stages. She no longer took the same delight in her surroundings, nor was her stock of tales and glimpses of China by any means inexhaustible. Her Chinese costumes remained untouched in the wardrobe for long and longer intervals, and her jewels, ceasing to be a novelty, ceased to excite admiration. Little by little her invitations fell off. This was exactly in ac-



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cordance with her own wishes, as they were now coming to be. Her circle gradually restricted itself to a few intimate friends and the necessary official acquaintances of her husband. Social functions in general had become simply duties once more, and wearisome duties at that.

**I**T was at this phase of her life that her husband was called to Peking in order to study there the preliminaries of a projected treaty with France. Ming-ni, taught by their earlier sojourn in China and uncertain as to the conditions of his life in Peking, decided to leave Monique behind. The same considerations prevented her from insisting that he take her. He started alone, then, promising that, if his absence were prolonged, he would make arrangements for her to join him.

His departure left her more lonely than ever. The round of receptions and dinner-parties was broken. She found herself without an occupation.

During this period she began to see more and more of her mother. Their intimacy became greater than it had ever been. They read the same books, showed each other their letters. They lived in a state of friendship which can exist between mother and daughter only when there is complete mutual understanding.

Owing to Monique's position, they found themselves practically under obligation to read everything that was published on the Far East. Many authors dedicated their works to the widely-known Viscount-

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ess of Lin. But they were not greatly interested in mere records of travel. Studies of Oriental customs, philosophies, and sentiments were more frequently the subject of their absorption. Madame de Rosen remained decidedly French in her judgments. Parisian life was her criterion for everything. Nothing which was at variance with it was to be countenanced for a moment. Monique, taught by experience, had to concede that some things did exist outside Paris and Parisian preconceptions. Perhaps, too, she sometimes had the impulse to defend alien usages in order to stimulate conversation with a spice of disagreement. In such wise they beguiled the time, in default of better occupations.

Ming-ni's first letters to his wife recited the details of his work in Peking, the compliments of high dignitaries, his chances of future promotion, and above all his unalterable devotion to her, his regret at the separation, his hope of a speedy return. But in the sixth month after his departure, Monique received a letter which troubled her and stirred the most painful memories.—

My sadness at not seeing you [he wrote] daily increases. I am lonesome without you, and I dream constantly of the happiness of reunion.

Just lately, my health has not been so good as it used to be. I find myself wearied of everything and distrustful of the future. It comes over me that the years are passing, and that we are still childless. In spite of myself, I am constantly wondering whether our ancestors and ourselves are

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destined to remain without posterity to perpetuate our line, and without the sacrifices whereby sons and grandsons would appease the yearning of our wandering shades.

I wonder if it is my fate to be the last of my name? Or, on the other hand, shall we have the happiness of being surrounded by the generations of our descendants, who would bring warmth and joy to our hearts at a time when they will naturally be growing sluggish with age and disillusionment?

It is the sole form of immortality to which men can pretend, but it is real. Mysterious laws of nature force this aspiration upon us sooner or later. Why, consider: even in the immoral and heedless West, the childless woman is a creature of despair.

I speak frankly to you in the full knowledge that we are by no means without hope. Your vigorous and radiant youth still colours everything for you in the brightest hues. But, alas, a few years, even, sometimes, a few days, suffice to change such confidence into despair, and such happy carelessness into the bitterest dejection.

I wish you would give me, with equal frankness, your own reactions on this subject—which, to any Chinese, is, as you know, of the first importance.

“He is a man full of delicacy, and he has the strongest family instincts,” declared Madame de Rosen when she saw this letter. “I would never have believed that those queer creatures could have such ideas and express them in such a fashion. It really is too bad that you have had no children—one or two, perhaps; not more. It enlivens a home. On the other hand, children occupy such a place in the house that one ends by living only for them and through them, which in the long run brings more care

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than pleasure.—Anyhow, my poor girl, in this, as in everything else, we have to get along with what we have, since we can never get just what we want.”

“That is all very well, mama,” answered Monique plaintively, “and I do wish I had children. But I have none, and I suppose I shall never have any.”

“Tut, tut!” said her mother. “You never can tell what may happen. Plenty of people have children after having been married for years.”

“Yes—but suppose I should have none, after all? My husband would be terribly disappointed, and he would hold me responsible.”

“But one never knows who is really to blame for such things,” interposed her mother hastily.

Monique, attempting to answer the letter, tore up beginning after beginning before she could satisfactorily convey her regret and the sense of her complete helplessness. Presently, another letter from Ming-ni brought her further distress and perplexity.—

My father [he wrote] has come to Peking on purpose to see me. He has several times expressed his disappointment at not being able to see you, too.

He tells me that my mother has never been able to recover from the spasm of anger that our wedding and our hasty leave-taking caused. Her temper, sufficiently irascible before, bursts out in the most terrible rages at the slightest contradiction. And she suffers physically from this lack of self-control. Her health is by no means what it was.

Thanks to these conditions, my father has had three rather dreadful years. It was with great alacrity that he snatched

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at the excuse of coming here to see me — though of course he went through the motions of pretending to regard it as a distasteful duty. His life in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers has become, in his own phrase, sea-water and vinegar.

He brings me news from our friends Mackensie and Orchid. They are living in our old pavilion in the garden. Having already three children, who play and scream through all the rooms in the Palace, they are greatly in favour with my mother. Mackensie has been appointed to a fairly high office as representative of the Board of Transportation, a fact which is very gratifying to our old friend Wang — who, by the way, has been received as a member of the "Forest of Brushes."

My father has been most anxious and worried to find me ailing, though my condition is really nothing to worry about. But he has spoken to me repeatedly and at length on the subject of our still non-existent posterity, and he presses me to take some action about it. . . .

Monique showed this document to her mother, commenting: "I am dreadfully upset by that visit from my father-in-law. I know he is going to win Ming-ni over to all his own old-fashioned Chinese prejudices."

"But your husband has lived in Europe long enough to know that these stories of ancestral worship are pure nonsense. It is a pity that his title and his fortune should go to his brothers instead of to your children. That is the main thing."

"Oh, it is easy enough for you to talk, but that never changed any one's instincts and inborn ideas.

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Of course, we are still young, and entitled to hope. And yet—we have been married five years. And if we did have a child, it might just as likely be a girl, which would not help at all in connection with their sacrifices, because women are supposed to lack the necessary virtues.”

“Then what can you do?” asked Madame de Rosen.

“I don’t know,” answered Monique despondently. “What *does* one do in such a situation? See a doctor? You know what doctors are. They talk learnedly and order extraordinary prescriptions—and nothing whatever comes of it.” After a pause she went on: “Yes, my husband seems to take it very seriously indeed. My father-in-law is sure to keep hounding him about it. And it has already been the cause of one domestic melodrama—”

“What melodrama is this?” asked Madame de Rosen quickly. Monique had never as yet told her anything of the details of their flight from China.

“Why,” answered Monique, slightly embarrassed and wishing she had said nothing, “my mother-in-law wanted to get rid of me because I was childless.”

“Get rid of you! You never said anything about it to me.—And how, pray, did she propose to get rid of you?”

“Oh, divorce, I suppose. Or worse.” Monique tried to put it trivializingly.

“She must be a dangerous lunatic, that old hag!” said the baroness.

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“She had to watch over the interests of her family,” replied Monique calmly. “Over there, a woman must have children, and a man is entitled to repudiate any wife who does not fulfill that condition. She was simply upholding the customs of her own country.”

“A fine country, I must say! You are well out of it.”

The next week's post brought new perturbation. Ming-ni, after describing his daily occupations, went on:

My father has been talking to me again about our future. He has just had a message from my mother. According to the messenger, she is dangerously ill, and in her letter she mentions the state of her health without any illusion. She writes that she could die happy if she could only see me with a son. She constantly insists that, considering the apparent hopelessness of our outlook, I ought to repudiate you and marry again, or else take a second wife.

Of course, I have explained to my father that it is impossible for us to consider the expedient of divorce. You know me well enough to rest assured that I love you and that my feelings will never change. You are my First Wife, in China as well as in Europe; the foundation-stone of my family, as well as the friend of my life. You and I are one.

You must, I am sure, share my own views about the future of our blood, the perpetuation of our family. I beg you, therefore, to think over the question most earnestly, and to give me your frank advice about what we shall do next, so that this question of our offspring may be definitely settled. You know me; also, you know our customs, the dif-



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ferent means of achieving this end. I leave absolutely to you the choice of what is to be done, insisting only that something must be done, and as soon as possible.

Monique was with her mother when this letter was handed to her. Without a word, she passed it over to the elder woman. Herself, she sat for a long time staring abstractedly into vacancy. Then she covered her face with her hands and began to weep silently. Her mother ran through the letter; then she tossed it angrily to the floor and exclaimed: "What does he want? What on earth is there to do?"

"Oh, mama!" sobbed Monique, "you don't understand. It is the end of everything, for me."

"The end of everything? He is not proposing to kill you, I imagine?"

"No, but—I know what he means."

"Well, you know more than I do, then," fumed her mother. "And what is it that this precious scoundrel wants, that should make you so wretched?"

"He wants a child, a son; and he is offering me a choice among the various means of getting one."

"The various means!" exclaimed her mother in amazement. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"The long and short of it is," said Monique, driven to nervous desperation, "that, since we have no children of our own, and children he must have, his only choice is to divorce me, take a second wife, or adopt one of his brothers' children. These are the only

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courses which his national customs leave open to him."

"Well, let him adopt the son of one of his brothers," said the baroness. "I don't see anything so awful in that."

"His brothers have had no sons as yet—only daughters."

"Oh! That alters the case. Then the choice is between a divorce and—?"

"—And a second wife."

"And you have to do the choosing yourself, and say which you prefer—poison or dagger?"

"He loves me, and I love him. He could have divorced me a long time ago if he had wished, for the wife's consent is not required. No, he wants to keep me, and he wants me, of my own accord, to suggest that he take a second wife."

Madame de Rosen's outraged loyalty to her daughter expressed itself in the form of bitter irony. "Well, well!" she said, "I don't know which to admire more, his delicacy in leaving it to you to suggest the only course which is possible, or his effrontery in expecting your own command to be treated in such a shameless fashion.—I would get rid of him, if I were you."

"But I love him, mama! Don't you understand?" cried the poor girl. "Oh, what way out can I find? What shall I do?"

Madame de Rosen walked agitatedly across the

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room. Then she stopped in front of her daughter. "A second wife! A second wife!" she stormed. "Truly, a nice euphemism for something perfectly unmentionable! They have second wives here in Europe, too, but they call such women what they really are."

"You know very well that it is not the same thing," answered Monique. "There is no deceit, no secrecy, no petty lying. Everything is done openly, and with the First Wife's full consent."

"If she is idiotic enough to allow such doings, she deserves all she gets."

"But you are forgetting about the children, mother."

"The children, the children! Here in France, which is a civilized country, when one has no children one goes without. You have no children. Is it such a calamity, after all? You are young enough, and you can afford to wait. Don't let your husband gull you with such yarns. He wants to gratify a little personal fancy of his own, and he is trying to arrange things to suit himself; that is all there is to it. If you let him have a second wife, he will take a third, a fourth—a hundredth, for all you know. You will soon have a whole harem in your house, and be forced out of it yourself." She paused, but only to gather her forces for still bitterer invective. "Just think of what people here will say when they mention you. They will ask: 'The Viscountess of Lin? Which

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one? Number one? Number two? Number fifty?" No, believe me, my dear, I know men. They always find a good explanation to cover their little transgressions. Even your dear father—well, it was impossible to be really sure of him until he was dead."

"But, mama, you forget that Ming-ni has a perfect legal *right* to do as he likes. He may take as many wives as he chooses, and I have nothing to say about it."

"Well," said her mother helplessly, "you know that, for my part, I have always been against this foreign marriage, anyway. If you had listened to me in the first place, you would be in no such dilemma now."

"If I had married a Westerner, I might be learning now that my husband had always been on the most intimate terms with my best friend, and that the whole town knew of it and was laughing at me."

"Well, it does happen sometimes, to be sure. But then you get a divorce."

"Shall I, as it is? I don't want a divorce."

A few days later she heard from Ming-ni again, in a letter even more urgent and explicit than the preceding.—

I have been thinking about our problem long and earnestly. I love you, and I cannot bear the thought of losing you. So far as I am concerned, the possibility of divorce cannot be entertained for a single minute. My brothers

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having no sons, I cannot adopt one of their children. We have no relatives near enough to ask them to give us one of their sons. And I cannot reconcile myself to the thought of letting our ancestors be worshipped by someone who has not a drop of their blood in his veins. Personally, I should have a strong distaste for taking into my house a child who would be neither my own son nor a near relative. Moreover, I could buy such a child only from poor and uneducated people, and I should be in a constant agony, knowing that his lack of hereditary superiority might plunge our family to ruin and destruction. Even children of good stock are not always perfect, it is true, and the son of a very ordinary man may become a genius. But as a rule the laws of heredity are not transgressed—especially in our country, where for several thousand years the closest attention has been paid to such matters, and where breeding is not so crazily helter-skelter as in Europe.

The one remaining solution is for you to allow me to take a second wife.

I remember very well that I promised you never to do this without your express consent. This promise I now reaffirm. I will never do it if you do not freely grant me that consent.

If you were to do so, it is to be clearly understood that, as is the custom, the child of this second wife would be your own child, not hers. If you wished it, we could send her away as soon as she had given you a son. She would be your servant and nothing more until she went away, and our love and happiness would in no way be touched or interfered with.

Your last letter does not answer this grave question. My father presses me for a decision every day. My mother is waiting anxiously. The worry is likely to hasten her death, whereas the happiness of having a grandchild might prolong her life. . . .

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Monique, now more tortured than ever, read this passage to her mother, who took the letter, looked it through, and then said: "What utter nonsense! A servant who is not a mistress, a child who would be yours without being born of you, a wife who is to be sent away as soon as she has given birth to a son—what does all this mean, now, in plain French?"

"It is simple enough, mama. The poor girl will be bought for a certain term, and as soon as we do not need her any more we may sell her again and keep the child."

"But—why, that is slavery!"

"No, it isn't: over there, you can hire a wife for a month or a year, just as you can a servant here."

"And the child?"

"The State takes your sons and sends them into the army; it even kills them, without giving you a sou for it. Is that slavery? Over there the mother is at least *paid* for the child that is taken away from her. It is a free bargain."

"Anyway," reiterated her mother, "trust my advice and never give your consent to any such transaction. You are happy as you are: make an effort to keep your happiness."

Poor Monique passed the rest of the day and all of that night in anguish. On the next day she answered her husband's letter in these terms:

Your last word has placed me in the most terrible position. You married me in my country, according to its customs and

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laws. I never imagined then that a day could come when you would ask me of my own accord to renounce the most fundamental of our ideas and conventions and sentiments. It would never have occurred to me to urge the fact that I have had no children by you as an excuse for asking your consent to my taking a second husband—or rather, in your own phrase, to my engaging a “little servant” to serve my purpose and be sent away afterward. The bare idea of such conduct, or misconduct, makes me blush with shame. How is it that your feelings can be so utterly different from mine?

I have borne no children, it is true. But is it so certain that the fault is in me? I say “fault” because I, too, begin to suffer the loneliness and sadness of my childless house. I remember now what Orchid used to tell me about the home without husband and child. . . . Can it be that you are going to desert me after the five years of our marriage? Have you forgotten all our happiness together? Are you going to thwart and destroy with your own hand all our hopes for the future? We are still young. Oh, let us wait before taking such a perilous step!

## XXI

**F**OR several weeks there was no letter from Ming-ni. "It merely happens that way," said Madame de Rosen soothingly. "He has been crowded with overwork, or they have sent him on some special mission."

"He is seriously ill, or—he may be dead," said Monique.

Madame de Rosen shrugged her shoulders. "The Chinese Foreign Office would have informed our Chargé d'Affaires if that were so," she said.

"Then why does he not write? He has repudiated me. According to Chinese laws, he can send me away without even telling me that he has decided to do it."

"My dear girl, you are married according to French laws, and he cannot put you away in any such cavalier fashion. We have judges."

"If it came to a test, I should be married in France, but not in China, because, by my marriage, I have ceased to be French and become Chinese."

"You are no more Chinese than I am. Because a pack of fools have voted a law on a point about which they knew nothing, the plain facts of nature are not going to be made over. Your father's family was



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French. So was mine. You have been brought up in France. You are French, and no stupid law of nationality can alter that or make you anything different."

"But, mother, the law is the law, and a fact is a fact!"

"A law isn't a law at all, when it is against truth and our personal liberty and common decency. Then we have to refuse to obey it, or else we are despicable cowards and slaves of the State. A child, I tell you, has the nationality of his mother, who gives him the best of her blood and first impresses on his unformed mind the background of her own education, breeding, and language. The mother is certainly the mother, and no mistake about it; whereas her husband—well, a man can never be materially certain that he is the father of a given child. The most he can have is a moral certainty. Why, the father is a mere passing butterfly, here today and there tomorrow.—Anyhow, you are French, and French you will remain."

"French or not, I have had no word from him. I dare not telegraph to Peking, for fear of making a scandal somehow. Yet I love him; I never have met and never shall meet any one so devoted, tender, and steadfast."

"His manners," conceded the baroness, "are certainly those of a true gentleman—not in the least like those of our own young men, who only learn how to bully their inferiors and truckle to their su-

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periors." After a pause she added: "You might try writing to that Chinese friend of yours—Orchid."

"Yes, but when should I get an answer? Not for two months. I can't bear the suspense.—Let him have his second wife, rather than lose him altogether."

Days passed. More and more overwrought, and still not daring to do anything, she waited feverishly.

It was not until after two more weeks that she finally received a long letter from Ming-ni.

Pardon me, O First Wife [it said], for having left you so long without any word of me.

On the day when I posted my last letter we received, my father and I, a telegram announcing that my mother had just had a grave crisis, and that she must see us before her death. There was not a minute to lose. We went directly to the Board for our passports and our orders for horses at the Imperial Post stations on the road. In an hour we were on our way. On the whole journey we never stopped from dawn until late at night. It took us twelve days of such galloping to reach the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

My mother was still alive, but she seemed to be beyond hope of recovery. The doctors said that she was obsessed by an *idée fixe* which rendered all medicines futile. We found her on her bed, propped up by cushions. In spite of the dimness of the room and her own weakness, she knew us at once. Without even giving us time for any greeting, she pointed to me and said: "Does he consent?"

"Yes, he consents," said my father.

"Ah!" she said, relaxing. "I shall die happy, in the trust that now my shade is not to go without propitiatory offerings. You are a good son," she added, "and I am overjoyed to see you again."

I understood then—not before—that my father had been

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sent to Peking expressly to obtain from me an assent which depends on you alone, and which I accordingly ask you to ratify. Could I tell my dying mother that I was still waiting for your answer? Was it possible, in her dying condition, to destroy the profound and obvious satisfaction which my father's words had given her? Even in Europe, where there is little respect for anything except money, the last moments of the dying are sacred, and promises made to the dying are even kept sometimes. You can hardly blame me, I am sure, for not having lied to my mother. In spite of all my love for you, if I had it to do over again my first duty would be to act as I did.

But this was not the end of my ordeal. As soon as the first excitement of our sudden coming had subsided, my mother said to me: "Your conduct toward Monique proves that you are still as infatuated with her as ever. I have tried no more, then, to get you to repudiate her. I have even realized that a second wife would not be acceptable to you or to her, with her narrow and barbarous notions. And I have simply bought you a little girl, one whom you can either keep or sell, as pleases you. She is in the pink of health and capable of bearing you well-formed and lusty children. Her father was a scholar, and might have risen to a respectable rank had he not been killed, with all his family, during a bandit raid. This girl alone escaped, because she was at that time here in the Palace on a visit to a relative. She has consented for a certain sum to give over her body to you for whatever use you deem it fit. And she is waiting for you in your room."

Here again, O my dear wife, what was I to do? Could I delay until your answer should have come? Or lie? I could not lie to my dying mother—especially when I reflected that the girl would surely be submitted to a severe cross-examination.

I have now told you everything exactly as it happened.

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I can only declare again to you, my darling, that I love you faithfully, whole-heartedly. You are my First Wife, and nothing in my feeling for you can be altered by the mere presence of this little slave in the household. I love you, you alone—and so it shall be always.

Monique sat in a daze for a long time, the letter in her hand. She did not know what to think; still less did she know what to do. She felt that her husband really did love her: yet here was his open and ingenuous avowal of an act which, in Europe, could only have been taken as a cynical proof of his indifference. Because she loved him, she felt a bitter pang of jealousy at the very thought of his action. None the less, his frank and perfectly simple recital, coupled with the fact that he could so easily have suppressed the whole thing, spoke powerfully in his favour and gave the situation a quite different aspect.

But what was she to do? It was no longer a question whether she would or would not accept the second wife. Events had snatched this decision out of her hands. Another and still more difficult problem faced her: could she now accept the situation, condone and actually approve of it? Or must she immediately institute divorce proceedings? But since she was no longer French, the courts could not apply French law to her case. They would have to take the Chinese marriage laws into account; and under these, though she would undoubtedly succeed in rais-

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ing a pretty enough scandal, she might very likely lose her suit. What would her life be then—still married to a husband who would never forgive her?

She was still plunged deep in reflection when her mother came in.

“I haven’t seen you this afternoon,” said Madame de Rosen. “What is the matter? Has something happened? No bad news, I hope.”

Monique silently handed over the letter. The elder lady perused it with evident enough anger, amazement, and distress. For once, she was seriously enough affected to say nothing but “What are you going to do?”

“What can I do?” replied Monique despondently.

“For my part,” said her mother, “I have never heard of such a case before. I have had a certain experience of life and society, but—this goes beyond anything I ever imagined.”

“There was nothing to compel him to tell me about all this.”

“It is true enough that any gossip from the remotest corner of China could hardly reach you here. His frankness is certainly a point in his favour—though it is no compliment to his cleverness, if you ask me.”

“Should you prefer him to lie and do the same thing in secret, as they do here?”

“Well,” answered her mother with a hint of embarrassment, “you could at least have shut your eyes

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to it, as so many women do, and everything would have remained the same outwardly.”

“Outwardly! But he loves me! and I love him. And somehow—though I have written him to the contrary—I do understand him, and I can see his case as I would my own if I had suddenly hired a manservant in order to have a child by him.”

“Oh! loathsome!” exclaimed the baroness. “How can you? It is revolting and senseless to make such a comparison.”

“Senseless!” echoed Monique. “If every one acted according to sense, logic, justice, nothing would exist at all. What is quite natural for men seems absurd for women, and *vice versa*. If men displayed in their dress the same stupidity and caprice that we do, we should be heartily ashamed of them—and yet they are not ashamed of us. If we had anything to do with politics, do you suppose that we should agree to appoint for four years, without imposing any responsibility or any possible check, a set of men to be complete masters of our lives and destinies? Did you ever see a woman arrange to turn over her house to her cook for four years, without any possibility of controlling her and with a formal understanding that she was to go unpunished even if she burned down the whole establishment, or sold it, or destroyed and changed everything in it? No, it is not and never has been sense which rules the world: it is custom and convention.”

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"Well, custom and convention do not sanction this thing that your husband has done."

"Here they don't. But in the East they do. My husband wants children."

"Children!" fumed the baroness again. "Fecundity is no longer fashionable. It went out some time ago."

"Without children, what would become of the race?"

"There will always be enough drunkards and fools to keep it going. If the modern countries had fewer children, the world would be a much more agreeable place to live in. There would be no soldiers, for one thing, and hence no wars. There would be no workmen, and so we should get rid of these factories which poison the air everywhere. We should live a normal life, as they did in the eighteenth century, when Europe contained fifty millions of inhabitants instead of five hundred millions."

"But, mother, you are just blinded and embittered by seeing me childless. We must conform to our obligations, and act throughout for the best. What am I to do?"

When her mother left her at the end of the afternoon, nothing had been decided. Monique's emotional stress carried her hither and thither, and she invariably found the most unanswerable logic in defense of her latest decision, whatever it might be. She went to bed at last, utterly exhausted and utterly

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desperate. Sleep drifted her away from herself, still thinking, suffering, and unable to see her path.

And there came to her a dream, in which she seemed to be once more in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. It was a warm, bright summer day. She was in the vast Reception Hall. Beside her sat Ming-ni, but she hardly recognized him, for his hair was white and his face wrinkled. And suddenly she noticed that her own hands were shrivelled. They were both seated in the huge gilded armchairs that had been used at her Chinese wedding. All at once it came to her that they were celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.

Round the long banquet table was a large gathering of old and young. She knew some of them—Orchid and Mackensie, her brothers-in-law and their several wives. But there were others whom she had never seen. On her right, notably, was a distinguished-looking man, evidently in the prime of his fortieth year. He had dark eyes, dark hair, and he strikingly resembled some one she had known—she could not think whom. She strained her memory. And lo! on a sudden she saw, in the face of the man, her own face. He was her son. Down the table were four young men, and with them one little girl with fair hair and blue eyes; and all these smiled at her.

And there was a mighty array of functionaries in uniform, of friends and neighbours as well. And



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her husband stood up and said in a proud voice: "On this, the fiftieth anniversary of our marriage, I want to ask all our friends, the witnesses of our already long lives, to drink a cup of wine with me in honour of my First Wife. She has given the whole city an example of all the virtues which lead to happiness for the family, success and honour for the children, goodness and well-being for the nation." The Governor of the City rose next, amid the plaudits of the company, and said: "It is my great pleasure to inform you all that, with the assent of His Imperial Majesty (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years!), the Board of Rites has decided, on the strength of my report, to confer today on the Eminently Virtuous First Wife a token of undying honour." And, at his signal, the servants brought in with devout care a long slab of marble, with her name and the date in tiny letters down in one corner.

Above, deeply graven in gold, were the four ideograms: "IDEAL VIRTUE; PERFECT MOTHERHOOD."

## XXII

**W**HEN Monique awoke, the sun was high. The servants brought her, together with her breakfast, a letter from Orchid. They had never quite abandoned their correspondence, these two, though it had suffered some long interruptions.

I have been having [said the letter] some long and earnest talks about you with my husband—about your past life and your future. We have heard, of course, of the situation in which you and your husband find yourselves. And because we love you and know your heart, we understand something of what you must be thinking and feeling. We have read over your last letter; and I think it my duty to answer you by speaking unreservedly on the subject which means so much to you. You and I have shared experiences which, perhaps, give me the right to interfere, even in a matter so delicate as this. I should not like to imitate those friends who, when they are asked for advice, avail themselves of the opportunity to glut a secret pleasure in pointing out all the mistakes one may have committed and all the faults of disposition with which one is afflicted. But we have to locate the hidden cause of our disease before we can hope to cure it. Now, it seems to me that all your uncertainties and sufferings, as well as your husband's present difficulties, are the result of your failure to have resolutely abandoned, once for all, your Western ideas.

You see, you have voluntarily undertaken to found a family. But you do not give yourself unreservedly to the task,

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and you allow your prejudices to stand between you and your goal.

I understand something of the effect of such an attitude, if I may judge by the mutual misunderstanding which has sometimes stood between my husband and myself. It would appear that the yellow and the white races are not on the same plane of human nature and desire. The cause of this disparity is, I suppose, that for more than two thousand years past we have been incessantly disciplined, modelled and remodelled, by the doctrine of Krong-foo-tse. His "Great Study," *Ta-sio*, the fountain-head of all wisdom, teaches us that our worst enemies are our passions and instinctive impulses. The sole means to attain a proper balance and, consequently, happiness, is self-mastery. We must act, not according to our natural desires, but only in order to further the enterprises which we have deliberately undertaken. "If one wishes to maintain harmony in the State, one must first learn to maintain harmony in the family. And to maintain harmony in the family, one must know how to maintain harmony in oneself." And he adds: "What I mean by maintaining harmony is acting always according to Reason, Justice, and Social Conscience, and never listening to one's passions and appetites."

If I understand my husband correctly, this elemental basis of all true education is completely ignored by Westerners. They teach children every conceivable subject of knowledge, but they never teach them how to behave toward their own passions and the wild impulses to which we are all subject, and which may ruin our own lives and those of everybody round us. Such teachers are like a madman who should place a loaded pistol in the hand of a child without telling him that one bullet from it is sufficient to kill a man.

But, to return to yourself: I know from your father- and mother-in-law how deeply you and your husband love each other. You freely chose to marry him, and you have the

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essential basis of a happy and lasting union. Do not let your unreasoned impulses darken the clarity of your intelligence. Hold fast to the essential, the durable thing; renounce stoically all that is transient and of secondary importance. Help your husband discharge his filial duties. He has not asked you to do anything for selfish reasons. Besides, it is not a dishonorable or degrading course which is proposed. There is not even a question of accepting an insult without reparation. You know very well that his love for you will in no wise be endangered by your consent; that, on the contrary, it will be doubled by his gratitude and his respect for your reasonableness and forbearance. . . .

Monique's mood, if not her ideas, had been changed, softened, exalted, by her dream of the night. Her mood, enhanced by this timely letter, now drew her ideas into harmony with itself. She felt at last, on a sudden, that for the first time a generous and lofty vision of life's meaning had begun to flood her being. Her heart, lately so troubled, seemed, somehow, as clear and calm as a lake under the morning sun just after a tempest of the night has passed over it. Without the slightest trepidation, without feeling it necessary to take another moment for self-torturing reflection, she wrote a cablegram to Ming-ni, called a servant, and ordered him to take it at once to the telegraph office. What it said was:

You have acted as a good son and a faithful husband. Bring back with you the mother of our child.

When her mother came that afternoon, she simply confessed what she had done, but without mention of

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her dream or of Orchid's letter. Madame de Rosen raised her hands in horror. "My poor girl, you are absolutely mad!" she said as soon as she had recovered her speech. "You have condoned your husband's misconduct; and to do that is always immoral, as well as imprudent."

"I suppose you can't understand it from my point of view, mother," replied Monique calmly. "I have thought it out, and I am certain that what I have done is for the best."

"You will be sorry soon enough," said her mother drily, with a sage nod. "It is not for nothing that such conduct is so strongly condemned by society."

"I may fail, after all," answered Monique. "The outcome does not always crown with success even actions which have been carefully weighed and wisely planned. But what I have done was the right thing, and whatever the consequences turn out to be, I can bear them with a good conscience."

"Then I have nothing more to say. You know that in any case you will always find me ready to help you out of your difficulties."

Four weeks later Monique received from her husband a letter which began with a salutation unlike any he had ever addressed to her before.

To the First Wife, to the Mother of the Family, to the Mistress of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

I have received your "lightning letter," and I have shown it to my mother. She simply said: "At last I can die. My

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duty is fulfilled. I have given my husband many sons and daughters, but none would have been able to replace me. Now the wife chosen by my first son has shown herself such as a true mother of a family must be. I know her, and the difficulty of obtaining her consent assures me that she has the strength of character needed for her rôle; it shows, too, that she has mastered herself in what was for her the hardest of all tests. Thus she will know how to teach the true principles to any children she may have, whether herself or by her slaves. And if my shade has any influence in the Land under the Nine Springs, I shall know no respite until, through my own mediation and that of our ancestors, I have won from the Master of the Book of Destinies the gift of a son for her."

And then, after making sure that we were all present, she said: "Let her follow me as Mistress of the Palace, and let each of you obey her as always hitherto you have obeyed me."

These words have filled me with inexpressible joy and pride. But I can assure you that, whatever happens hereafter, I shall never forget that hour, or that you, by your decision, have claimed my undying reverence and devotion. Henceforward you are more than my wife: you are the mother of our descendants.

But I must hurry on.—My father, my brothers, and all the members of our household answered my mother: "You shall be obeyed. She shall be the First Wife, and we will be to her what we have always been to you."

It almost seemed as if my mother had been waiting for nothing more in life except your word. She closed her eyes; and only a little later she had started on the Mysterious Road. We have now finished the "Great Toilet" and the "Small." The coffin is closed. Priests of the various creeds have come to exorcise the evil spirits.—In our ignorance of the laws which govern life, it can do no harm to use

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all possible means of bringing luck. Chance rules our lives; even Reason and Justice are sometimes insufficient to guarantee our success. If the traditional observances do us no good, at least they can harm nobody.

The solemn funeral will be celebrated later on—perhaps in two or three years, when an especially propitious day comes. You will have to be present for that, you know. Pending that time, the coffin will be laid in the Temple of the Ancestors, and sacrifices will be offered regularly.

No duty now detaining me here, I shall follow this message within a few days. My official work in China is suspended by my mourning, as you know; it is only my residence abroad which could prevent me from resigning all my offices and honors during my three years' mourning, as the wise laws of our country prescribe for one who has lost father or mother.

Since you authorize it, I shall take with me the mother of your children.

This letter filled Monique with conflicting emotions. Dominant over them all was sheer pleasure in thinking that her consent had made her husband so happy. She was not a little proud, too, to have been named as Mistress of the Palace by her mother-in-law—the very woman who had once tried every possible means to compass her death. But at the same time Monique was troubled and haunted by a vague anxiety. It seemed to her that she was at the starting point of a prodigious journey. She was leaving behind all that had hitherto constituted her life and plunging out into the unknown. What she had done amounted, in fact, to an unequivocal abandonment of the last outpost of racial prejudice, the one most inalienable con-

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cept of Western civilization—the creed and code of monogamy.

Madame de Rosen, of course, could by no effort curb her anger. She broke out incontinently into threats and recriminations. “How dare he bring his paramour here? I shall notify the police. They shall throw that creature out of the house, and you will get a divorce at once! At least, that is what any woman with a grain of common sense would do in your place.”

“If I had never loved my husband,” answered her daughter placidly, “perhaps I might make a pretext of this. But I married him with my eyes open; I voluntarily agreed to follow the usages of his nation. I should despise myself if I did not keep my part of the bargain.”

“You will make yourself the laughing-stock of Paris. I wonder what people are going to say when they hear of it?”

“As long as I have nothing to say, nobody has the right to utter a single word.”



### XXIII

**T**WO weeks later Monique had a telegram from her husband. He had landed at Marseilles, and would be in Paris that afternoon.

Monique went to the station with her mother, whom she besought not to say anything whatever about the recent matter of contention. "You can perfectly well ignore it," she reminded Madame de Rosen, "since it is so altogether private a matter."

"But what are you going to say to *her*?" asked her mother querulously. "I presume you aren't expecting to greet her as a sister?"

"Oh, mother, don't!" said Monique impatiently. In spite of herself, she felt some qualms now and then. "I shall try to be fair and kind to her throughout. For Heaven's sake, don't try to set me against her."

They were walking up and down the platform. The train was visible at last. In the confusion and bustle of arriving passengers, it was difficult for them to find Ming-ni—the more so because, with the characteristic patience of the East, he had not plunged into the tumultuous crowd at all. He was calmly standing at a window, waiting for the porters to come for his luggage. He was dressed in black European

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clothes, for he did not wish to attract public attention by the white gown and white head-band of Chinese mourning.

He greeted Monique with a tenderness which deeply moved her, and there was a new look of worship in his eyes that she had never seen there before.

“And—she? Where is she?” she finally asked.

“There, in the compartment. You will see in her, already, the visible promise of your motherhood.” Going to the door of the coach, he called sharply: “Nelumbo, come here and *kow-tow* to the First Wife.”

A very young girl appeared, clad in a long, tight, pale pink jacket and a mauve skirt of innumerable pleats. Her large eyes, lethargic and timid, were without any definable expression. Only the redness of her lips gave a vivacious touch to her white moon-face, framed in jet-black hair adorned with flowers. She alighted, cautiously setting a dainty diminutive foot on the dirty footboard. The foot was encased in a tiny embroidered shoe, the “golden lotus” of China. She would have knelt on the platform as she said, in a soft and musical voice: “I touch my forehead to the ground before the First Wife, the Mistress of the Palace, the mother of my child.” But Monique hastily stopped her, prompted partly by the fact that some few strangers had turned round to look at the odd group. “Be welcome in my house,” she said simply. “What is your age?”

“Twice eight,” answered the girl. She would not

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say the number literally, because she wanted to hoodwink the evil spirits, which are notoriously ignorant of the simplest elements of arithmetic.

"I trust you have had a fairly comfortable trip?"

"Everything has been very well, owing to the good influence of the First Wife."

Madame de Rosen could contain her impatience no longer. "You do not introduce her to me?" she said, when she had exchanged a few constrained words of greeting with her son-in-law. She stared at the girl with significant curiosity.

"One does not introduce a slave," answered Ming-ni inscrutably.

The baroness was about to make a tart rejoinder, but, seeing her daughter's supplicating look, she refrained.

They passed out of the station. In the motor-car they spoke but little. The girl gazed indifferently out of the window. Ming-ni was smiling at his wife. Madame de Rosen was busy wondering at her own anomalous position, asking herself why she submitted tamely to such an outrage. Monique looked now and then at the girl, admiring her lustrous eyes and graceful body; envying her, too, her prospective motherhood. Unconsciously, she was scrutinizing her husband's attitude to the other; watching for a look or a gesture which would indicate the true fact of their relationship, just as though she had not already had the proof of it.

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At the Embassy, when the servants had taken their luggage upstairs, she asked Ming-ni: "Where are we going to put her?"

"No arrangement has been made, then?" he asked. "Any room will do."

"But don't you remember? With the present staff, every available room is occupied by the new secretaries. We really have nothing except our own suite."

"So we haven't," said Ming-ni. "These houses are so wretchedly small! But never mind: anything at all will do. There used to be a *krang* on the landing-stage just outside our room."

"Yes, it is still there. But surely we couldn't put this girl there?"

"It will be quite all right," he insisted. "As long as she has a roof and a bed, she will be happy."

On the second floor of the hôtel, on the landing off which opened the private apartments of the Ambassador, there was a Chinese sofa with a mattress and hard pillows covered with red silk. It was to this that they referred. The servants brought a roll of blankets and Nelumbo's small trunk. They unfolded and set up a large high screen, which completely shut off the end of the landing and formed a sort of small room. The girl sat on the edge of her new bed, surveying their exertions with consummate indifference. When they were through, she unrolled her blankets and lay placidly down.

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“Are you comfortable?” asked Monique. “Is there anything you would like?”

“Don’t ask her that,” said Ming-ni. “She shall have what she is given, and she must not be encouraged to ask for things. She had her dinner just before we arrived at the station. My servant will give her everything she needs. Let us go and talk over our own affairs.”

It was literally true that Nelumbo, having eaten, had nothing whatever to do. She could not read; and she had an inborn hatred of needlework or, for that matter, work of any sort. What could she do to busy herself? She looked drowsily round, closed her eyes, and went calmly to sleep.

When, presently, Madame de Rosen left them, her curiosity was struggling with her maternal solicitude. The perfect simplicity of the whole transaction had astonished her. She could trace no perceptible correspondence between the details of this affair and those of the innumerable adulteries which she had known of in the course of a fairly long and varied social experience. There were, for example, no passionate outbursts, no asseverations of an undying and overmastering love before which all duties, all promises, were as chaff in the wind. Rather, the whole affair entered a claim to be thought of as the most natural thing in the world. It even had a certain flavour of patriarchal dignity and grandeur, which dimly recalled certain portions of the Old Testament.

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She was aghast that this should be so. She knew that the whole episode was in flat contravention of the rules of society, and by consequence utterly wrong. And yet there was in it this element of undeniable genuineness. Being unused to dialectical analysis, she suffered all the force of the contradiction without being in the least degree able to understand its significance. Trained to accept the majority verdict on everything, she now found herself in presence of a situation on which she had never heard a single opinion uttered. She was obliged, for once in her life, to think for herself—and she was incapable of any such assertion of character.

As for Monique, she had no time to think about the problem at all. As soon as she and her husband were alone, Ming-ni knelt down before her and, despite her protests, insisted on saluting her as the Mistress of the Palace. "You have done the right thing at exactly the right moment," he said, "and at enormous cost to your own feelings. I promise you that you shall never regret it. I have here for you the key to our family treasures, of which from this moment you are the custodian."

"But I had much rather you kept it," she answered.

"It is your duty. You know that Chinese functionaries cannot be appointed to any responsible employment unless they are married, so that their wives may be entrusted with the public funds at times when

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the officials themselves are away on duty.—Also, I have brought you some gifts from my mother, my father, and each member of the family.” Out of the trunks which had come he drew forth jewels upon jewels, dresses and robes of every colour and description; and each article was of exquisite loveliness and rarity.

They talked long of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers, of old Chen, of Wang and his gardens, of the thousand interests and problems which Monique would now have to estimate and decide on her own responsibility. On the morrow, the secretaries, who had learned of her new dignity, greeted her with the title proper to her rank, “Glorious and Brilliant Wife”; and they embarrassed her by submitting to her inspection, for the first time, all the Embassy accounts.

Engrossed with her duties, she worked on for hours. Then, suddenly, she remembered Nelumbo. Reproaching herself for her forgetfulness, she went upstairs to the landing. About to knock on the screen, she remembered just in time that the girl was a mere slave. She pulled aside a section of the screen and entered. The girl was reclining and dreamily eating *li-tse-trang*, or sugared lotus seeds. On seeing the First Wife, she rose and would have knelt, but Monique stopped her, bade her lie down again, and herself sat on the edge of the *krang*. “Did you sleep well?” she asked.

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"Very well, thanks to the First Wife," was the answer.

"Did they bring you your breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, the *chrai-kwan* brought me a tray."

"You had enough? It was satisfactory?"

"Oh, yes, thanks to the First Wife."

"Because, you know, in your condition you must be very careful."

The talk consisted of a series of such questions and answers. Monique found herself suddenly at a loss for anything more to say. After a few moments she withdrew.

That afternoon Madame de Rosen came and asked to see the girl. Monique did not much like the request, but, having no reason to refuse, she took her mother up. Nelumbo was fast asleep.

"Anyhow," said Madame de Rosen, "she does not look particularly intelligent. As for her face—well, she looks healthy enough, but I should call her ugly."

"Not from the Chinese point of view," answered Monique. "And, though she seems rather slow-witted, her parents were very intellectual people. Perhaps it is nothing more than laziness."

Monique tried again, later, to talk with the girl, but she never succeeded in extracting any answers except perpetual and obsequious agreement. Ming-ni noticed what she was doing and said: "She is only a slave. Don't talk with her. She is here



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to give us children, to obey your commands, and—that is all.”

Nelumbo did, in fact, seem to be more surprised than pleased at these attentions from Monique. She had a dim fear that the First Wife's efforts to distract her might really be designed to seduce her into doing some sort of work, and she thought to herself: “I was bought to give them a child. I am doing my duty. They have nothing to complain of. They can't expect me to do anything else.”

And, to the last, she never did anything else. Whenever any one opened the screen, there she always was on the *krang*, sometimes asleep, sometimes sitting cross-legged and slowly chewing her lotus seeds. Sometimes Monique gave her European confections. These disappeared even more quickly than the *li-tse-trang*. Sometimes the noise of Nelumbo's snoring filled the stair-well, to the intense delight of Madame de Rosen if she happened to be in the Embassy.

The process of Nelumbo's toilet always remained an unsolved mystery. She was dressed day and night, as is the winter custom in China; for the climate of Paris seemed to her extremely cold. Monique suggested a bath now and then, but Ming-ni said, wisely enough, that inasmuch as it would have been the first such experience of her life, it would be better to postpone it until after the birth of her child. Monique had to be content with providing fresh un-

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derlinen every day. Even so, Nelumbo did not change very often. Also, Monique saw to it that a toilet table and accessories were placed behind the screen. Some curt instructions, issued through the *chrai-kwan*, resulted in a visible improvement, as to cleanliness, in the girl's face and hands. But that was about all Monique accomplished.

So the days passed; and it seemed to Monique that she had assimilated the fact of polygamy. She even said to her husband: "If this one does not have a son, we will have Orchid choose another for us, so that we shall have a double chance to succeed. Two possibilities are better than one."

Was there, in this, a faint element of parading her courage because, subconsciously, she was afraid?

## XXIV

**E**VENTUALLY Monique became irritated by the complete and ostentatious idleness of Nelumbo. There is nothing so exasperating to physically active persons as the happiness felt by lazy persons who are doing absolutely nothing. To incomprehension of such a feeling—which, never having known it themselves, they cannot understand—is added the influence of a growing respect for work which prevails more and more in our decadent civilization. The life of the spirit is of too high a plane for the materialistic politicians and canny traders who now possess all the wealth and prestige of the Western world. Not that the life of the spirit was exactly Nelumbo's strong point; but the hazy day-dreams which floated in the girl's mind were enough to give her a basking contentment which nothing else could have given. She had a vague notion that Monique would have liked her to be sewing on baby clothes for the unborn child. But she knew that nobody was going to interfere with her, for she bore her immunity within herself. And she stuck to the letter of her contract and did nothing other than what she had been engaged to do.

Monique's uneasiness may have been due partly to

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subconscious dread. Her husband was incontestably as solicitous, devoted, and tender as he had ever been. But the bare thought of his physical relation to the girl persisted in recurring to her mind, and always with a peculiar unpleasantness of suggestion. As for Ming-ni, he appeared not to be aware of his wife's disquiet. He never paid the least attention to the slave, and he spoke only of the child that was to be.

Perhaps Madame de Rosen had something to do with this new deflection of her daughter's mood. She had not as yet fully grasped the simplicity of the situation, and she kept discussing it with her friends. What was far worse, she was foolish enough to keep harping on it to Monique. When she was not mentioning the subject directly, she was recounting innumerable episodes of infidelity and divorce.

"But I thought you were supposed to be a Catholic," was Monique's invariable ironic comment; to which her mother would answer: "You know very well that there are fourteen cases of nullification of marriage recognized by Rome. One always proves that one is in the class of one or another of them. Look at Madame X.—and Madame Z.—"

"But they were not in love with their husbands. That is why they stooped to divorce."

"Love!" snorted the elder lady. "Love and marriage very seldom go together. A good match is one between two families of the same standing, opinions,

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and social inhibitions. One does not marry a woman or a man: one marries a family."

"That is true," answered Monique. "When the two families do not agree, the newly married couple must align itself squarely with one or the other, under penalty of intolerable and constant bickering—I understand that."

There were other days when Madame de Rosen would expatiate on the merry views of life held by the courtiers of Louis XV and Louis XVI. "Love in marriage is purely an ideal of the lower classes. They care nothing about founding a family, and they have as many children as rabbits do. Not possessing the resources to procure enjoyable extra-conjugal loves, they hope to combine two mutually destructive things, and they make a muddle of both. Ah! they knew how to lead a jolly life in the eighteenth century."

"But we aren't in the eighteenth century," Monique would answer. "And there are other ways of combining love, children, and family continuity. Europe is not the entire world, you know, and our narrow Western views are not the only ones that human civilization has evolved."

"To be sure: your polygamy—"

"And why not? Polygamy exists in fact, right here in Europe. Why not give it the seal of the law's approval? Why not legalize it, since it is impossible to uproot it?"

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But as soon as her mother was gone, Monique would give herself over to her previous morbid reflections. She loved her husband; she was angry with herself for not taking joy in his happiness; and she despised herself for being like a host of common and unimaginative dullards whose feelings are compounded entirely on the basis of the pleasure they receive and never on that of the happiness which they have it in their power to give. But, once more, she was discovering that one's inner self is not always amenable to logic.

It was while she was silently waging this struggle with herself that she experienced her first actual shock. One night she awoke in the dark. Everything in the room was silent. She did not even hear her husband's light breathing. Still drowsy, she noticed its absence. She stretched out her arm to touch him. His place at her side was empty and almost cold. Thoroughly awake now, she listened strainingly, as one does in the dead of night. And suddenly she heard, from outside her door on the landing, the sound of voices, hushed laughter. Suddenly she remembered, and was flooded with dismay. There, behind the screen, was Nelumbo.

It was like being stabbed in the heart. She realized all at once and with an overwhelming bitterness the full implication of the consent which she had given. Here she was, deceived, yet not deceived; deserted, yet not deserted; loved and honoured by

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her husband, yet caught in a situation which was enough to drive the average Western wife to a fury of despair. Her heart was a babel of emotions. At one moment she sat up in bed, on the point of springing out and surprising them there. She felt herself capable of hurling the girl down the stair-well. At another moment, she remembered only her promise, and then she sank back again. She was already sufficiently Oriental in her reactions to know that, in spite of the crude physical facts, her husband had never ceased to love her. He had not lied to her: he was utterly frank, straightforward, ingenuous. Yet she could not save herself from being harassed and tortured by this jealousy.

Tears began to run down her cheeks. She buried her head in the pillow to stifle her sobs, and—waited. But her grief had been so devastating that she lost memory and consciousness. There seized her at last the deep sleep which follows emotional exhaustion. In the morning her husband woke her up with a caress, as he always did. She smiled. Then the memory of last night's horror came back to her. She felt a wild impulse to scream threats, insults, entreaties. Again she restrained and mastered herself. What, after all, was there to say? What reproach could she possibly address to him? Was he not the most true and loyal of husbands? Was he not doing his whole duty to her?

Throughout the day she went mechanically about

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her occupations, numbed and bruised as if she had been beaten. She tried to think, but could not: she could only feel. Her soul was a battlefield over which trampled jealousy and self-respect, duty, love, and selfishness. She dared not speak to her husband. What to do, she did not know. She was not ready to proclaim that she could not go through with her commitment. It was too late: the mischief was done. She compromised by promising herself that she would lose no time about sending off that stupid, lazy, fat, good-for-nothing girl. . . . She felt certain that the child would have its mother's eyes—rolling, expressionless eyes in a moonlike face. He would be fat, dirty, unintelligent. She hated him in advance.

That night, she feigned extreme tiredness and made a point of staying awake. Ming-ni, as soon as he thought she was unconscious, slipped softly out of bed and went straight to the landing. Alone in the darkness, Monique listened once more to the low voices of the pair; and once more she found herself sobbing as if her heart had broken.

The days that followed were one long agony of jealousy and despair. She had just strength enough to keep her grief to herself, to let it be suspected by no one, not even her mother. She knew only too well that Madame de Rosen would nag her and incite her to drastic measures which might have a certain relevancy to Western life and society, but which her new



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code would never countenance. To her husband she remained outwardly the same, though sometimes it was a torture to submit to his kisses.

The only thing she could not do was to continue her benevolence to Nelumbo. The girl's laziness exasperated her more than ever, and she had to exert all her self-control to keep from striking the innocent object of her jealousy. She spoke to the girl harshly, tried to make her life as acute a misery as Nelumbo's own stolidity permitted. She stinted the allowance of *li-tse-trang* and sunflower seeds, and her remonstrances against Nelumbo's constant idleness and slackness began to be edged with a biting contempt.

Ming-ni noticed these symptoms, and was very sorry. But he knew human, and especially feminine, nature well enough to realize that, the less said, the better. In two months more the child would be born, and then the mother could be removed to a comfortable distance. Ming-ni's seeming unconcern did not tend to soothe his wife's feelings, however. More and more she lost her self-respect, the mastery of her impulses. She even acquired the habit, utterly unlike her, of taking her friends upstairs to the landing, where, shoving aside the screen, she would snatch off the blanket which covered the poor sleeping girl, exhibit her blank and stupid with sleep, and say witheringly: "Did you ever see such a disgusting object?" And her friends, so prompted, would laugh and make more or less witty remarks at Nelum-

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bo's expense, while the girl hid her face in her arms as if she thought she were going to be struck.

Monique took to confiding her situation to all and sundry, in the ostensible hope of getting useful advice, but really just in order to vent her poisonous and in-growing rancour. Even the things which she had formerly cared most for now merely bored her. Always meticulous about her household duties, she grew more and more domineering and autocratic with the servants. She liked to be alone, and was often to be found in her boudoir, sitting idle, holding a book which she could not read, or beginning to write a letter which she was likely to tear up before it was finished.

There came a day when, after a more than commonly rasping fit of anger against Nelumbo, she felt a horrible strangling constriction in her throat. The next instant she had fainted dead away. Half an hour later they found her there on the landing, still unconscious, and put her to bed. A raging fever developed, and she became delirious. A doctor whom they called declined to pronounce immediately on the case. For several days Monique was out of her head. Madame de Rosen never left her bedroom during that time. She changed the ice-pack on Monique's head almost incessantly, and would let no one take her place. Ming-ni was in and out every other minute; he did not even go through the motions of doing his work.

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On the first evening Madame de Rosen found herself alone with him. In her most sardonic tone, she opened fire without mercy. "Are you happy at last? You have succeeded in killing her—you, with your shameless misconduct! She is going to die, and it is all your doing. Are you satisfied?" Ming-ni was so taken aback by this unforeseen assault that he could find not a word to answer. "Yes, you have killed her!" his mother-in-law went on. "But you shall suffer for it! I am going to have the law on you for this. I am going to show the court how you played on her with your diabolical tricks and won her consent; and I am going to exhibit your dirty little Nelumbo. Then we shall see!"

"Let us first save *her*," replied Ming-ni with impassive sadness. "If, by unspeakable misfortune, she were really to die, you might kill me if you chose. I should not try to prevent you. Do you suppose my own life would mean anything to me without her?"

"And yet you had the brutality to torture her as you did?"

"She tortured herself with your fatuous Western notions of life," replied Ming-ni sadly. "Oh, you are all mad, you Europeans."

Madame de Rosen turned white. For once, she was actually speechless with rage. Ming-ni availed himself of the instant's respite by opening the door and slipping silently from the room.

THE fever abated at last, and there came a morning when Monique asked her mother, in the ghost of a voice: "Why are you here, mama? Have I been ill?"

Ming-ni, who had been sitting in a second arm-chair in the room, came at once and knelt by the bed, saying happily: "Saved at last, my love! You are saved!"

She smiled gently. "Have I been so ill, then?"

"Quiet!" answered her mother, arranging the pillows. "You have been pretty sick. But it is all over now. You must have complete rest, though."

Ming-ni stood up to go, but Monique clung to him. "Don't go away," she said. "Stay with me, while mother rests a little."

In the afternoon she was measurably stronger. She insisted on opening the letters which had come during her illness. Among them was a long one from Orchid.

To the Glorious and Brilliant Wife, Mistress of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers [it began].

Dearest friend, you have written to me several times lately, but not about yourself. I am afraid that you are suffering from some secret distress. You must forgive me for writing so freely about matters so private, but I cannot resist the

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conviction that I understand the cause of your torment. The burning poison of jealousy runs in your blood, and you cannot bear the knowledge that your husband has given a part of himself to another woman.

This feeling is, alas! very common. There are some wives who cannot even bear to see their husbands working or reading or being interested in anything outside their own little feminine preoccupations or pleasures or petty caprices. For a man, it would obviously be better to be hated than to be loved in such a way.

We have to content ourselves, we women, with being sometimes less than everything in the lives of our men. If a man gives us his entire and whole-hearted love, if he is truthful and frank with us, we must be happy. At bottom, we understand this perfectly: we give a proof of it whenever we despise a man weak enough to be ruled entirely by his wife. A drink in which there is too much sugar seems very palatable at first, but soon we find it too sweet and can no longer endure the taste of it.

The passionate and exacting sway of love may, perhaps, be deliberately sought and pampered in those facile and ephemeral *liaisons* which are allowed to concubines, and tolerated in those men and women who are perpetually walking under the arbors of pleasure and under the willows of misconduct. But for us First Wives, the end sought is quite other. We are the associates, the dependable and loving friends, the constant help. We have not married for our own self-regarding, fleshly, or useless pleasures, but in order to partake of our husbands' success or failure. And our first duty to him, to our children, and to ourselves is to sustain and increase his strength for the daily struggle; to prevent him from ever forgetting the presence of the enemy when he is intoxicated with some previous victory; to heal his wounds and hearten him for battle when he comes back vanquished from an encounter.

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Our disinterested love of our children gives us an intuitive vision of Truth, Right, Justice. We must influence and guide our husband among the dangers which he himself might fail to see. We must protect him, too, against ourselves and against himself, so that all his strength may be exerted for us and for our children.

And then even, if Fate has decreed that our efforts shall be in vain, we feel a deep and lasting happiness, untinctured by remorse. For even those who respect only riches and the cheapest satisfactions have to bend their heads before True Righteousness. Be its destiny fortunate or calamitous, Righteousness has a mysterious, invincible power over which no other force whatsoever is victorious. The best proof is that, in order to succeed, Evil has to hide its ugly practises under a disguise of Virtue and Truth.

Monique put down the letter and pondered. She remembered the time when such a letter would have evoked from her nothing more than a skeptical smile. That was in the days when she still accepted as great men the false prophets who fill modern cities with the clamour of their insolent and gross publicity. In her soul, washed clean by the recent threatening approach of death, the dawn of a new light illuminated past and present. In this light, her jealousy appeared as nothing but an ephemeral madness. She looked at her husband, in whose face she saw nothing but unalterable and tender affection; and it seemed to her that she had suddenly ceased to plod along in the mud of the road of life and begun to soar peacefully through the clear azure of a summer sky.

To Ming-ni, who still sat by her bed, she said

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softly: "Will you not call in the mother of our child?"

He looked at her. In her eyes he read that Good had conquered. He said: "I thank the mother of our sons and grandsons."

He went out, to return a moment afterward with Nelumbo. She stopped hesitantly and asked in her musical voice: "Is the First Wife better?"

"Yes," answered Monique, "I am much better. And you? Have you had everything that you needed?" And, as the young girl drew nearer, Monique gently stroked her cheek. "You look a little pale," she added. Then, to Ming-ni: "The mother of our first child must not stay on that landing. It is neither healthful nor seemly. Will you tell the servants to move all the furniture out of my boudoir? We will put a good bed there, and she will be in more comfortable surroundings for her confinement. And she must go out in the motor-car sometimes, and walk in the Bois-de-Boulogne. It will give her strength."

"Again, I thank you," said Ming-ni.

On the same night Nelumbo was installed in her new room. She accepted this arrangement as she had accepted everything else, without attaching any great importance to it and without trying to understand the motive behind it. It was just one more fact, and there an end of the matter. The drives in the motor-car left her equally stolid. There or else-

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where, so long as she was not beaten or made to work and was given enough to eat, she was happy. Her simple sleeping soul was not unlike that of a cat which basks and purrs contentedly on the hearth.

Time passed like an arrow. Monique, now much stronger, could walk about the house. It seemed to her that she had come back from a prodigious absence. Everything was different to her. The smallest object stirred different sensations from any that she remembered. In place of the seething torrent of passion in her moral being, it seemed to her that a calm river of crystal waters was flowing gently under the sunshine of an Indian summer day. She was filled no longer with wild and selfish desires, impulses which sped her onward in spite of her will, as the spurs of the rider do a spirited horse. Rather, she was borne on as in a sailing vessel before a gentle breeze. A new sense of order, harmony, and beauty had been born in her.

To her mother she hardly seemed the same person. Madame de Rosen no longer regaled her with Parisian *chroniques scandaleuses*; the baroness, somehow, was not quite herself, either. Anxiety for Monique's happiness at first, and afterward anxiety for her life, had revived the religious impulses of her youth. She now went to church every day, and on some days twice. She presently declared to her daughter that it was time for her to be thinking of



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her eternal salvation, and that she had practically decided to retire wholly from the world and enter the old ladies' convent of the Avenue Malakoff. There she would be in constant touch with priests and under the best possible auguries for the end of all. Monique tried to dissuade her, but in vain.

"You are now," said the baroness, "in a stage of life in which I can be of no more use to you. I might even be a hindrance. I do not understand you very well, and my help is no help at all to you. We can see each other as often as we want to, and you may be quite at rest about me, for I shall never be alone, and I shall have every spiritual and material comfort." Her decision being irrevocable, she had all her furniture moved to the Embassy and settled herself in the convent. It must be added that she found there one satisfaction on which she had not counted. The callers who came every day to see the other ladies were soon introduced to her. In addition to the quite respectable number of persons who lived in the convent, she gained thus a varied circle of acquaintances; and they gave her the sole distraction which seems to appeal to ladies past a certain age—conversation and social intercourse without the trouble of going out to return calls.

At the Embassy, the moment neared for which everything had carefully been got in readiness. An attendant nurse compelled Nelumbo to walk regularly and take all the customary precautions. And

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then, one morning before there was time even to call the doctor, the child was born.

It was a girl.

Nothing is quite so delightful and droll as a Chinese baby. It has such serious black eyes, and such red little lips in such a round little noseless face, and such irresistibly comic expressions when it smiles or cries, that no one can resist it.

When Monique entered the room, Nelumbo took the baby, which was lying beside her, and presented it to her mistress, saying: "Here is your child, O First Wife. Have I fulfilled my duty?"

Monique had always taken it for granted that she was going to feel the greatest antipathy for the child of her husband by a stranger. But when she saw the little object—was it actually holding out its arms to her?—she thought only of her husband; and she took the little thing into her arms as she would have taken the child of a beloved brother. "She belongs to both of us now," said Monique. "You shall nurse her, and you shall stay here."

The usually expressionless face of Nelumbo was actually lighted by a smile of joy and gratitude. She seized Monique's hand and kissed it.

A new serenity and happiness reigned in the house. Monique grew to love the little girl, which was for ever laughing and playing. Nelumbo would let no one help her, and she was suddenly as active as before she had been lazy.

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Ming-ni, of course, was secretly disappointed not to have had a son. He even thought of buying another slave immediately. But he reconsidered it in time, and consoled himself with the hope of better success in the not distant future.

## XXVI

THE happiness of the household was soon upset by sad news. A telegram came, informing Ming-ni of the death of his father. Old Chen had not been able to enjoy for very long the freedom which became his by the death of his First Wife. An attack of acute indigestion had taken him off within a few minutes of the conclusion of a little banquet given to a group of choice spirits.

Ming-ni could not think of remaining out of his native country. The management of his fortune, and also his new duties as head of the family, compelled him to start at once and to take up his permanent residence in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. He telegraphed to Peking the news of his mourning, and was authorized to resign his appointment forthwith.

Monique grieved at having to leave her mother. This was another of the painful crises of her married life. She proposed to take her mother to China with them, but this the baroness would not hear of. "No, no, my dearest," she said, "I cannot go with you. It is too far, and I am too old. My health is not of the best, and I should be a wretched incumbrance to you if I were to be sick on the way. Besides, what could

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I do in China? No, no, I will stay and be buried here beside your father. I am thankful to have kept you with me even so long as I have; I might have been separated from you long ago."

"But the journey is nothing at all, mother: many really aged women have taken it easily."

"If you were going to live among Europeans, I might try it, perhaps. But, 'way off there in the interior of China, I should feel myself lost, even with you. Maybe you can come back next year on a visit. You say there is now a railroad not far from your city."

In spite of their mutual promises of a speedy reunion, they both had a presentiment that they were parting for the last time. But Monique could not stay and let her husband go alone. He would not have accepted the arrangement, even though he dutifully proposed it to his mother-in-law.

"No, no," she answered. "My dear son-in-law, your own life must not be disarranged that way by me. You have your duties, and they are Monique's duties, too. Unhappily, we cannot always arrange our lives just as we should like. And perhaps, if it were possible, we should only make a terrible muddle of them, and render ourselves more miserable than we were before."

When they started back to the Embassy, Monique was in tears. Her husband tried to console her, but she said: "You do not know what it means to have

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a friend and a mother in the same person. I have never had a thought that I did not share with her, and she has never had one that she kept from me. She is not at all well, and I feel that I am never going to see her again."

"Then, my dear, I will put off our departure." And, without listening to her entreaties, he called his servant and told him that their journey was postponed for a week or two.

He had no more than done so, and Monique had already started back to tell her mother, when he was called to the telephone. The Superior of the convent, who was on the wire, asked him to inform his wife that Madame de Rosen had fainted after her departure. He started after her instantly, but, not finding a cab at once, he arrived at the convent some minutes behind her. Madame de Rosen had rallied sufficiently to recognize her daughter and kiss her for the last time; then she had swooned again. When the doctor came, he could only say that it was the end.

Monique was nearly driven mad by the conviction that she had caused her mother's death. It took all the Mother Superior's gift of persuasiveness and all of the doctor's most emphatic assurances to make her recall and admit that her mother had already suffered more than one seizure of this same sort, and that the occasion of this one was only a coincidence.

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The harrowing details of the funeral arrangements so tired Monique physically that she had hardly any strength left to expend in grief. She went through it all in a dazed, stunned condition which moved her husband profoundly. He was so anxious about her that he now hastened their departure as much as he could, in order to get her away from the scene and suggestion of her sorrow. They started within a few days. Monique's last visit to the cemetery filled her with such sadness that she hardly noticed the first incidents of the trip—the last farewells of her friends and of the Embassy staff, the train, Marseilles. It was only when the ship left her mooring, and when the coast was slowly dissolving into the blue horizon of the sea, that she realized, with a sudden impact of dismay, how definitively had been broken the last link which bound her to the country of her childhood. She was leaving behind nothing, nobody. Henceforward her husband must be all in all. She turned to him and, resting her head on his shoulder in utter trust, sobbed aloud. But the bitterness was gone from her woe.

As the regular beating of the screw carried them farther and farther from Europe, she began to think of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. She remembered, too, her dream. And suddenly she said to her husband in a whisper: "I am going to have a son. I know it."

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“How do you know, dearest?” he asked, astonished.

She told him her vision.

“It was my mother who sent it to you,” he said simply. “What you have dreamed will come true. Yes, I know it will come true, O my First Wife, mother of my sons and grandsons.”



## XXVII

A NEW mutuality of understanding had enwrapped the two. Perhaps the atmosphere of the East was already bringing them that abandon, that indifference to one's own destiny, that conviction that life is but a lottery on whose outcome we have no influence, which we neurotic Europeans term "fatalism"—while we proudly and fatuously ascribe all our own successes to our virtues, and all our failures to bad luck. Each port recalled to Monique her own past emotions and enthusiasms; her hopes, most of which had proved illusory; her judgments, now incomprehensible even to herself. She felt certain that she was leaving Europe for ever, and with it a great part of herself; and she turned back in her mind, passing in review the long and lengthening procession of dead memories.

Monique was at an age when hope has ceased to make us strain our eyes toward the future; an age at which we begin to reap the harvest of our first endeavours; at which we no longer count on grand rewards, spectacular achievements. The blind confidence of youth has ceased to sustain us; we have more or less intimately known failure, or gone near to doing so; and we perceive for the first time that well-

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nigh everything depends on the luck we have. Happy are those who, besides being sufficiently gifted from birth to meet without quailing all the exigencies of their lives, have always been abetted by circumstance. But a thousand times happier are those who, looking back on their past lives, can survey the long line of their acts and not detect among the white and spotless robes of the good deeds the grimed and maculate dress of an evil action, done of deliberate choice to secure a material advantage. In the symphonic *ensemble* of our past, a false note jars as harshly as in an orchestra—and it has the additional bitterness that it never ceases to vibrate so long as we remember.

Monique, reclining in her deck chair under the awning which hid the deck from the fierce direct rays of the sun, absently followed the play of flying-fishes. Her body, resting thus at ease, was almost as if non-existent, and because of its tenuity her soul and spirit were left uniquely free. In the peace of the illimitable sea, to an obbligato of the regular throb of the engines, she reviewed her life, hardly knowing that she did so. And she was thankful that, with whatever defects of origin or education, she had never wilfully done any important thing that was not in harmony with the new spirit which animated her. She could examine all her past actions, even her past wishes, with the indulgent smile of a mother at the frolics of a beloved child.

Ming-ni and she were in perfect communion. He

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was assured of the advent of a son, and happy in the sense that the Unknowable favoured his deepest wish and smiled on his family. He ascribed this to the powerful influence of his ancestors, giving to these words the meaning with which every educated person invests them; assuming, that is to say, that the hidden and uncontrollable impulses which prompted his own views on all things were inherited from the long line of his forebears, stretching back into the mists of antiquity. The dead dictated his conduct whether he willed it or no, drove him forward among unfathomable present dangers toward inscrutable future possibilities.

When they passed Ceylon Monique remembered with emotion her former enthusiasm for this Gate of Paradise. She saw vividly the contrast between her earlier reaction, based entirely on the gratification of a personal whim, and her present deeper sentiment, prompted ultimately by her devotion to the lot she had chosen—the family, the husband, the child of that husband. Again she could be thankful that her past motives, so fickle and superficial, had not led her irrevocably astray or ruined her life and her chances of future happiness. Desire, which—or so Buddha taught—is the cause of all our torments, had ceased to ride her soul and to spur her insensately forward. The peace of contentment, whether attained by satisfaction or by renunciation, had settled upon her. After the plunging and frothing torrents of her youth,

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the river of her inward life was to flow calmly through the level plains of her mature years.

The Palace of a Hundred Flowers seemed to her more ineffably lovely than ever. Autumn had begun, and the gorgeous seasonal colours had flung over every tree and shrub a mantle of purple and splendid gold. In China, September is a second spring for the flowers, and the indescribable clarity of the air and purity of the light, in the bracing coolness of the mornings and evenings, give a new beauty to earth and sky and make bare sentience an untold delight, an inexhaustible treasury of new pleasures.

Monique was installed in the apartments of the First Wife. Her bedroom was large and uncluttered. The entire wall next the garden was made of panels of trellised wood over which had been spread a translucent paper. When the panels were shut, a diffusion of soft light filled the room; yet, since the paper was not transparent, a sense of absolute and inviolable privacy caressed her. When the panels were opened, one was as in an open verandah on the garden, the light still softened, however, by the shade of the projecting roof supported on its thick lacquered columns. The walls of her room were painted a pale green with gold flowers, and a thick golden carpet with pale green figures completed the harmony of an exquisite colour-scheme. The low, massive chests of drawers and the carved chairs were done in green

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lacquer; where the carving was in high relief there were touches of gold and vermilion. The vast square low bed was of the same material—though Monique had to replace with a wire mattress the boards on which her mother-in-law had slept, not having been inured from childhood to the hard Chinese beds.

The days passed, happy and simple as a flight of swallows. She awoke in the morning and had all the panels raised, in order that she might savour the fine brilliant haze of the morning light, the perfumed coolness of the air. She gave her orders for the day. This first duty finished and her toilet completed, she usually received a call from Orchid, whom she had rejoined with a pleasure greater even than she had foreseen. Together they debated the infinity of household and garden problems, the bringing-up of the children. They were often together until, with night, there came the evening meal.

All the members of the family were present at this—sisters, sisters-in-law, even the second wives of old Chen. But in place of the constraint of former years, there reigned a trust and a simple happiness which made of this family reunion the pleasantest hour of the day. To be invited to it was a coveted and prized honour.

Monique began in time to be cited as a model for the women of the city, as before she had been cited in a quite different way. Her indirect influence on the general wholesomeness of the city was so patent

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that the Governor sent a report on the subject to his superiors, as part of a plea for the suggested construction of a school for girls in his city. This was a great innovation. But the spirit of the century had at last penetrated even to this remote hinterland. The railway, completed now, brought with it a well-being and a variety of work which had never been dreamed of before. The muleteers and teamsters, now become railway workers, found their new work both lighter and better paid. Because it was new, they had not yet had time to be wearied by its monotony, and they had not perceived, either, that, from their former state of free workers with initiative, they had become mere machines in the control of an unknown, irresponsible, and consequently most dangerous group of absentee rulers.

Mackensie was now a very important personage in the province. All projected roads and railways were under his jurisdiction, and his decisions were final. He was entitled to the green sedan-chair of high functionaries. His rank, coupled with his personal justice and integrity, had won him the love and respect of the entire population.

Old Wang had retired from the active part of his profession, and contented himself with superintending the new manager of the gardens. Also, he had undertaken to teach poetry to his grandchildren. It was a touching and delightful thing to behold these lessons of his. The little dark-haired boys and girls

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—there were two of each—surrounded the old man, all of them sitting cross-legged on the ground in some shady nook of the garden, and repeated with the proper intonation the poems which their grandfather recited first. Their fresh, clear voices rose and fell harmoniously in a chorus which rejoiced the aged poet's heart. The group was increased presently by the children of Red Peony and Little Badger, who had married not long after their master and mistress.

And so the days passed, happy, uneventful, and artless, until one beautiful afternoon of early November when the clear sun was shining peacefully on golden boughs and the light evening breeze was rustling the leaves ever so gently. On that afternoon Monique's baby was born. Ming-ni, Orchid, and an experienced matron were in the room. Outside stood the gathering crowd of sisters-in-law and other women of the household.

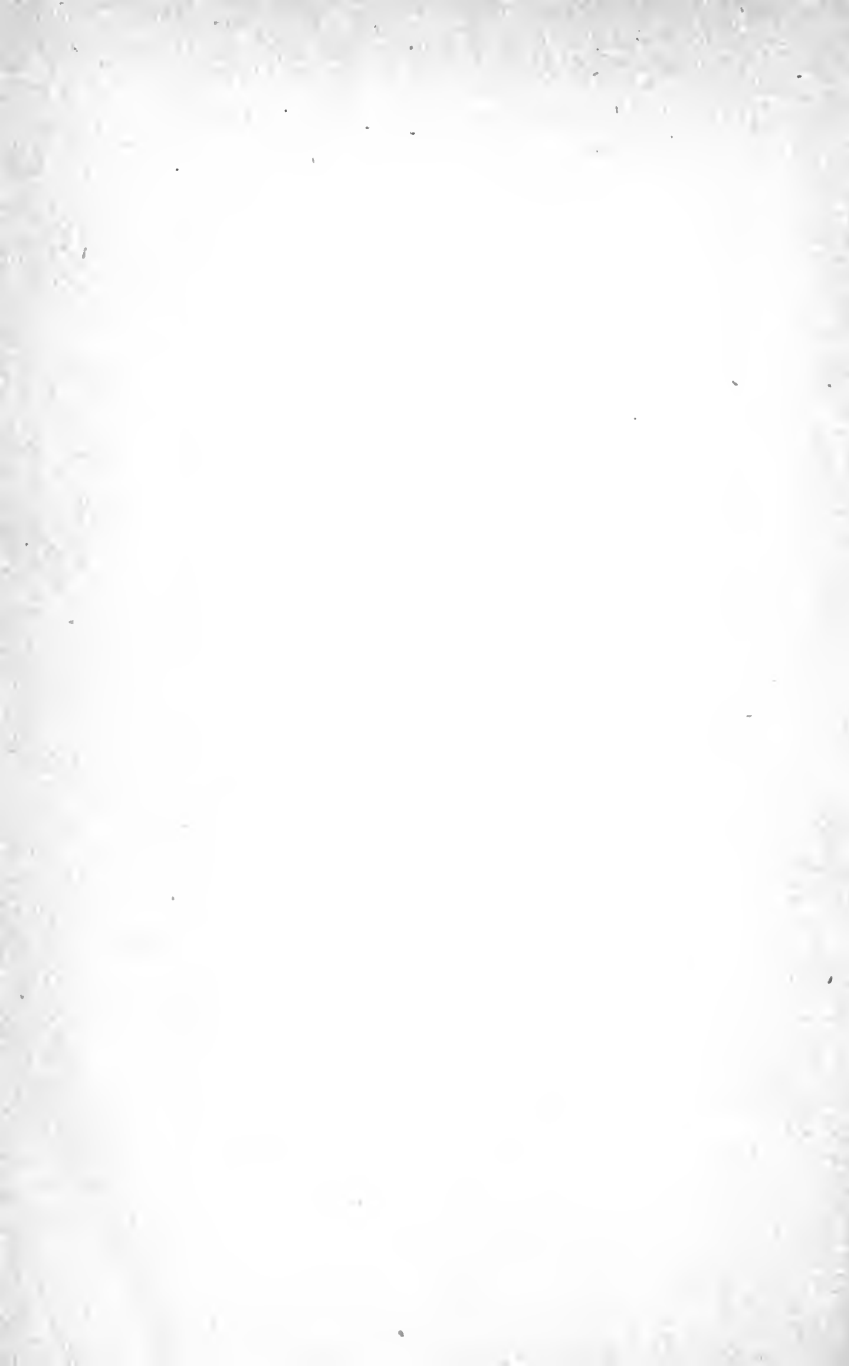
At last came the moment when the matron stood erect, a broad smile on her wrinkled yellow face, and presented the child to its father, saying: "Here, O Happy Father, is your son! Forget not the herald of good news."

"It is a son! Our ancestors be thanked!" the women outside caught up the word.

"I knew it," said Ming-ni simply.

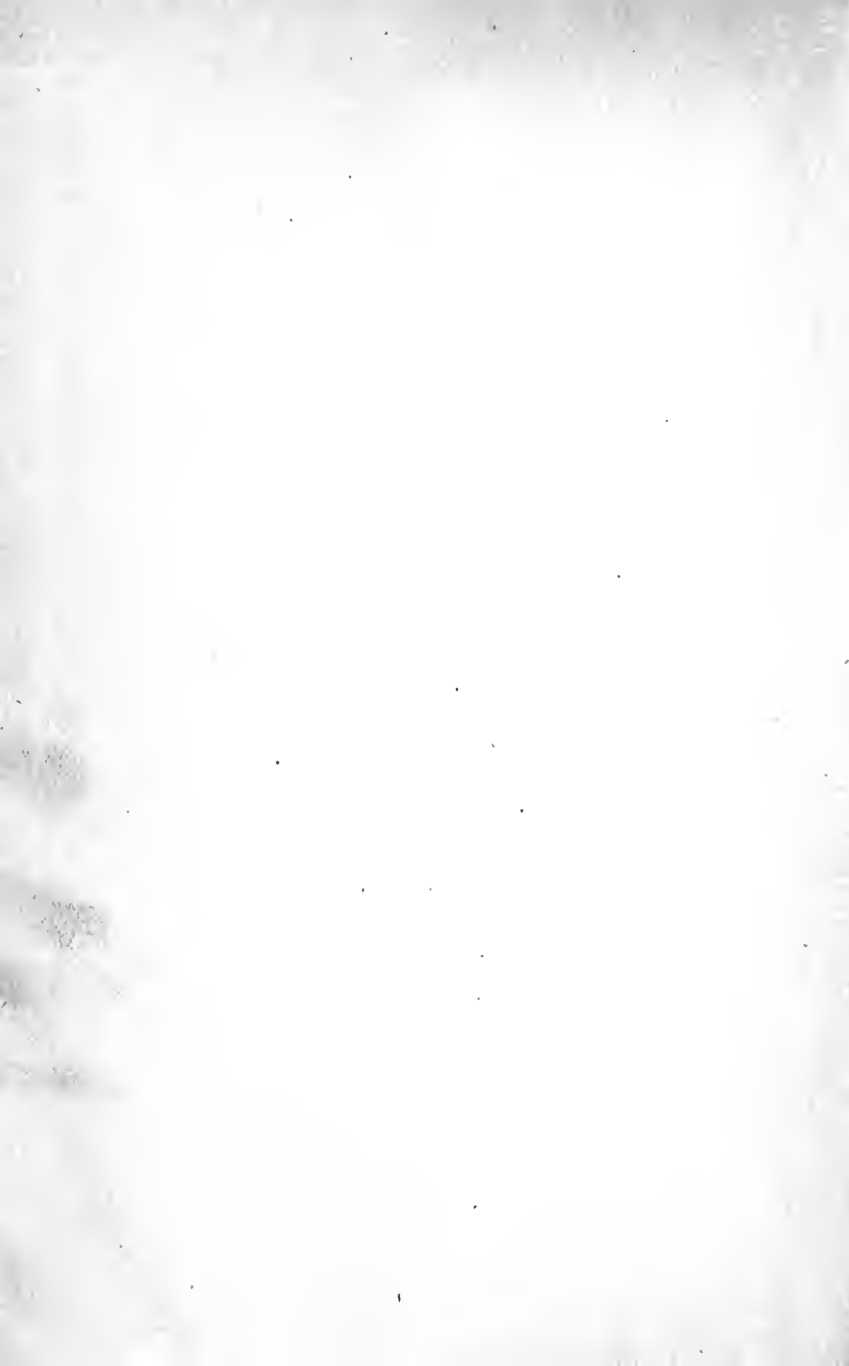
"I knew it," echoed the happy mother, holding out her hand to her husband as he knelt beside her bed.

"My dream will come true."









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