

The
Vintage
of
Yon Yee

LOUISE JORDAN MILN

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Title: The Vintage of Yon Yee

Date of first publication: 1931

Author: Louise Jordan Miln (1864-1933)

Date first posted: Aug. 10, 2014

Date last updated: Aug. 10, 2014

Faded Page eBook #20140814

This ebook was produced by: Marcia Brooks, Al Haines, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IT HAPPENED IN PEKING
RUBEN AND IVY SÊN
IN A SHANTUNG GARDEN
MR. AND MRS. SÊN
THE FEAST OF LANTERNS
MR. WU (
THE GREEN GODDESS (
IN A YÜN-NAN COURTYARD
THE SOUL OF CHINA
RED LILY AND CHINESE JADE
THE FLUTES OF SHANGHAI
BY SOOCHOW WATERS
RICE

THE VINTAGE OF YON YEE

By
LOUISE JORDAN MILN



*“Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.”*

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMXXXI

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Printed in the United States of America

To an unfailing friend

MRS. HAROLD STEEVENS

THE VINTAGE OF YON YEE

CHAPTER I

Many things go to the making of the perfect wine. Many conditions are essential to its achievement. Every few years—sometimes sooner, frequently less often—there is a perfect wine, a vintage apart.

There are no perfect personalities. There has been no perfect nation. To the grape, and its epic of smooth ruby, or its lyric of sparkling gold, perfection is given now and then; to immortalize it and to rejoice the appreciative souls of its lovers who know. No effort, no suffering, no experience can give perfection to any man or to any race. Humanity, individual or herd, can but strive—never entirely triumph or fulfil. But there are men apart, there are peoples apart: vintage manhood, vintage nations. As many things, as many essential conditions, go to the making of those finer, more worth knowing, human individuals and races as do to the vintage wines.

Charles Monroe lifted his glass slowly—he did most things slowly—and studied the wine gravely. Monroe usually was grave. But he never was glum; his face was ardent, his mouth sensitive, his chin clear-cut, square, firm. His gray eyes, clear as a child's, saw most things, saw through almost as many, told nothing. His glance was direct and full, it took but did not give, rarely announced or revealed. And yet—the man's gray eyes, watching the wine's delicate golden bubbles gather and break and gather again, were affectionate now. Neither the man nor his eyes doted or gloated on the perfect wine, but they loved it.

"Perrier Jouët 1911!" he said softly.

"Thank goodness!" the woman said.

"I do," he told her, "goodness, and France, and all else that are priests of the beautiful cult of good wine. But you? You surprise me, Betty—you who I thought could never surprise me again. What in the world does it matter to you? You are not going to affect an interest in wines, or the slightest knowledge or taste, are you? It's rather late in the day for that. Get some other new affectation, do. You'll come a bad cropper, if you take on a pose of wine expert."

"I never pose!"

"You never do anything else."

"Don't be such a donkey, Char. I don't mind your being rude."

"Splendid!"

"Of course I don't give a mustard seed who made your silly old wine, or what silly year they made it in—or pretend that they did. I said, 'Thank goodness'—and I jolly well meant it—because you didn't say 'extraterritoriality,' I'm tired of living with a one-word-vocabulary man."

"Sorry!"

But Monroe was not in the least sorry—as they both knew. He was not even interested. All his interest was in the wine glass. He had not looked at Betty once.

She sat turned in her chair towards him, her bare arms on the black table, and her eyes had not left his face. Betty adored him. He was sincerely fond of her.

They were not quarreling. They never quarreled. No two people in Han-chow were more deeply devoted to each other than these two; unless, just possibly Que Shan and Que Nee were, or Edward Allingham and his daughter Lois.

"Extraterritoriality! I'm afraid, Miss Monroe, that even to please you, and much as we all want to please you—I know I do—the objectionable word will be the oftenest used word in China—White China, I mean of course—for many a day. It's got to be." Henry Cotterel refilled the girl's glass as he spoke. The brother and sister were his guests to-night, and so was the man who made the fourth at the little table under the banyan tree at the edge of the dancers on the velvet-smooth grass.

Miss Monroe half drained her delicate glass before she bit savagely into another pâté sandwich.

"Extrater—" she began, despite the sandwich.

Charles interrupted her fiercely. "You are not to drink vintage wine like that, or eat those things with it. It's criminal."

"Rubbish. I'm hungry as well as thirsty. Ever such nice sandwiches, Mr. Cotterel. I'm going to finish the plateful."

"Then leave this wine alone. Tell the boy to get her some lemonade, Cotterel, or cheap claret! It breaks my heart to see Betty drink this wonderful wine as if it were cocoa. I'd no more give her a glass of A I wine than I'd—" He broke off with an exclamation of unaffected indignation, and caught his sister's wrist in a vice. "No, you don't!"

"Stop bullying me, Char, do! Let me enjoy myself my way while you enjoy yourself yours. Sit looking at a glass of bubbly as if it were a pretty girl, instead of drinking it like a little man! It's nice wine, I know, or Mr. Cotterel wouldn't have it, and these sandwiches are heavenly. And I *am* going to smoke while I eat them. That's when I love a cigarette most. You sip, and be happy. I am going to drink—not sip—eat and smoke, and be happy."

"For goodness' sake, take her away, and dance with her again," Monroe

implored their host. "No girl is going to smoke across this glass of mine. There'll be bloodshed first!"

"Let's leave him and Dudley to their vice then?" Cotterel pleaded.

"When I've finished my sandwiches."

She finished them with provoking deliberation, her brother watching her gloomily.

The sandwiches finished to a crumb, she gestured to Monroe derisively, and got up lazily.

"Bring my cigarettes with you," she told Cotterel.

"Won't mine do?"

"They will not. They're vintage—like Charlie's wine. I like common things. When I smoke a cigarette I want to taste tobacco, straight honest tobacco, not dead rose-leaves, jasmine and oil of tuberose." She emptied her glass, winked at her brother patronizingly, and went with Cotterel back towards the dancers.

"Ripping sister you've got, what!" Dudley remarked politely.

"Betty's all right," Monroe agreed, "she'd be A 1, in fact, if she wasn't quite unmanageable. I wonder how the dickens I am going to get her to nip back home—*now!*"

"Thought she had come to you for a year or so?"

"That's what I asked her to do, more fool me! But I want her to go back home all the same."

"Squally?"

"Exactly. It may blow over. It usually does. But it hasn't always. Nineteen hundred."

"Yes; some dust-up! But we are on our guard now. And we are too strong for the beggars now, surely."

"H'm."

"China's not strong enough to *do* anything much."

"Perhaps not—yet."

"All split up, no control, no cohesion. And Russia's just bluster and fake. I don't see that anything very bad is going to happen. I don't see what can. Do you?"

"Anything can happen in China at any time."

"They'll get the worst of it!"

"A few times more, I believe. Not always, I believe. But all that's guesswork. What I *know* is that I wish Betty would go home. But there!"

Monroe drank his one glass of perfect wine very slowly.

The two men were silent for several minutes. Dudley, comparatively a

newcomer, was interested in looking about him.

It looked anything but squally here in Mo-kan-shan: the Europeans' lovely Han-chow annex.

"I say, Monroe!"

"Hello!"

"Who are they?"

"Which? Where?"

"That man with a scar on his chin, handsome old fellow, and the girl he's dancing with, got a pink dress on—what there is of it. A yard and a half of pearls! What wouldn't they be worth, if they were real!"

"They are real."

"Who are they?"

"Whose are they? Hers of course. They were her mother's."

"*Who* are they? I said."

"Oh"—Monroe finished his wine—"Edward Allingham and his daughter."

"He must be rich—if he paid for those pearls, and if they are real."

"He paid for them," Monroe stated. He did not repeat that the pearls were real. He did not often repeat himself. "Edward Allingham *is* rich, almost a millionaire."

"Wife dead?"

"Quite."

"Only child?"

"Miss Allingham? Yes."

"Know them?"

"Rather well. Every one knows every one else in Han-chow—except strays like you. Betty and Lois Allingham were at school together in Sussex. There's nearly six years between them; Betty mothered Lois rather there. I've always known the Allinghams more or less. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Lots," the itinerant journalist stated quite unabashed.

"Fire ahead," Monroe said resignedly—good-naturedly too, though as a rule it was not profitable to cross-examine Charles Monroe. On the whole he liked this newspaperman, and recognized the professional necessity of interrogation. He knew that for all his downright trade industry Dudley was no idle Paul Pry, still less a fortune-hunter.

The journalist fired ahead. "Who's the fat old lady in the quarter of a yard of magenta satin?"

"The most dangerous woman in China. We all are scared stiff of her; even Betty is."

“Name?”

“Saunders. *Lady* Saunders. Soap.”

“Thought it might be stockings.”

“Nice legs, hasn’t she?”

“Her knees aren’t. Can’t somebody make her cover ’em?”

“No one. Old Buddha herself couldn’t have ‘made’ Mary Hermione—Lady Saunders—do any single thing she didn’t choose.”

“What makes her particularly dangerous?”

“What makes most women dangerous? Tongue. This one has considerable money, no scruples, not much intelligence. She’s as vicious as she’s vain. No heart, none.” Monroe did not add that Lady Saunders also had no taste. The very low and very short magenta satin costume made the statement unnecessary.

“Bad combine, what? But she’s got a heart all right. Every one has. It’s just a question of finding it.”

“You have a hunt for hers then. Come along, and I’ll introduce you. She’ll tell you more about Han-chow and its scandals than I could in a year—if the occupation attracted me. And you won’t even need to trouble to question her. She’ll tell you every uncomfortable thing on earth without you opening your mouth. Lies and half lies with not one word of them accurate. Her half lies are the worst, of course. Come along.”

“Thanks. Some other day. It’s too hot just now. Don’t mind being introduced to the Allinghams though. They are coming this way. Good Lord, Monroe, the girl’s a Chink!”

CHAPTER II

"Or is she though?" Dudley murmured, "now I look closer. Tar-brush, isn't it?"

"Mrs. Allingham was Chinese," Monroe said gravely.

"His *wife*? Married her?"

"Quite." Monroe said it sternly.

"I'm blowed!" Dudley was not abashed. "Went to school with your sister!"

"Yes. And Betty loves her."

"She looks happy."

"I believe she is particularly happy always. I never have seen Lois Allingham look or seem anything else."

"Isn't he ashamed of her?"

"Proud of her. Any father would be. But just to you—I often wonder if he is not ashamed now and then—for her, not for himself—of her mixed blood. There is something equivocal about it always."

"Will she marry? Get a chance to?"

"Lois Allingham is pretty. She is amiable, always sunny. She is the only child of a very rich man."

"White or yellow? The suitors?"

"Both."

"She'll choose a white one, of course!"

"I have no idea. I rather doubt if she has."

"I'm damned!"

Monroe made no comment.

The other man asked presently, "Which race does she most take after?"

Monroe shrugged. He took the flower from his button-hole, and offered it to Dudley.

"That's the most sensible question you've asked me to-day; the one sensible question I ever have heard you ask."

"Answer it then." Tom Dudley ignored the proffered carnation.

"I can't. Wish I could," he restored the flower to his coat, "for it is—at least to me—an intensely interesting question. I doubt if any one can answer it—even Allingham or Lois herself. A great deal depends upon the answer to that question. I think that Mr. Allingham must ask it to himself sometimes anxiously. I have seen Lois Allingham so English that I scarcely could credit the fact of her Chinese blood; I have seen her so Chinese that it was hard to realize that she had English blood.

Sometimes she *is* English, sometimes she *is* Chinese. There is nothing half-and-half about Miss Allingham ever. She is unique in that—among those of mixed blood—I think.”

“He’s brought her up in England, given her an English education?”

“Half.”

“Half?”

“Exactly half. Ever since his wife died he has spent alternate years in England and in China. He and his daughter never have been separated. Even when Lois was at boarding school in Sussex—it wasn’t long—he lived a stone’s throw away. She speaks English perfectly, *and* Mandarin. She plays the piano *and* a table-lute. She knows and visits as many Chinese as she does English. I haven’t the blindest which she prefers—if she prefers.”

“Is he crazy?”

“Some people think so. Lady Saunders insists that he is.”

“He is fond of his daughter. Look at them now! The man is devoted to her.”

“Peculiarly.”

“Why the devil then hasn’t he kept her out of China, kept her away from everything Chinese? He must wish her to marry an Englishman.”

“He must, I think.”

“Why risk the other then? If there *is* any risk?”

“Can’t say. Don’t understand it in the least.”

“How did he come to marry a Chinese?”

“Never asked him. Don’t advise you to. It’s in his blood—that’s all I know.”

“How do you mean, ‘in his blood’?”

“He’s the third—third generation—to be attracted by Oriental women. His father and his grandfather were. Some of us are—we Europeans—some of us are not. The Allinghams all seem to have been.”

“Edward Allingham’s not got Chinese blood! Look at him.”

“Not a drop. He *married* the Chinese lady.”

“And the other Allinghams did not.”

“That’s it.”

“Where’s his wife now? His Chinese wife—this girl’s mother?”

“I told you. Dead.”

“Wonder if he is glad.”

“Never asked him that either. Perhaps you’d like to.”

“Introduce me!”

“You will not make ‘copy’ out of it—write it up?”

“No. I’ll remember that she is your sister’s friend.”

“Come along then.”

The story of Edward Allingham’s marriage with Shang Yon Yee, more than twenty years before, was less simple than Monroe’s somewhat sketchy, but in the main accurate, telling of it to Tom Dudley.

That it had been in his blood was true enough. But it no longer was; wedlock and its social consequences had purged it; the actual wedlock even more than its social consequences. His intense love for his daughter, even his great pride in her, too, had disintegrated and dispersed it. If Allingham ever were to marry again—nothing was farther from his thought—he knew that he could marry no woman not purely of his own race.

Mary Saunders—not nearly so black, or half as brainless, as Monroe had reported her to Dudley—not a little devoted to the Allinghams, man and girl, was sure that Edward never would marry again; and considered it a great pity. He was eminently marriageable in every way; so admirable and—but for the one canker which few divined—so joyous a father that he would make a delightful husband—as husbands went, she was sure. (Lady Saunders did not exaggerate the average excellence of husbands.) And few men would have been better satisfied in a successful marriage. And he had tied himself so tight, all these years, to Lois’ pretty apron strings, that he’d be sadly adrift when his daughter married. Only an appreciative and congenial wife could fill that gap—when it came. The right wife would fill it beautifully. Lady Saunders was under no delusion that perfect wives were more abundant than perfect husbands were. But for several reasons she believed that Edward Allingham might have had the luck and the shrewdness to find one: one approximately so. She had no doubt that he would not.

And Lois would marry—probably before long. The girl was twenty-four now.

That Lois Allingham might not marry was an absurd impossibility that never had wasted an instant of Lady Saunders’ thought.

Lois would marry a Western. It never had crossed Lady Saunders’ imagination that Lois might marry a Chinese. And the woman had abundant and vivid imagination.

It had crossed Edward Allingham’s mind more than once.

He often wondered if it ever had crossed Lois’ own mind.

He longed not to leave Europe again, and not to leave England for long at a time or over often.

More and more England called him.

But he kept honorably a pact he had made at his Chinese wife's death-bed; and spent equal months in Europe and in China.

He, too, had no doubt that Lois would marry. When she married, his promise to her mother would have been fulfilled—done with. He should be free then to go where he would, live where he chose.

He knew how lonely he should be. A man who had lived in such uninterrupted close and radiant intimacy with a congenial woman as he had with Lois would be personally and incurably desolate without a woman's companionship: maimed. Women still attracted him; he was virile, keenly alive and normal. He knew that many women liked him, found him companionable—women of charm and character. He knew that if he had been a poor man, even more ill-looking than he was, still he might have married enviably. And such marriage was not always altogether absent from his longing. But, too, the thought revolted him—and always would. To his taste it always would be impossible—even in the long uncompanied years of loneliness that he foresaw. His gorge rose even while he desired—for he held himself tainted; tainted by the lasting consequence of a young mistake to which he had been splendidly loyal, and for which he was paying a life-long price like the brave and honest man he was.

Also he felt that to marry again and marry a wife of his own race would be a betrayal of Yon Yee, a disloyalty to her, a reflection upon her. While she lived he had been true to his Chinese wife; he would be true to her while he lived.

And Lois came into it, too; she came into everything. Edward Allingham lived and thought in terms of his daughter. Though her marriage might separate them widely, even after it he should hold himself at her disposal. He would not give her a Chinese stepmother; still less would he give her one who was English—not Chinese.

If Lois were to marry a Chinese, he foresaw cleavage between them, do what he would—and he should do his utmost—to bridge it.

Cleavage between them—bereavement for him!

If she married a Western, his own loss of her, and of her children, might be less. But in any marriage of hers he must lose her largely. He came of long-lived families; he counted on many solitary, sore years.

Not that Allingham was unhappy. Far from it! No one as healthy as he, as constitutionally reasonable, who persistently does his duty is easily unhappy. Edward Allingham was doing exactly what he believed he owed it to Lois, to her mother—and to himself—to do. His own conscience approved him. That approval is sweet. Not that this man was a prig—no man ever was less one. But he thought and weighed unflinchingly. He wished that he had weighed and thought more clearly

years ago. He did not upbraid himself that he had not—he gave youth its due; reasonable in this as he was in most—now.

And ginger still was hot—and sweet—in his mouth. He enjoyed greatly. Great defense—perhaps the greatest—against unhappiness. He'd be lonely, God knew, when the time came. He'd miss Lois most damnably. But his sore would have many plasters—good sensible bachelor plasters.

At home in London—no other place on Earth half so good to be in as London!—he'd put in more time at his clubs. He liked one of his clubs very much, and several of his club friends. He'd hunt up Freddie Carter. Lois disliked Carter; so Allingham had avoided him. But he had rather an affection for Carter. He would do some bits of rougher travel than he had been willing to let Lois share. Probably he would find the stiffer Alps difficult now. But he'd hear again "the mule bells on the hills of Spain," and he would hunt again. It was years since he had really ridden to hounds. Lois never had begged to, and he had been glad not to have her risk it. He knew that he rode better than many other men could. He had no doubt that he was good for some years of first-class hunting, if he got the chance.

He had ample money and a gift for using it well. He had health; he could climb a modest mountain modestly, beat many a younger man at tennis, pull a steady oar, fill an emergency gap in a moderate cricket eleven almost decently—with luck, quite decently—he was an excellent shot—one of the best.

He had breeding, and because he had, the ease and enjoyment in living that only breeding can give.

He'd miss Lois damnably, when the time came; but time would not hang heavy on his hands.

His life had been upright, he was glad to remember; his hands were clean, and he knew that he should keep them so.

He had made one great mistake, but he had made it uprightly, he had carried it with regret and disillusion, but to the end not without love. And he never had soiled it. Put bluntly—Edward Allingham had been faithful to his Chinese wife.

For himself—though until almost her death he had hoped not for her—their marriage had been a mistake—his one great mistake. But it had flowered very beautifully, the mistake that had given him his greatest and lasting joy: Lois.

Certainly Allingham was not unhappy; probably he never would be.

Dudley had judged her accurately, in thinking Lois Allingham happy. Monroe had said quite accurately that she was particularly happy.

Lois Allingham, the rich man's half-caste daughter, never had known a moment's unhappiness. Her mother's death had not grieved her; Lois had been but a

month old. Even parting with her father, when he left her at boarding school, and turned away with a ridiculous lump in his throat, had not grieved her in the least, for she had known that their separation would be of the briefest. She knew that her father would come back to her soon. She knew that he always would come back. And she expected to enjoy the novel experience of school-life.

The girl had inherited the father's great aptitude for enjoyment—perhaps had inherited something of it from her Chinese mother who had loved the sugar-plums of life. And naturally enough she had her secure share of the imperturbability that above all others the Chinese race has, and in a less degree, but beautifully, many English.

In her four and twenty years Lois had never been ill, and never once been bored.

She greatly loved and admired her father; she enjoyed every hour they spent together.

If she had been unhappy ever, she would have been meanly ungrateful. Lois Allingham could not be ungrateful; she was half Chinese.

CHAPTER III

Their story—Allingham's and his girl's—begins a long way back; generations before the day that Tom Dudley first saw them in Henry Cotterel's Han-chow garden.

All human stories begin a long way back. The more vital, more significant the story, the farther back its first chapter. To begin at the beginning of such stories is quite impossible. But intelligibility of this tale demands some brief recapitulation.

Henry Allingham had been thirty and more when he had gone to China to "shake the pagoda-tree," if he could. He had shaken it to his own great advantage, and had continued to shake it for years. He had left his wife and their infant son Desmond in England. She never had expressed any wish to join her husband in China. To do him, and his own somewhat irregular story, justice, Mrs. Allingham never had felt any wish to journey to China. The husband went home now and then; stayed a few months when he did. Desmond grew and thrived. And he was not an only child. His parents obliged him with a pair of brothers and the same number of sisters.

Henry Allingham brought rich and fascinating gifts to them all whenever he came from China, treated them handsomely in other ways—genially and indulgently. They always welcomed his arrival, but did not much object to his departures. He provided for them lavishly, more and more lavishly each year. The arrangement suited them both—the husband and wife—well enough. In a colorless way they were fairly good, if never intimate, friends. They never had a quarrel. They never had been lovers. Neither was of the stuff of which lovers are made.

Henry Allingham always was glad to come home. He did not like China—except for its "pagoda-trees"; he never wearied of them. On the whole he left his wife and their children more reluctantly than they were reluctant to have him go. The whole family affair was tepid.

No Black, with an exacting overseer's whip near, vigilant and ready, ever worked harder than Henry Allingham worked in China. The gold-fruited pagoda-tree never was shaken more assiduously than Henry Allingham shook it for more than a quarter of a century.

In those days there was little English Society in China.

Shanghai was a poor cluster of cheap houses insecurely set in a treacherous, unwholesome mud-flat. Englishmen were not welcome in Peking or encouraged in Canton. There was no English Club for this Allingham's relaxations. He was not a bookworm.

Often Henry Allingham went far off the beaten paths. He went—when he could—wherever pagoda-trees flourished thickly and unshaken. And he stayed in such remunerative localities as long as he deemed it most profitable.

Henry Allingham was full-blooded. He drank little, smoked less. But he did not live alone—either in Shanghai or up-country.

When they were young and amiable, sunnily obedient, he did not dislike Chinese women. After the fruitage of his pagoda-trees—a very long way after—he even approved them. Except those two things Chinese, there was nothing in China that stirred even a passing interest in Henry Allingham.

His intimacies with Chinese women were many. Most of them were brief. All of them were selfish, heartless. Sometimes they overlapped. He regarded the little, dark-eyed, soft-voiced Chinese women as his chattels. While he chose he kept them. When they ceased to please him he dismissed them. While they were in his service he kept and ruled them strictly. When he left them, or sent them away, he made no provision for them or theirs, gave it no consideration. While he kept them, he paid them or the relatives or others from whom he rented them. They never were girls of “family.” Henry Allingham met no women of the guarded courtyard class. Even so—of little social account as the Chinese girls of his intimacies were—Henry Allingham debased rather than enhanced the prestige of English manhood in China. He spoiled more than one Chinese woman’s life completely, irretrievably. Two of his young companions were addedly unfortunate enough to grow attached to their English “master.” One of them killed herself when he dismissed her.

But callous as this man was, he did feel something of the lure of Chinese femininity—almost the only thing that Henry Allingham ever did *feel*, the only inkling of her myriad message that China ever got through to him.

Nora, his wife, the daughter of a Bristol merchant, had inherited little from her Irish mother, and was almost as tepid as her husband.

But genius is not the only thing that runs underground in women. Desmond their son inherited a great deal from his Irish ancestors: charm for one thing, susceptibility for another.

Desmond went to China younger than his father had, China got more of her message through to Desmond Allingham than it ever had to Henry his father.

Desmond handled and pushed the Chinese end of the family business as ably as his father had—less ruthlessly, more deftly; and far more acceptably both to European competitors and to those Chinese with whom he had dealings.

There were more English in Shanghai by then: an English Club, English ladies, better buildings. The Shanghai miracle had begun.

Young, handsome, rich, a bachelor, Anglo-Shanghai welcomed Desmond Allingham cordially. There was no girl in it above his very possible matrimonial reach.

He showed no intention of seeking any one of them in marriage. If he had, his choice would have been narrow. Most of the English ladies already were married—the wives of men with whom he shared club and recreations. Allingham had no “affairs” in the Concession. To have had would have been inconvenient and even risky. More than that it would have been in dubious taste, smacked of disloyalty to some countryman whose hospitable bread he often broke, whose pegs he often drank. There are men who do such things—many of them. Desmond Allingham was not of their kind. “So-called men,” he would have termed them. Far from an anchorite, he never was disloyal to bread he had eaten. Desmond Allingham was of finer stuff than his father had been.

But his first recorded ancestor, Adam of Eden, was strong in Desmond Allingham.

As such lives went in Anglo-China then, he gave no fuel to scandal. He had his quiet experiences; most of the bachelors of the Concession, several of the Benedicts too, had more. He had his rooms near the Bund, and he had a bungalow not far from the Bubbling Well. There were many such bungalows, kept more or less discreetly there and thereabouts.

The Chinese girl who “kept house” in his was a permanency. She was a dear little woman, pretty—of course, deft in her housewifery, accomplished in the courtyard accomplishments of well-to-do Chinese homes. Her English “lord” invariably was kind to her; and as the years passed he grew very fond of her. He took some of his men friends to visit her—or rather had them as his guests at the bungalow, and did not screen Pun Fo away when he did.

Pun Fo entertained them charmingly, with a gentle kittenish dignity. They all liked her; and more than one of them envied Allingham. But every one of them knew that he must treat the Chinese girl with respect. Allingham selected with care the men he sometimes took “home” with him to the bungalow in the fragrant greenery of Bubbling Well.

Even then there were European men who married—legally married—Chinese wives: a few such men. Allingham considered them chumps. It never occurred to Desmond Allingham to marry Pun Fo; if it had occurred to him, he certainly would not have done it.

But he treated her well, always with courtesy, grew to care for her as much as without infatuation normal men of the West can care for yellow-skinned women,

grew to care for her as nearly unselfishly as a man of his caliber could for a woman whose relation to him was what Pun Fo's was. But he would have scorned any suggestion of marriage with her. No one made that suggestion—least of all Pun Fo herself.

He left her once for all when he left China. He made no pretense that their parting was not final. And Pun Fo bowed her head to it.

He left her provided for amply.

"Good-by" grieved them both; that it grieved him, perhaps her greatest consolation. They had no children. Pun Fo was sorry. Being Chinese, she adored children. She longed for babies of her own to cuddle—and made such pale shift as she could with babies she borrowed from their bungalow servants, when Desmond was not at home with her. He, being half Irish—his dominant half—too was fond of children. But half-caste children, amazingly pretty as most of them were, always seemed to him not a little pathetic, and harassingly problematical. Half-caste children in his own courtyard would have appalled him, he knew; and he believed that they would have revolted him even while he loved them. For he knew that it would not be in him not to love Pun Fo's children who were his.

If they had had children, it would not have led him to marry Pun Fo. But it would have made his going from her harder for them both perhaps. He probably would have made permanent provision for such children—unwanted children—but the thought of them would have nagged him in England. He might not have been able quite to forget them. His memories of Pun Fo did not disturb him in any way; they were pleasant memories—until they faded away.

Desmond Allingham was not an old man when he left China. He did not intend to come back. He might, he knew, alter his mind. He did not intend his Chinese interests to suffer. But he left such details of his Chinese affairs as he could not, he believed, handle efficiently in England, in hands he had proved competent and was confident he could trust.

That was a risky experiment. But James MacDonald justified it.

Desmond Allingham never went back to China.

He married in England—an Irish girl who was lovely and in no way tepid. Their marriage was unusually happy. The three children were as lovely as their mother. When Desmond Allingham of Leadenhall Street and Beach Park in Norfolk thought of Pun Fo, he thought of her kindly but never with regret. And he thought of her less and less often.

He often told his wife and his children of China—of what he had seen and learned there. Mrs. Allingham always was interested. Everything interested Alys

Allingham. And an uncle, who had gilded much of her childhood, had spent many years in China. And she loved the sound of her husband's voice.

Rose and Miriam enjoyed hearing their father's stories of China—sometimes; rather oftener they were bored.

But Edward the boy could not hear enough. He was born, his mother said, with a craze for China. And hers was less of an exaggeration than maternal pronouncements concerning only sons often are.

When Edward was eighteen the father died suddenly.

The boy was grieved—even more grieved for his mother's grief than he was hurt by his own keen sense of loss. He begged to leave Oxford—to which he had gone only a few months before—that he might be the closer with his mother. She would not permit it.

They compromised.

The 'Varsities are not niggardly of vacation. Edward spent every hour of his with his mother—her servant and lover. In term time she spent more days at Oxford than most undergraduates would relish even the best-liked and least discreditable relatives doing. Edward wished that she would spend all of all his terms there.

Men came to half expect to find Mrs. Allingham there before them when they dashed up his stairs and into Allingham's rooms.

They always were glad to find her there. At forty Edward's mother was as radiant and beautiful as she was gracious. She queened it delightfully over Edward's friends; scolded and encouraged them, each according to his need. She saved more than one from raw young disaster, literally dragged one up out of it. They all adored her. They amused her vastly, and she felt sisterly kindness for them.

She loved her son every bit as deeply and tenderly, if not quite as violently, as he loved her.

And had it not been for Rose and Miriam, probably Alys Allingham during term times would have left Beach Park and the house in Brompton Square to the more-or-less mercy of servants, and have "kept" all his terms with Ed. But she did not intend to let her girls be 'Varsity hangers-on. She had a swift and sure sense of proportion, and she had good taste.

A year after Edward "came down" his mother died.

Edward thought and hoped that the blow would kill him. Possibly it would, but that mothers' deaths do not kill boys of twenty-four. Little as he clung to it, life clung to him.

Rose, his senior, had been married a year. Miriam, two years his junior, was engaged. She accepted Rose's invitation to make the Grants' home hers until her

marriage.

At first the sisters gave little thought to Edward. His grief was not hysterical; not once noisy. It was too great. And he was manly, and had inherited from his mother the breeding and fine taste that not even sorrow—even the sharpest and most desperate—can degrade, make peasant and clamorous. Her girls had loved their mother dearly; she one of the rare and rarely happy women who are born to be loved. In their own grief they did not at first realize that Edward's suffering was beyond theirs, and was even dangerous. But when their own sincere grief was a little spent they did—saw how deep their brother's hurt.

"What are we to do with Edward?" Miriam asked her brother-in-law one evening.

"Yes; he's in a bad way," Grant agreed. "Do with him? H'm—I wonder! Could you get him to slip off to China for a bit—see into his affairs there for himself? H'm?"

Rose Grant caught her husband's hand. "Gerald! You've got it!"

"Yes," Miriam echoed gratefully. "You've got it, Gerald."

"Hope so," the man said doubtingly. "It might help, and it might not."

"If it doesn't, nothing will," Miriam said.

"It will help," Rose insisted. "Of course, it will!"

"Hope so," Grant repeated. "Worth trying, perhaps. But can you get him to go?"

"That's the rub," Miriam owned.

"He's got to go," the older sister said stoutly. "We've got to make him go; that's our part."

"You girls might go with him, or one of you—stay with him six months or so. Let him hang on there, if he took to it."

"Poof!" Miriam scorned. "Not me!"

"He won't want us, or either of us," Rose Grant told her husband. "We'll make him go. But he'll go alone; he'd rather, and we'd rather, and it will be best for him too."

"If he'll go," Grant reminded them.

Edward went without persuasion.

He had not thought of doing it. He had thought of nothing since his mother's death—he had only felt.

But when Miriam suggested it, he consented at once.

"Might as well," he replied. He said it listlessly. But it almost seemed to Miriam that, unsuspected by himself, the idea interested him.

"We've done the trick!" she announced to Rose and Gerald.

"Hope so," Grant told her.

“Perhaps when he’s there his old craze over China will reassert itself, take him out of himself—actually help him. He was wild about China when we were children.”

“Oh, I hope it will,” Miriam said fervently.

“H’m,” Grant remarked dubiously.

Two weeks later Edward Allingham sailed for China; a longer, less commonplace voyage than it is now.

His sisters rejoiced, and made much of Gerald Grant.

Two years later, when they heard that Edward had married a Chinese wife, actually married her, Mrs. Grant and Lady Rawlins were aghast, and wished Edward had stayed in England, ossified or even perished there, rather than have made that fatal sailing for China.

“And he says he may never come back home. Isn’t sure his wife would like it here. We must go out and visit them!” Miriam Rawlins sobbed.

“Edward never come home!” Rose Grant said unsteadily. “Live the rest of his life in China!”

“H’m,” as often, was all that Grant said.

The sisters both were crying now.

Grant slipped from the room.

But neither then nor after did either Rose or Miriam ever remind Gerald Grant that it was at his suggestion that Edward had gone to China.

They were extraordinarily nice women.

CHAPTER IV

China thrall'd Edward Allingham from his first day there. He did not feel an exile from England. He felt that he had come home; the unusual feeling grew.

Already Shanghai was rich—English Shanghai—and richly social. But Allingham, with the first eccentricity of his well-ordered Englishman life, deliberately elected to find friends and exchange hospitalities among the Chinese. The mingling of Westerns and Easterns now so general in some treaty ports, at least on the surface, had scarcely begun then. But it was in the air, here and there. And Allingham, quietly determined to learn something of the people of the land that so fascinated him, found ways to achieve his desire.

He did not, as so many Europeans did, and do, class all Chinese together. He realized from the first that the home of imperial arts and supreme literature, great architecture must be also the home of an imperial race, the home of many fine and interesting personalities. Human charm must, he thought, go hand in hand with such charm of cultivated Nature; gardens more beautiful than he had seen in Europe, scenery adored and reverently emphasized and enhanced.

He had met a Chinese diplomat or two in London and at Oxford. To Allingham's unaffected pleasure, he came across one of them again in Shanghai, and claimed acquaintance with a courteous bonhomie that the courteous Chinese could not rebuff.

Little by little the young Englishman won his way into the Chinese man's confidence, and at last—much less easily—into his Chinese friend's courtyards.

Koo Wing was "advanced," far advanced for that time, or it could not have happened.

For himself, Koo Wing, the Chinese gentleman, was invulnerable to flattery. Indeed the most laudatory words that any Englishman could bring himself to pronounce could be but scanty and cold compared to the excessive exaggeration of all Chinese courteous speech. But for his country, even for his countrymen, Koo Wing was flattered and touched by this exceptional Englishman's so evidently sincere and respectful appreciation of China, and eagerness to see and know more of China and of the Chinese.

An accomplished scholar in his own country, Koo Wing too had traveled far. He had not particularly liked Europe or admired what he had seen of Western ways. But he had gathered some ease towards Europeans, even some smattering of surface acquaintance with Western culture. He spoke English, not well but

intelligently—as far as his English vocabulary went. He was instinctively broadminded. Being Chinese, he was tolerant. In much he was somewhat lax. He was greatly more interested in his scrolls—books and pictures—in the poems and essays he brushed, in his race's history, in China's philosophy, in his flowers and his birds than he was in things of more material moment.

The encroachments of the white races did not disturb Koo Wing; he scarcely realized them. Nor could he have conceived that they menaced China.

He liked and respected Edward Allingham. He liked him more and more as the months passed.

When Allingham, two years after his arrival in China, told Koo Wing, that he wished to marry Shang Yon Yee, Koo Wing was unpleasantly shocked. He said so, but with the gravest courtesy. When he learned that Shang Yon Yee was quite as anxious to marry the young Englishman as he to marry her, Koo Wing was pained. He told her so, but he showed no violence about it either then or at any time. And after a time, a decent time of decent remonstrance, Koo Wing, the exceptional Chinese, made no insuperable difficulty.

Just then Koo Wing was writing a history of the Chinese drama. The rest of his life scarcely could suffice for the monumental work he had planned, and was eager to accomplish with distinction—eager for the book's sake, not for his own. He disliked any long or unsettling interruption of his engrossing task much more than he disliked the idea—crass as it was—of an Anglo-Chinese marriage at the edge of his own courtyard.

Allingham asked for no dowry with Shang Yon Yee, which was fortunate. Shang Yon Yee was penniless; and Koo Wing, who was poor, could not have provided her with even a modest wedding portion except by selling some cherished treasure—an ivory, a picture, a bronze or a jewel. To do that would disembowel him, Koo Wing believed.

He had been anxious because of Shang Yon Yee. She was not his daughter. And she was a widow. No Chinese gentleman ever could be induced to accept her in marriage. Koo Wing would not have tolerated anything less for her. Nor would he have seen her toil—had that solution been practical, which it was not. While he lived she would be cordially welcome to her simple share in his simple *chia*. But it constantly troubled him to wonder what her lot would be after he had joined his ancestors.

After his first surprise and disgust, his feeling of betrayal, Koo Wing softened considerably to the astonishing proposition.

Shang Yon Yee was only seventeen. She never had seen the husband whose

widow she was. He had died when she was six. And she cursed him for it. She so loathed the stringent conditions of widowhood, greatly though Koo Wing relaxed them for her, that she made faces at her dead husband's name whenever she heard it. She ought to have been whipped for doing it—most Chinese widows would—but indulgent Koo Wing looked the other way. He pitied Yon Yee, and he had loved dearly her mother, his sister.

Shang Yon Yee was an orphan. He had taken her into his own care when her mother had died. Her father's people callously preferred such bestowal of the girl.

Never would Koo Wing have failed his sister's only child—his sister weltering in Purgatory because no son or grandson survived her—but he was well content to remember that Shang Yon Yee would not stay with him long. When she was twelve and her husband fifteen she was to be carried to her father-in-law's household; so the betrothal document stipulated.

The bride was still in her cradle when their marriage rite had been performed: a proxy marriage that greatly inconvenienced the families living half the length of China apart. The boy bridegroom died. His family refused to receive the five-year-old widow, refused to burden themselves with her. Koo Wing might have forced them to do so; but he had scant means and less stomach for the lawsuit, which might or might not have gone in his favor. Unobservant as he was of jurisprudence in practise, he knew how often justice miscarried in China. Most of all, his pride forbade him to force, if he could, his sister's child upon an unwilling family; his heart forbade him to sentence her to probable unkindness.

But her future was a bitter problem to Koo Wing; at times he too could have made faces at the name of Shang Fang.

Much as his Chinese gorge rose at it at first, much as his caste sense resented it—all Westerns were inferior ones in Koo Wing's estimation—the marriage that the rich and otherwise desirable Englishman offered had its points, Koo Wing gradually realized. He did not like it, but for some things he did not dislike it. He was glad to see indubitable happiness cream and flush on Shang Yon Yee's face. And he liked its convenience to himself.

And when in honeymoon contentment Allingham offered and pressed an incredible sum of money to enable Koo Wing to purchase the adoption of a living, lusty son for Koo Wing's sister, the mother of young Mrs. Allingham, Koo Wing accepted the Anglo-Chinese marriage cordially and unaffectedly. To have done less would have been both churlish and ungrateful. No Chinese is ungrateful. Koo Wing was no churl.

Her adopted son, worshiping at her grave, released Ma Koo Lu from Purgatory,

gave her an honored place in the Chinese Hereafter, made her a respectable ghost.

Naturally Edward Allingham did not believe that it did anything of the kind. The superstition was absurd—as absurd as several of the superstitions that had, he knew, hosts of convinced adherents at home in England. He wondered if Koo Wing really believed it either—Koo Wing who seemed so sane and sanely thoughtful.

But there was no doubt that Yon Yee believed it implicitly. Her mother's rehabilitation gave her great joy.

To give his little wife a much smaller satisfaction, Edward Allingham would have paid many times the sum he had given.

He was deeply in love with his Chinese wife.

To have pleased her, he willingly would have purchased a son for her first husband, for whom he had no ill-will, since she never had seen him; had even a sense of thankfulness to the eight-year-old urchin who so obligingly had died, leaving an adorable widow to become the fascinating bride of Edward Allingham.

But little Mrs. Allingham hinted no such wish. And when Edward half jokingly suggested it, she screamed out at him prettily. Shang Fang was the concern of his own family, she exclaimed. If "Ned" had the much price of adopting a son to give, far much better he buy with it some pearls, and give them to her.

Allingham did.

Sore from his mother's death when he came to China, his own countrywomen in Shanghai, for some reason, had jarred on him. The quiet girl with the butterfly hands, the demure face, eyes that twinkled and laughed on the very slightest provocation, dove-like voice, soothed him strangely; soothed his sorrow the more because she was not of his mother's race.

The quiet of Koo Wing's courtyard calmed Allingham's troubled spirit. And there there was nothing to remind him poignantly of his mother; in the British Concession there was much. Sydney Gore and his mother were devoted to each other. It hurt Edward Allingham to see them together, reminding him bitterly of what he had lost. In the Chinese *chia* he was in another and different world. He grudged English women, dancing and driving and smiling in Shanghai, the life his mother had lost—she so much fairer and sweeter than they, so much worthier to live. The quiet existence of the ladies in Koo Wing's courtyard would not have suited his vibrant mother, never reminded him of what she had lost. He did not grudge those quiet Chinese women anything they had; it did not occur to him that they had anything that had been taken away from her.

Shang Yon Yee attracted him at once. He thought her delicious—and quite the prettiest thing he ever had seen. He fell in love with her before he knew it, and he

knew it before long; knew it for life's greatest certainty, the second unalterable fact of his life. He knew that for weal or woe he loved Shang Yon Yee. And one night, far out in the garden, while the nightingales sang their throbbing bridal songs, when he took her into his arms and kissed her, Shang Yon Yee knew it too. She never had been kissed before—but it neither startled nor revolted her. His lips on hers was a sacrament between them. They knew that she was his.

Edward never had had a love affair in England. He had not needed one. His mother and the life at Oxford had filled his days and his nights with wholesome contentment. Boy and young man, he was constitutionally clean. And he loved his mother too splendidly for cheap “love” to allure him.

From the moment when he discovered that Yon Yee was dear to him, he thought of nothing less than marriage. He had broken Koo Wing's bread. It was not in Alys Allingham's son to smirch hospitality, most emphatically not in him to outrage that of a man of another race who had so trusted him, wrenched every adamant rule of Chinese social law and family tradition aside in favor of the alien stranger within China's not often welcoming gates. But to all that Allingham gave no thought. He loved Yon Yee, and he was clean.

That she was a widow he thought a wild joke. And Shang Yon Yee thought it so too, after the night when he drew her to him, and kissed her, out with the crimson jasmine and rose celandines while the nightingales sang to the scented yellow lilies.

They were married—twice: English fashion and Chinese. Allingham insisted on the first, Koo Wing demanded the other.

The Chinese nuptials were not formidable. A widow, if she marries—luck she rarely has, especially among the sash-wearers—is wedded with scant ceremony. A few gifts interchanged, two tiny tied-together wine-cups drained, a bow to each other, a deeper obeisance to her outraged ancestors, served to make Shang Yon Yee Edward Allingham's wife as far as she and Koo Wing were concerned.

The Concession scoffed—then shrugged and forgave. Edward Allingham was very rich.

He cared as little for the forgiveness as he had for the scoffing—nothing at all.

They were very happy.

Koo Wing saw the odd marriage a success. Even Frances Wilson, the bitterest-tongued woman in White Shanghai, had to own that the Allingham marriage was a success.

Why?

They pleased each other in every way, and did not care whom else they pleased or displeased. They were deeply in love; yet too they were sensibly and practicably

companionable.

She gave him peace, she gave him love—his for her, hers for him. After marriage she gave him ecstasy. It did not pall. She kept his home admirably.

He gave her ardor and tenderness. She knew him manly, and almost could have believed him a god.

Edward Allingham never acquired her ways—the ways of her people—but he never offended them, nor did they offend him. They interested him, some of them he came to think admirable—for Chinese. She acquired his ways—the ways of his race—surprisingly. Even Mrs. Wilson had to own that she did.

Chinese and Manchus were not allowed to marry each other, but the law sometimes was disobeyed—though very rarely in Peking itself. Mrs. Allingham's paternal grandmother had been a Manchu. Many a Manchu lady, dressed as a European, would have passed for one. Some Manchus are white-skinned. Yon Yee Allingham was not, but in the European clothes she sometimes wore she might have passed in the West for a Jewess or an Italian of short stature—until she spoke. She had a merry mind, acute, not profound. But who wants a profound woman? Edward Allingham did not. If she spoke English with a tinkle of Chinese accent and intonation, she learned it quickly—enough of it to suffice—spoke it prettily with a clear Manchu voice—and her husband loved to hear her.

They were very happy—for several years.

Then England—British insularity, if you will—reasserted itself. Allingham never ceased to love his docile, little Chinese wife, but sometimes he wearied a trifle, not knowing at first that he did. Then that worst of all wearying was oftener, clearer; until the day came when he caught himself almost repenting his marriage and blamed himself that he did.

He played the game.

And he rejoiced that Yon Yee never suspected that for him their rapture, their entire content, had worn a little thin. He rejoiced that he was able to guard her happiness, keep it complete and unsuspecting.

Allingham never took his wife to England. This was not because he shrank from being seen with her in England. He did not—or never suspected that he did. If he had suspected that, he would have gone to Europe with his Chinese wife. Edward Allingham from first to last played the game with Yon Yee. He believed that she was much happier in China than she would be in Europe. Believing it, he would not take her out of China, not even for a brief return there for which he often longed. To go without her never occurred to him. If it had, he would have despised himself that it did.

Three years after their marriage their only child was born. Allingham was glad that it was a daughter—he did not know why. But silent, gently smiling, very lovingly Yon Yee Allingham knew. She knew that Edward unconsciously felt that in the years to come a “Chinese” daughter would be to him a less embarrassment than would a son.

And the wife knew that sometimes their marriage irked her husband. She gave no sign. She loved him passionately; more loyally, more unselfishly than passion often can. She knew that it would pain him to so much as suspect that she sometimes thought that he had a little regretted, and had winced now and then, or that she ever felt that for him their companionableness had waned in the least.

He had spared himself nothing to spare her pain; he should never learn that he had not succeeded.

They both were fine—vintage—the best of two splendid races.

Yon Yee Allingham never left her childbed, until they lifted her cold body into its coffin.

When they both knew that she was dying she smiled at him and comforted him. “I have had a long lifetime of great happiness,” she told him. “It is more joy to me to be dying here on our pillows than to have all that the gods themselves could give me apart from you.”

She caressed the wee head nestled on her bosom, and clinging to her husband’s hand made her first urgent request of him.

Allingham, sobbing, swore to grant it, swore to fulfil it always.

And now, for more than twenty years, Edward Allingham had kept his promise.

Dying Yon Yee had begged him to give equal shares in their child’s life to China and to England, to Chinese influence and to English influence. Edward Allingham had given his word. He had kept it as even the pledges of honorable men rarely are kept.

“Let her, I entreat,” the dying woman had said, “know both our lands, both our peoples, both our cultures, until she is old enough to know herself to which she should cleave, with which her happiness is.”

The words were shrewd and thoughtful. Edward Allingham thought them acutely so. He always had known that Yon Yee was not dense, had a pretty wit, thought as quickly as she was slow to speak. But it was those, her death-bed words, that told him the quality and strength of her mind.

He gave her the assurance she craved, and gathered her into his arms for the last time.

Just at the last she spoke again.

“Call her Lois. The English word is sweet; too it has a sound of our tongue—

mine.”

Allingham knew that she did not hear his broken reply. But he knew that she had known how surely he would obey.

English prayers were read at her funeral, Christian commitment. But he laid her in a Chinese coffin, in a Chinese grave, in a lovely spot he chose and bought. He walled her grave-garden with cypress trees. He laid wine and rice on her grave. He paid the necromancers highly to pronounce the *fêng-shui* of the new burial-ground fortunate; did it because he believed that she would have wished it.

He wondered sadly if, and how much, she sometimes had longed for Chinese customs that she as his wife had more and more discarded; wondered how badly she had lacked Chinese companionships, the women of her own race.

He thanked God that she never had sensed that once or twice he had felt something alien, some disjointment in their marriage.

He reproached himself that he had. He gathered her child close and vowed that he would atone to it for the wrong he involuntarily had dealt its mother.

He missed his wife. He grieved for her.

He clung to their child.

He kept his word—his impulsively given word—for more than twenty years.

Call him a morbid sentimentalist or even a sickly one, call him weak—or call him a man; concerning such things, tastes differ widely. This is his story, not his defense.

CHAPTER V

In English Han-chow, Shanghai, the other Concessions and Settlements, Lois Allingham was accepted as English, usually even considered English. And there—in the conceded corners of China so acutely English—she thought of herself as English.

It was only when some stray newcomer like Tom Dudley caught her Chineseness and questioned, that the Settlement and she herself were reminded that she was not altogether English.

In *Chinese* China, wearing Chinese garments, alone there with Chinese friends, in Chinese conditions and surroundings, she sometimes forgot that she was in part English. And the Chinese there who loved her forgot it too, or held it of no importance.

But Edward Allingham never forgot that his daughter was half-caste. It hung over him a perpetual threat—a hair-held sword that he feared and could not escape. What chance was there that it would not fall and cut? Little.

As he saw more of her, as their acquaintance grew, Dudley lost his first sense of her Chineseness.

Cotterel—less observant than the journalist—met her several times before he caught it at all.

Betty, as they danced together that first night at Red Bridges, saw how often Cotterel's eyes followed Lois.

Betty was glad. She liked Henry Cotterel very much. And yet she was anxious. She was sure that he did not know that Lois' mother had been Chinese; had not happened to hear it, and had not seen it for himself. How would it affect him when he knew? Would it revolt him?

She and her brother had seen a good deal of Cotterel in England a few years ago. Charles had pronounced him sterling. Betty set great store upon her brother's opinion of other men. She never had known him to misjudge a man who had interested him. Unlike herself, Charles was slow to form such opinions, and slower to pronounce them. When at last he said, "nice chap," his sister did not hesitate to show the nice chap frank friendliness. When Char pronounced a man "A 1" his sister had no doubt that that other man was a very desirable acquaintance, a friend to be coveted.

When they had known Cotterel for six months Monroe had pronounced him a "nice chap," when they had known him two years, Monroe had pronounced him "A 1."

Accepted at her brother's estimate, Miss Monroe had grown to like Cotterel quite on her own account, and to like him very much, during the three years of their acquaintance in England.

Here in China they had met again only a few weeks ago. Oddly enough Cotterel, a rolling stone, had been in Mo-kan-shan for a year, the Monroes had only come up from Shanghai a few weeks ago.

They all had been glad at the reencounter. Betty Monroe liked Henry Cotterel every bit as well in China as she had in London.

She had seen at once that Cotterel was delighted with China—the little of it he had seen. But she had seen that the Chinese did not attract him, that he neither understood nor approved them, and probably never would. He was that sort of Englishman. Most Englishmen are.

Incapacitated from birth, they never gain the finest cosmopolitanism—no matter how much or how far they travel—never are able to hold the scales quite fairly between other races and their own English race. They lose a great deal. Perhaps they gain something.

Great English diplomatists, and many English soldiers, outgrow this insularity and international handicap. Cotterel was not of the stuff that makes great diplomats. Miss Monroe judged that presently he would grow tired of China, sell Red Bridges or leave it to molder, and hurry back to Piccadilly and Pall Mall. She believed that he would know the Chinese no better, and like them no better—if as well—on his last day in China than he had on his first. And she believed him the type of Englishman to whom every half-caste must be “a stench in the nostrils,” even less to be accepted on a social parity than full-blooded Hindoos, Chinese or Egyptians.

Cotterel thought how beautifully Betty Monroe was dancing. He always had liked to dance with her.

He did not hear her sigh.

Betty Monroe would have given a good deal to see Lois happily married—a great deal to see her happily married to Henry Cotterel.

The older girl's affection for Lois was real. But Betty knew that her wish to see Lois happily married was not altogether unselfish.

If Charles had wished to marry Lois, Betty Monroe would not have resented it. But Charles had shown no such inclination. Just as well, probably; for Betty was sure that any such inclination on her brother's part would have caused Lois only dismay and amusement.

She believed that Charles never would marry. That was a bore! She would love to have nieces and nephews—in default of the children of her own which she knew

that she'd greatly prefer. For she feared that she, too, would not marry. Thirty was not old, of course, a girlish age these days. But there was another reason.

Too wise to introduce the subject of Lois, Miss Monroe was glad that Cotterel did when they sat down. And she smiled a little to herself that he did it indirectly. Cotterel was not often indirect.

"I believe that Mr. Allingham is the handsomest Englishman I have seen," her host said as he took her fan.

"No, you needn't," Betty told him. "Here, give it back. I am not too warm, and I like to play with it myself. Give it back; I'd hate you, if you broke it."

"I don't break things."

"You might."

Cotterel relinquished the fan. He noticed that it was neither new nor valuable. He thought that it did not go too well with the dress that Miss Monroe was wearing.

"Yes"—satisfied about her fan, Betty replied—"they are a good-looking pair, aren't they!"

"Awfully good-looking. Worth talking to too."

"Have you talked with Mr. Allingham much?"

"Not yet. But I have a bit. I don't know them well—yet. Didn't know them until the other night. I took Miss Allingham in to dinner at Lady Saunders'. By-the-way, you were not there; why?"

"I 'Why' is your favorite word, isn't it? I was not there, because I was not asked. Lady Saunders doesn't like me. She invites me to her big things. She has to. We all have to ask us all to big blow-outs. But she does not invite me except when she jolly well has to."

"But, I say, I like her. I wish you did."

"I do. I like her immensely. But she has no use for me."

"I don't believe it!"

"Good man! What lovely manners you've got! It happens to be true all the same. You ask her. You shine at asking questions. Lady S. shines at giving snappy answers. She'll jolly well tell you all right. Well—you took Lois in to dinner—go ahead."

"I only just met Mr. Allingham that night. But the next day when I called I was lucky. Both Miss Allingham and her father were at home. I'm afraid I stayed an indecent time. I found Mr. Allingham awfully interesting. I like him very much."

"Oh"—in alarm—"do you dislike Lois? Poor girl!"

They both laughed again.

"Awfully good of them to come to-night," Cotterel said.

"How many regrets did you get?"

They both laughed.

"We don't refuse invitations in Mo-kan-shan. And we all were bursting to see your new palace."

"Like it?"

"Not too well."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Ask Paul Trench."

"Why?"

"He will give you better value. And he is a very patient man. I am not. And I couldn't make you understand."

"Trench and I don't hit it off. *You* tell me. Or, I'd rather ask Mr. Allingham. I haven't seen his place in Norfolk. But I know that it's top-hole."

"No, no! You mustn't do that," Miss Monroe cried.

"Why not?" Cotterel was amazed at the alarm he heard in her voice. He was sure that it was genuine alarm. "Why ever not?"

"Please don't. I'll tell you myself why I don't like this wonderful new place of yours. Not now; it would take too long. You have other guests here now—quite a few. And it's high time you toddled off and did the nice-nice to them all: a smile and three honied words all round."

"I suppose it is," Cotterel owned with a sigh. "I'd rather stay here and rag you."

"Oh—were you ragging me? I believed that the shoe was on the other foot. Go and do your duty."

"All right. I know that the advice is sound. But when will you tell me why you don't like this place? I have a particular reason for wishing to know."

"Oh—I'll tell you all right. The first good chance. Next time you come to see me, if I'm alone."

"As bad as that?"

"I certainly should not neglect my other guests to educate you about architecture and garden planning. But, dear me, what a lot we are making of nothing! But I tell you what, I'll run in and have tea with you—"

Miss Monroe broke off with a tiny gale of laughter.

"There, there, my dear man, don't look so alarmed! You don't need to. I am not going to propose to you—now or ever. And I give you my word of honor, Harry, that if you proposed to me, I'd refuse you."

"Why?" Cotterel demanded.

Betty replied with a derisive smile.

"Thank you just the same, thank you very much, but I will not marry you. Honor bright, I won't. But," she added gravely, "I can be a very good friend. Like to try me?"

Henry Cotterel bent down and laid his hand on hers.

"I'll make a point of being at home to-morrow—and alone. Come to tea?"

"Perhaps. If I don't, I'll pop in one day soon. But we won't make it an appointment. Appointments are damnable. Don't stay in. I'll catch you one day soon. I think it very likely that Lady S. will invite you to go to Si-wu with her to-morrow afternoon—"

"Oh, I say!"

"Fearful bore for you, I know. And I'm sorry for Lois and her father! They have promised to go. Need I remind you again that you have other guests here?"

"Let me take you back first—"

"To Char? No, thank you. I'm all right here. I shan't be alone long; don't you worry. Toddle off and propose to some one else; don't take my refusal too hard. You won't get many, I warn you. Keep mine for your collection of uniques. Be careful whom you ask next; she is sure to accept you."

"Is she? Then, it shall be our Lady Saunders. And here goes!"

Why, he wondered, had Betty Monroe shied so from his consulting Mr. Allingham about this house and garden? And she *had* shied; she had been downright frightened. Of what?

Miss Monroe was not alone long. But she contrived to watch her host for some time.

He went directly to Lady Saunders. But he paid his devoirs to her somewhat briefly.

He went from woman to woman, stayed a few moments with each, which was excusable, even obligatory to the host of so many guests.

He stayed no longer with Lois Allingham. But when he had made his hospitable rounds, he went back to Miss Allingham. And Betty Monroe was not the only woman there who noticed how long he stayed beside Lois then.

It was late before the gay gathering began to thin.

The Allinghams were among the first to go. Lady Saunders was the last.

"Did she accept you?" Miss Monroe asked as Cotterel tucked the light rickshaw rug about her knees.

"No; I accepted her instead—her invitation to West Lake. Seem churlish not to."

"Then I can't come to tea to-morrow! What a jolt! Jilt, I mean. How you hurt

me!” Miss Monroe pretended to be nearly in tears, before she giggled.

“But you will come one day very soon? You promised,” Cotterel reminded her, ignoring both her sorrow and her mirth. “See that you do, and I will not ask Mr. Allingham what’s wrong with Red Bridges.”

Had Betty Monroe flushed a little? Cotterel asked himself musingly, as he watched her rickshaw out of sight. And, if she had, why the devil had she? Oh—his imagination of course.

But Mary Saunders could have told him.

To do Lady Saunders justice, nothing could have induced her to tell him, or any one else, that. Not altogether without cause reputed the scandal-monger of Anglo-China, she had her adamant discretions, and several unswerving loyalties of which few suspected her.

CHAPTER VI

After the last guest had gone home Cotterel stood alone in his garden for some time, thoughtful and deliberating.

It was late. But midnight or after is nothing to a man who has no need to bestir himself in the morning until he likes. And in China most Westerns take on something of Chinese disregard of time.

The night was full of perfume, and full of delicate music.

The birds were abed. No human noise rasped the garden. But breeze-touched tendrils and fronds thrummed lace-fine melody to the honied night, tiny things of fur scuttled across the verbenas, brushing the thick sweetness they softly bruised, fire-flies and larger insects of gossamer wing fanned tender "string" music into the silence as they flew.

And the garden was ravished with the languid breath of rose and lotus, lemon-flowers and heliotrope, of waxen lilies and harp-flowers, of mignonette and passionate carnations, and sweetest of all, the perfume benediction of the pendent, heart-shaped Kwan's-own-flowers that hung in lovely thousands among their exquisite foliage.

A rich man's pleasure—moon-flooded, star-jeweled—a place to dream in!

But Cotterel was not dreaming. He was thinking hard.

He rarely dreamed in his sleep. He never had had a daydream in his life.

He had a good work-a-day mind, but profound or intricate thinking was not in its easy scope. He lacked mental agility, but he thought exactly and carefully. A self-indulgent man, and intentionally so, yet he ruled himself. He rarely, if ever, deviated at all from the laws he had made for himself—making them because, after full consideration, he concluded them wise. A self-indulgent man who called himself to strict account about great things and small whenever he believed he deserved it—more often about small things than about great. He rarely concerned himself about great things, they rarely touched him. He set considerable store by the small things. They interested him. About them he was strict with himself—stricter with himself than he was with any one else. Tolerant of most others, he was a severe self-critic. Scrupulous of his clothes and in wearing them, he never had had a valet. He would have loathed having a valet.

Cotterel perhaps was a bigger man than he seemed.

He never had been tested. When one of life's big things touched him intimately—if one ever did—his reaction to it would show him even less or very much more

than he seemed.

Henry Cotterel stood completely still, taking himself to task.

He was not pleased with the host he had been to-night.

He had not divided his time and attentiveness between his many guests with the scrupulous rightness anything less than which smirched hospitality.

He had spent too much time with Betty Monroe. She was the one woman there whom he might, without the least offense, have neglected a little. They were such old friends, and their friendly footing so easy and informal that he well could have treated her with almost brotherly disregard, and given the time so saved to women whom he knew less well, newer and slighter acquaintances. But just because Betty was such good fun he had hung about her when he ought to have been paying his devoirs to others. If he too had been a guest, it would not have mattered. Within wide limits, a guest may please himself, always provided that he does not neglect his hostess—or her daughters. But he had not been a guest. A host must please his guests, and do it fairly; show no favoritism. Cotterel was vexed with himself.

Perhaps he also had given a trifle too much time to Miss Allingham. But he blamed himself less for that. He had met her so recently, he knew her so slightly. It *had* been very good of them—the father and daughter—to accept his invitation. (Monroe had vouched for him, no doubt. Monroe would.) That graciousness of theirs entitled him, almost enjoined him, to show them special welcome. Still—

He took out his cigarette case.

He'd smoke three before he turned in.

He lit a cigarette carefully. He did most things carefully.

The match bothered him a little when he had blown it out. He disliked litter. Especially he disliked it on anything that was his. The burnt matches of life—literal and figurative—always had been a problem to Henry Cotterel.

He moved across the garden, smoking, still holding the used match. He was as incapable of tossing it into the lotus pond's pure water as a Chinese would have been. Nor would he throw it under a shrub, in a flower-pot, or on a perfectly groomed path. Bother the match! He could return it to his gunmetal box among its abler fellows—a practise he disliked.

Embarrassed by a burnt match! Betty Monroe would have laughed at him, twitted him. She had called him an "old maid" and a "fuss-pot" more than once.

He sat down on one of his garden's beautiful carved benches, and put the offending splinter of aspen conspicuously on a dragon's stone wing where an early garden-servant would see and remove it—or be meritedly reprimanded.

The moon was blazing now. Almost it paled the stars. Hundreds of fire-flies

sparkled above the flowers, danced above the fragrant bushes.

They bred down in the melon patch beyond the honeysuckle trellis. And many of them Cotterel had bought from the itinerant insect-sellers; buying them to augment the night-time beauty of his garden and courtyards.

The green roofs of his long sprawling house looked deep silver in the moonlight, the bridge over there—one of the little red bridges from which he had named the place—looked pearly pink.

What a place! How it satisfied him! How near it was to perfection!

What the devil did Betty see wrong with it?

She'd been pulling his leg. Must have been! But, no, bother the girl, she had meant it!

Ask Trench! Not he. Mustn't ask Mr. Allingham! Why not? And why had Betty cared so? She had cared.

Perhaps he'd ask Miss Allingham if *she* saw anything wrong with "Red Bridges."

To him this place of his looked faultless. Look at the crinkled sweep of those perfect roofs! The delightful windows! There were no such windows in Europe. Could the courtyards in any old Spanish palace shame these of his? Had Italy a garden as lovely as this? And he had made this in a year. What would it be in ten years? Those hills up there, with the pagodas and shrines and memorial stones and arches, a turquoise sky by day, a blue velvet sky at night all stars, and most of the time a great big moon; look at it now! And all the rest of it. Could you beat it in Greece—Athens with the Acropolis behind it white and pink in the sunrise? You could not—not anywhere.

It was indescribable, and he wasn't much good at describing. But this was jolly good. Betty talked through her hat.

And the house inside was as right as all this was out here.

Perhaps she thought there were too many bridges. That Chinese "garden-artist" chap had hinted there were. But, "Whose place is it anyway?" or politer words to that effect, he had rejoined, and the "artist" chap had bowed and shut up.

Cotterel was proud of his red lacquer bridges. No two were alike, no two were within sight of each other. A mother couldn't have been prouder of bouncing triplets than this Englishman was of his seven red bridges. The "garden-artist" had advised and designed the first one. Cotterel had liked it so much that he had insisted upon having the other six.

He had been warned that the brilliant lacquer was not permanently weatherproof. The finer the lacquer, the greater care it needs. It could be renewed, Cotterel had replied. "Go ahead," was his ultimatum. They had gone ahead. And the

red bridges—all seven of them—glowed like jewels, and so pleased Cotterel that he named his pretty domain after them.

One spanned a corner of a lake. One spanned a carpet of foam-splashed flowers at a waterfall's base. One crossed a rivulet in front of the blue-tiled temple that Cotterel had had built for a smoking room. One crossed a sunken path that divided a willow-softened slope from a stretch of plum-trees. They all were beautiful and all beautifully placed.

That one would have been more beautiful than seven, Cotterel the Occidental could not see.

He crushed out the stump of his cigarette, laid it neatly beside the burnt match, lit a second cigarette and put another used match beside the first. If litter there must be, it was best to concentrate it. And the larger this small pile was, the surer it would be to catch a gardener's eye.

Burnt matches and cigarette stumps! Cotterel puckered his mouth a little at the problem of them. What was the solution? A fellow couldn't carry a little brocade bag on his arm, or saunter about his garden at midnight, wearing an ash-tray on his wrist watch.

The man sighed gloatingly with his pleasure as he looked about him.

He loved his homes. He loved making them. The little place in Spain, the low long house of white marble beside an Italian lake, and now this, his flat in London, the cottage—seventeen rooms and six acres—in Dorset; he delighted in them all: womanless homes he had made himself where and as it had pleased him.

He intended to keep them womanless.

Henry Cotterel believed in matrimony—for others. He intended not to marry. He had weighed it carefully, and had decided against it cordially. He had no entanglement, he never had had one. He never had had a “disappointment.” Frankly, he did not anticipate one, if he ever changed his mind, suddenly shed his disinclination for marriage. But he felt sure that he'd not change his mind.

He liked many women. A few women he liked very much. He enjoyed knowing companionable, stimulating and beautiful women. But he was convinced that he would enjoy life more without a wife than with a wife—even an ideal one. He knew—for Cotterel was level-headed—that there was not, never had been, and never would be, an ideal wife. He did not believe in the ideal, except as an abstraction.

Enjoyment was his aim, his consistent pursuit, and, he believed, his right. He was convinced that he would enjoy his life more and longer unencumbered, unthwarted by a wife. He believed that he'd not alter that decision. For he was convinced that he entirely fulfilled Socrates' difficult command—believed that he knew himself.

Cotterel was not offensively selfish. If he rarely went out of his way in search of a kindness to do, he even more rarely evaded any chance to do one that came his way. He was kind by instinct and on principle. He considered himself richly blessed—as he was—with wealth, health and commonsense. And believed that it was only decent of him to share, now and then, here and there. At thirty-two he never had done any one a wrong, never had been mean or vindictive. Critical, he was not apt to imagine flaws, and when he saw them was more apt to be reticent than to comment or report. His name rarely went on to a subscription list; when it did, only for moderate sums. He liked to slip twenty-pound notes into hospital boxes, if he felt sure that the hospital was a good one, larger notes sometimes, or a wad of tens, twenties and fives. He gave a good deal, and did a great deal of good. He enjoyed doing it, he very much more enjoyed no one else's knowing or suspecting that he did. He would not give to a beggar—in rags or in a coronet. But he was quick and lavish to relieve need that did not ask or seek.

He traveled and made himself “homes” to his much liking: his two passions. He could afford to indulge them. He saw no reason why he should not indulge them—and himself, he saw several why he should.

Unlike most travelers who jog about fairly comfortably, do a conscientious amount of sightseeing, but never explore, Henry Cotterel lived while he traveled.

Globe-trotting and sightseeing were not for him. He thought them both “peasant” and cheap; vulgar things that made you perspire and rubbed you up against garrulous bores and other undesirables.

When something he knew of a place—a fact or rumor—or sometimes only its name—attracted him, he went to it. And it made not the slightest difference to him whether the momentary Mecca were thirty miles away or thirty thousand. But if he could not reach there without roughing it unduly, he did not go. He liked the best—bed, breakfast, clothes, service. He preferred to travel luxuriously. He was not in the least ostentatious. He cared very little for the opinion of others; he cared a great deal for his own.

His good manners were not starched and were quite without frill. His conscience and his bearing were easy.

He was debonair.

Mecca reached—his Mecca of the moment—Cotterel did not explore it at once or feverishly. He sat down and let the place “get” him, if it could; let it “soak in.” If it disappointed him, he moved on leisurely. If Mecca “caught him”—it often did—he stayed there, settled into the place and lived there, made it his home, for weeks or months or a year—even longer once or twice.

This place with its seven red bridges, its prancing pottery “animals” guarding it on the edges of its curled roofs, its ordered tumble of flowers, its great soapstone “lanterns”—only three, its pretty waters—silken pools and little cascades of foam, its odorous hibiscus and its palm-like giant ferns, its miniature army of sleek, blue-clad Chinese servants, its very beautiful carved outer wall and painted gates, was the third “home” he had made for himself in alien lands.

Something of a dilettante, or at least leaning that way, Cotterel was no Miss Nancy—not a trace of it. He was physically brave; quiet about it, as all true bravery is. He was no mean athlete.

Brave in the bigger, more difficult ways? That had not been solved. And only time could tell—if it ever did. The test was yet to come—if it came.

He knew that his mind was ordinary—and didn’t care. His education at public school had been the not unusual scramble and dodge, except in sports. His two pleasant ‘Varsity years had dwindled out without a degree, although mathematics had rather attracted him. No tutor ever had thought him dull, or scholastically worth prodding.

“Quite a nice boy who wouldn’t work except at play; and had no need to.” He invariably had done badly at examinations—and didn’t care. They did not interest him in the least. He thought and called them “bosh.” (Great teachers have agreed with him there.) But life sets examinations that are far from “bosh.” How would the rich, self-indulgent, ill-prepared man pass one of them?

But no one ever had thought Henry Cotterel dull.

He held to convention. He respected good form. The “done” thing stood well in his regard.

There was much inconsistency in Henry Cotterel. Often the most interesting people are full of inconsistencies.

It never had occurred to Cotterel that he was interesting, and few others ever had thought him so. If he were, it was unexpressed as yet. Life might show him so sooner or later.

CHAPTER VII

Cotterel did not mean to stay in China.

That was no reason why he should not have a home of his own while he did stay there.

He had not cared greatly for Hong Kong. He had liked Shanghai less. When he had learned that Henderson was in Han-chow, he had welcomed his old friend's suggestion that they should meet. Henderson could not leave Han-chow just then, and might not be able to for some time. So, Cotterel had gone to him willingly.

He had liked Han-chow at once. And Mo-kan-shan had grown upon him oddly.

Henderson, who owned the acres which now were Red Bridges, had bought them believing it a good speculation, but intending to build himself a home there if the next two or three years were prosperous. Lucy Henderson loved Mo-kan-shan. They expected never to leave China except for infrequent visits "home."

Cotterel rather envied his old friend that delectable site of his.

Not long after Cotterel came to Han-chow Henderson's firm nearly crashed. There was a good deal of that in China now. Business insecurity and personal peril were rife in many parts of Anglo-China. Lucy's baby died. The mother's love of Mo-kan-shan turned to hate. "Take her home," the doctor advised. Henderson decided to cut his losses, and leave China.

Cotterel bought the Mo-kan-shan property at a generous price; even more pleased to do it than Henderson had been to have him do it.

It had taken Cotterel nearly a year to make this Chinese home of his. He had enjoyed every hour of it. The way he had urged and driven his workmen would have been a valuable object lesson to the most up-and-doing of turbulent China's many generals.

Cotterel had availed himself of the best advice he could get, employed an excellent interpreter, and directed everything himself.

The more he watched his native workmen the more he admired them, and respected Chinese workmanship.

And they did indeed give him good value. For he had the two great essentials for getting the best out of Chinese labor: abundant money and unflagging good nature. He paid them treble wages which nothing could induce him to increase—neither threats of strike nor Oriental fairy tales. And he laughed at them and with them, and joined in when they laughed at him.

Cotterel never will forget the building of that Chinese house of his and the delight

he had in watching it.

He indicated what he wanted, insisted upon getting it, and then let the actual builders and artisans alone. He watched them a great deal, but he did not fuss or interfere.

They made the roofs first, flat on the ground—half to the Englishman's dismay, much to his amusement. How the devil were they going to get the roofs up, and walls under them? Capable inch by capable inch they did, building down; lifting the elaborate decorated roofs up, and making perfect and secure walls as they did.

They scarcely used a nail. They dovetailed instead; wonderful dovetailing that made the Englishman watching them take off his hat to China.

And when the house was finished and furnished, and the gardens in bud, Henry Cotterel wondered which delighted him most.

And he gave the Chinese who had served him a splendid feast.

Yes, Red Bridges pleased him very much. Betty Monroe didn't know what she was talking about.

He believed that he might stay here much longer than he had stayed in his home in Spain or in his house of white marble beside an Italian lake. He might travel less in the future. The years were passing. One didn't live for ever. And England always would be his permanent home. Nothing could take the place of Piccadilly and a grave in Dorset. But there was no earthly reason why he should not stay on in China for another year or two or even three, if he wished. And he wouldn't sell Red Bridges when he went. Probably he'd not come back again so far. But he might. And he could afford to keep this little jewel of a place on the chance. Henry Cotterel was deeply grateful to his forefathers for their admirable thrift, industry and financial judgment.

He never had felt so much "at home" anywhere else out of England as he did here in Red Bridges.

He had meant to see the Wall and Peking, the Yangtze gorges and Soochow. But he rather thought now that he'd not.

Cotterel sauntered to the lotus pond, and sat down on its wide porphyry edge. He liked to watch the big fringed and feathered, red-eyed goldfish come up to race each other in the moon-illumed water, and play hide-and-seek under the great lily pads.

He was smiling, contented, self-pleased, home-glad, at peace as he lit his third cigarette. It would be his last to-night. When Henry Cotterel had planned to enjoy just three cigarettes neither moonlight, nor lotus flowers on silver water could make him light a fourth cigarette, nor could happy thoughts.

He smiled again—thinking now of Lois Allingham.

He knew that she had attracted him more quickly than he often had been attracted—and perhaps a trifle differently. He must be on guard. And he would.

He knew that he was susceptible, far from invulnerable. And he always fled when he began to care. But he wasn't going to let it come to that this time. No girl should drive him from Red Bridges. Certainly graceful, strange-eyed Miss Allingham should not.

But the Allinghams were not going to be here long. They had said so. And he had himself well in hand. He always did.

He liked Lois Allingham. She was delicious to watch. Her voice was music. Best of all, she was different from other girls. He couldn't make out what that difference was. It puzzled him. But he'd find out. Cotterel liked solving easy riddles. This one would be easy enough when he had seen a little more of her.

There was no more reason why he should not enjoy her acquaintance—well on his guard, scrupulous that she should not misunderstand him, he was always that—than there was any reason why he should not stay at Red Bridges as long as he chose to stay.

Miss Allingham—he lit a fourth cigarette—had charm as well as unusual loveliness. Charm was more than beauty; it was the soul and perfume of beauty, beauty's inmost secret.

He had only seen her three times! Odd that she rather haunted him. He believed that Betty knew it—well, what if she did?

Three times—but no; it was four. He had forgotten the morning at the tennis club. How graceful she was. And how badly she played tennis! She had said that she did not care for any games—except cards and chess, games of chance. Cotterel played tennis superbly, several other strenuous games as well. But he rather liked girls who disliked sports.

He got up presently and tossed a match and two cigarette stumps, one still burning, into the pool's immaculate water. He never knew that he had. It was the most significant thing that he ever had done. He'd not have understood that it was, if he had realized that he had done it.

Goldfish fought for the unusual spoils. The victors were so disgusted with Turkish tobacco that they left the match alone, and it found a lasting refuge under a big lotus leaf.

Cotterel went lazily into his house, just pleasantly sleepy, pleased with the success of his picturesque house-warming, pleasantly in love with Red Bridges.

CHAPTER VIII

"A stickler who never conforms," Paul Trench had called Mary Saunders years ago. He had neither said nor meant it unkindly. Trench was never unkind, and he was one of the few discerning ones who liked Lady Saunders.

His comment had not been unjust. Mary Saunders invariably did as she chose. But no one else was allowed to deviate by a hair's width from the strict rules of best behavior—if she could prevent it.

She disapproved of the new lax ways, tolerated no display of them in her house. Consequently her functions usually were a trifle stiff; their stiffness appetizingly relieved by the tang of her acid tongue. Many feared her comments, but most of her acquaintances liked to hear her quick, caustic talk, and endured the worst she could say or do, because she was such good fun.

Oddly enough the picnic at Si-wu degenerated into rather a go-as-you-please affair.

Like most eccentrics, Lady Saunders was a creature of variable moods.

She was careless to-day. Most of her guests followed her cue.

She marshaled them out to Si-wu. Arrived there, she fed them well—she never failed of that—and then told them to look after themselves and leave her in peace.

"Peace" meant a talk she wished to have with Trench and Allingham.

The others scattered willingly—in twos and threes as they chose.

Lady Saunders made herself very comfortable, at a safe distance from the Chinese who were repacking dishes and napery, and took Allingham and Trench with her.

"You may smoke, I suppose," she told them grudgingly.

Paul Trench offered her his case.

"Nasty habit," she snapped, selecting a cigarette. "Match!"

Allingham already had lit it for her.

"Listen!"

It had not occurred to either of the men to do anything else.

"I am going to sell my Nanking Road property."

"That is what you must not do," Trench told her. "You'll never get so good an investment again. Mo Foy pays you an enormous rent—"

The woman chuckled. "Of course he does. A ridiculous rent, even for Shanghai. He knows that Ling Pi itches to rent it. Mo Foy would murder his grandmother to spite Ling Pi."

"And he does all the repairs as well. It is iniquitous. But all the same you'd be insane to sell."

"All the same I intend to. I am sick of wondering what is going to happen in Shanghai next."

Allingham nodded. The other man's face grew grave. Neither of them doubted that foreign holdings were in peril all over China; and nowhere perhaps more than in Shanghai. And they both agreed with the remark of Stephen Digby that Lady Saunders had the best business head in the Settlement.

"There will be no sound peace in China until every vestige of extraterritoriality has gone. It affronts China's 'face' too abominably. You may rob a Chinese, and he may forget it. You may injure him in a dozen ways, and he will shrug and presently forgive and forget. But make him lose 'face,' and his resentment never will cease or grow less. It is even more true of the nation as a nation than it indisputably is true of every Chinese individual. The infamous Arrow War is over and done with. Some of its consequences remain and canker, of course. But the war itself is largely forgotten. And Gordon wiped out its shame, drew its sting, for the Chinese. One European who gives the Chinese a square deal, still more a European who treats them chivalrously, cuts deeper into Chinese sensibility and China's memory than hundreds who misuse and trick her; such is Chinese gratitude, their unalterable quality of gratefulness," Trench said.

"It is not the injury that extraterritoriality does China—if it does—that so exasperates the Chinese," he went on, "and that they find unendurable, not the tangible, actual harm, but the loss of face, the hurt to self-respect. Extraterritoriality *is* damnable!"

"Rubbish!" But Mary Saunders said it with less conviction than she usually spoke.

"So it is," Allingham agreed. "But when it goes, the chances are we'll have to go with it. And when we do, it—our going—will be the greatest injury we've done China yet."

"It's a beastly tangle," Trench agreed.

"China can't afford to have us go. And where would her absconding politicians and generals take refuge, if the treaty ports weren't ours, safe for them to scurry into and live like fighting-cocks?" the woman insisted.

"No," Trench agreed, "China cannot afford to have us go. But she can afford it many times better than she can to have her self-respect bled white."

"But we have promised to abrogate extraterritoriality, haven't we? We and all the other Powers?"

"Yes"; Paul Trench answered her significantly, "we have *promised*."

"But," Allingham added, "the hitch is a nasty one."

"Very nasty," the other man emphasized. "The conditions we make are necessary, the merest self-preservation, God knows, *but* insulting. 'Set your house in order, reform your laws, perfect your Courts and your judiciary, and we'll see about relinquishing our exterior rights or at least modify them.' Quite right, of course—from our angle—but what right have we to dictate to China how she governs her own country, works out her own salvation, *if* she can work it out? None at all—from China's angle."

"The right of necessity, perhaps," Allingham ventured.

"Good enough!" the Englishwoman decided.

"What do you value your Nanking Road property at?" Allingham asked her. There didn't seem any use in beating the troubled extraterritoriality cur any longer. "What would you take for it, if you sold?"

At her reply Paul Trench whistled, and Allingham laughed outright.

"I am not going to give it away!"

"Apparently not," Allingham said. "You'll not sell it for that, Lady Saunders."

"Several want it badly; one big firm does."

"Who would pay most for it?" Trench wondered.

"Ling Pi," the woman said instantly.

"Wrong," Allingham contradicted. "Mo Foy would outbid Ling by several thousands. Mo Foy is the warmer."

"Well, one of those two," Mary Saunders said indifferently. "And I suppose he could get one of *us* to buy it and hold it for him. Hold it until the law that prevents a Chinese from owning property in our Settlement is altered," she added with a sneer—the sneer of the superior and always-to-be-triumphant race.

"It will be altered when extraterritoriality goes," Trench said quietly.

"It must not go!" the Englishwoman said.

"We shall see," Allingham spoke as quietly as Trench had.

"But I don't think I want a native to have it. Too much of that in Shanghai already."

"And yet," Paul Trench said sadly, "Shanghai is in China."

"We made Shanghai," she reminded him.

"In China."

"Oh! You weary me. You who are English! Extraterritoriality; it's hanging over us all out here like a vulture!"

"Extraterritoriality *is* a vulture," Trench said sadly—not meaning it as she had. "*The* vulture-menace of China and of Europe-in-China to-day. Extraterritoriality, not

Russia. Extraterritoriality and the spirit of Sun Yat-sen.”

“Well then, what’s the way out?” she demanded.

Trench shook his head. “There isn’t any. Or, if there is, only Time will find it. We shall not.”

“I believe that your sympathies are with China, instead of with your own people as they should be,” the woman snapped at him.

“Of course they are—with China,” Trench said gravely. “All righteous sympathy must be. We have given China a blackguardly deal; exploited and throttled her, taught her the monkey-tricks of universal suffrage, manhood equality, liberal education, political power without the ability or experience to exercise it sanely, and quite without the strength to enforce it. Precious monkey-tricks that are disemboweling her, plunging her deeper and deeper into the internecine domestic wars that always have been her curse, and now threaten to ruin and exterminate her—Earth’s most glorious country, the great homeland of a first-class people. Yes; my sympathy is with China.”

“You are mad!” Mary Saunders sneered.

“Inconvenient justice often is called that,” Trench told her gently. “But why go over and over the old ground again? We came here against China’s wish. We exploited her international ignorance. And on the whole it has paid us magnificently. Now and then China has flicked us, even given us a taste of punishment, killed a few of us. On the whole China has taken us lying down. There are signs that she may not do it for ever.”

“I suppose you’d give them Shanghai—my property there included—Hong Kong, all the rest of it: everything here that is ours. We ought to thank her, oughtn’t we, when she massacres our women and children?”

“No; we should thank ourselves for that. It is our blame that they are here insufficiently safeguarded.”

“Some sense in that. I’d have every river in China crowded with gunboats.”

“They might get in each other’s way,” Allingham laughed.

Lady Saunders paid no attention to the flippant interruption.

“I’d have three English Tommies, armed to the teeth, here to guard every English woman and child in China. In the outlying places I’d have more. I’d make our women and children safe. The Chinese soon would behave when they knew that we were too many for them.”

“A masterly plan,” Trench admitted. “But who would pay all those thousands of soldiers? And who would provide them?”

“I’d make China pay them.”

“Again an excellent plan, if it were practicable. Notice, please, that I do not say a righteous plan. But you know as well as I do that it isn’t practicable. Personally I see no reason why China should pay our soldiers or provision our gunboats whose guns are trained on her junks and on her cities. If there were sufficient reason, and China could be brought to see it—(She has been made accept some pretty tall propositions already. But we gradually are opening her eyes.)—she could not pay our soldiers. She can’t pay her own. She can’t even adequately pay her own diplomats abroad. The men who accept many of those appointments have to finance them. Several princely private Chinese fortunes have vanished so. More are going the same pace, in a desperate attempt to save China’s face in the capitals of the Occident. The Manchu paid his servants. Your plans are large, but impossible.”

“What do you advise me to do—me personally?” She asked it rather bitterly.

“Sell everything you have in China, except what you own in Shanghai, and in Hong Kong. Put those in careful hands over here. Give them power to sell, or anything they thought advisable, and to do it quickly. And when you have, go back home to England *soon*.”

“While the going is good, I suppose you mean?”

“That is what I mean,” Trench said quietly.

“Would you take care of my things over here for me?”

“No, dear lady. It must be some one on the spot—some one in Shanghai. I am no good at all at business. And if I leave here at all, I shall go farther north, not towards Shanghai.”

“And, if it came to selling, you would not like to get the better of a Chinese!”

“Perhaps not. But it is not too easy to get the better of a rich and wide-awake Chinese. One who tried to buy your Nanking Road building, would be both.”

“Why don’t you come home too?” Mary Saunders would have given a good deal not to have asked the question. Allingham was surprised that she had. They both knew why Paul Trench probably always would shrink from returning to his birthland. They both knew he loved it well.

“This is my home now,” Trench said quietly. “I have taken root here. I have been glad to stay when, with reasonable precautions, China was safe as Hampstead. And I am not quitting now.”

She turned to Allingham.

“Do you too advise me to go home?”

“Sound idea, I believe.”

“But you keep Lois here! Why?”

“Lois has a right to be here, if she wishes. I am very careful *where* in China I

have her. I shall not take her to Shanghai soon again, and certainly not to Hankow or Tientsin or to Shantung. And, if trouble should come, where I think it won't, her Chinese relatives are very powerful. They are devoted to Lois and so is Chenn-yi Erh No."

"A ridiculous old woman whom no one thirty miles beyond her own gates ever heard of! A fat lot of use she'd be, if bad trouble came!"

"Of incalculable use," Allingham insisted. "The Lady Chenn-yi has not been well advertised in White-China, I grant you. I even agree that no great number of Chinese beyond her own estate and the estates of her kindred know her name. But she has immense power, enormous influence. She can make them felt half across China. Her friendship is more than several armies."

Trench wondered why Allingham's eyes had twinkled—he had spoken gravely enough.

Allingham had been tickled to hear Lady Saunders, who never had seen her, label Madam Chenn-yi "A ridiculous old woman." For the English woman and the Chinese always reminded him of each other. He thought them oddly alike.

"Will you manage my Chinese affairs for me, if I take Mr. Trench's advice, and cut and run? You can't say that you are a dud at business!" Lady Saunders demanded.

"Gladly at your service"—he did not exactly sound so—"if I were going to be in Shanghai much of our time here, and not going back home before very long. Trench is perfectly right in saying that whoever you leave in charge needs to be on the spot—and to remain there. Anything may happen in the next few years—perhaps much sooner."

Lady Saunders stood up.

"You are a helpful pair," she told them. "I don't believe you are much more anxious to fight the Chinese, even financially, than Mr. Trench is," she added to Allingham.

"My wife was Chinese," he replied with a quiet smile.

"Well," Lady Saunders announced as she moved away, "I am staying—in China—just as long as I like to. And I am going to Shanghai before long. If I decide to sell—I think I shall; I don't mind a bit of danger for myself, but I intend to keep the money Tom Saunders left me safe—If I decide to sell, I'll do the selling myself. I never had any intention of letting either of you or any other man or men botch it for me; I'm no dud at business either."

"No one better," Allingham said cordially.

"Humph!" was the thanks Mary Saunders gave him as she stalked away.

Allingham bent down and picked up her parasol.

Trench bent down and picked up her vanity bag, her gloves and her handkerchief.

They exchanged rueful smiles, and shrugged, and walking side by side followed Lady Saunders, careful not to catch quite up with her. She would call them to her when she wanted her belongings.

CHAPTER IX

And Henry Cotterel and Lois Allingham, strolling together at the edge of old Si-wu, as beautiful now as when Marco Polo had thought it the most beautiful spot on earth, were talking of extraterritoriality too. That smoldering tangle and menace did not interest Cotterel greatly. Lois scarcely had consciously given it a serious thought.

Everything always had gone right in her life. She was sure that everything always would. And no life but her own—and, of course, her father's—interested her much.

Cotterel was not financially involved in China. He had thrown a "tidy sum" into the new house at Mo-kan-shan, but not more than he could afford to lose several times over.

But extraterritoriality was in the air. The very leaves on the trees whispered it. The hibiscus trees told the bamboos, the bamboos told the violets; hibiscus, bamboo and violets were indignant; even the little Chinese violets were indignant. The very birds of the Chinese air were indignant, rebellious. Peasants, dumb with toil and poverty, so ignorant that they did not know that China was a republic now, spoke of it bitterly. They did not know the word. Their vocabulary had few and short primitive words. But they knew the thing and cursed it, cursing and hating the arrogant foreigners who had despoiled and shamed China.

Trench was right. It was less the thing itself than the shame because of it that was enraging China—and threatening Europeans.

It was arguable that, except for the injury it unavoidably was to her international prestige, extraterritoriality did China little, if any harm, beyond its providing places of refuge and security for absconding Chinese scoundrels—a very small fraction of China's many breakers and evaders of law. But, as individuals and as a people, prestige means more to the Chinese than it does to any other race. Peasants who never had heard of international prestige, yet valued it, resented its damage.

A very small proportion of the Chinese knew—fewer understood—the history of extraterritoriality. Nor did the majority of the Europeans who, in and out of China, talked about it anxiously, and many of them cocksurely.

Among the best-informed Europeans conscience and self-interest clashed.

Among the best-informed and most thoughtful Chinese self-interest and national pride clashed and locked. If, they argued, extraterritoriality was a slur on China and on her competence, even perhaps on her good faith, it too advantaged China in some important ways. It drew, and kept in China, immense and fluid capital. Destroy extraterritoriality, and probably many of the richest Western firms would leave China

at once or by degrees. That was one of the last things to be desired for China now—little as European imports and exports had been welcome at first, long ago. A great deal of gold flowed through China from Shanghai. A withdrawal of Western spending would be disastrous. China needed Western loans and credit, Western purchasings, and even needed Western friendliness.

Extraterritoriality gnawed at the vitals of China. But, do away with it, and a grave national disaster might result. The “feeling” of the people—the poor, uninformed proletariat of Young China!—was unanimous, but even the “Government” opinion was divided. And many of the wisest, most disinterested and unselfishly patriotic Chinese were frankly opposed to the renationalization of the treaty ports.

It was all very difficult, and it grew increasingly dangerous: Extraterritoriality.

And Lois Allingham had heard the word heedlessly a thousand times now. Whenever two or more with knitted brows talked together earnestly and apart, Lois presumed that they were talking about extraterritoriality. The subject bored her. She was as tired of the word as Betty was. Her father never talked about it to her. Lois was glad. Many bad things come to pass because reiterated talk of them bores us until, in our impatience at the subject, we refuse to think of it.

“Miss Monroe does not like Red Bridges,” Cotterel said, holding back a long-stemmed bamboo, that she might pass on unimpeded.

“Not like Red Bridges! But she must! No one could help liking Red Bridges. It’s a dream of a place; a perfect house, and the garden is even lovelier. Betty was trying to tease you. Never pay too much attention to what Betty says when she is in one of her ways. It’s the nicest place I’ve seen in China—English-made one, I mean.”

“You have seen Chinese ones that you like better?”

“Even better, yes. Real Chinese homes, built by Chinese for Chinese families to live in. The foreigners compromise and modify, of course, over here.”

“Why, yes; I suppose we do.” For the life of him the Englishman couldn’t see why they should not.

“And get their houses and gardens rather mixed up—neither one thing nor the other.”

“Have I gone off the track too? I suppose I have. How would you alter Red Bridges?”

“But I wouldn’t. Certainly not. It is perfect. I said so. An Englishman’s house in China should be different. Sometimes the mixture’s rather funny—that’s all. But Red Bridges isn’t funny; it’s a gem.”

“Honestly?”

“Absolutely.”

"But you like *Chinese* Chinese houses even better?"

"Some of them—for Chinese to live in."

"Oh—they!"

Cotterel dismissed the Chinese race with an intonation of indifference.

Lois Allingham smiled softly at the bamboo she was passing, and put her hand on it gently.

"Do you mean the palaces? In Peking?"

"No, Mr. Cotterel. I was thinking of some of the Chinese houses that I know; just the homes of Chinese gentlepeople."

"I say, do you know many Chinese out here?"

"Oh, yes—quite a few."

"But not well." It was not a question. Cotterel made a statement.

"Some of them very well indeed."

What a pretty laugh this girl had. He hoped she would laugh again soon. But what she had laughed at he could not imagine. But it didn't matter; her laugh was delicious; and all girls laughed at nothing.

"I don't think you can know them very well, not really."

By Jove, her laugh was pretty: the most delicious laugh he had ever heard; pure music. Music and mischief! Bless her.

The girl nodded at him insistently.

"But I do know them very well indeed, really."

The man was more than incredulous. But he didn't trouble to dispute it again.

"Like any of them?" he asked instead.

"All of them," she told him gravely. "No—I mean, most of them—sometimes; many of them always. Several of my Chinese friends I love very dearly."

That was not true. Lois Allingham *loved* no one but her father—and herself—yet. But she believed what she said—no altogether discreditable substitute for truth itself.

"By Jove!"

Cotterel's tone expressed surprise, but not disapprobation; or Miss Allingham would not have laughed again so pleasantly.

Lois Allingham never had thought of her mixed blood as a detriment. She knew that it was a personal inconvenience to herself sometimes because of her peculiar changeableness of moods, and the sometimes bitter clash that she felt in herself. But she never had thought of it as a detriment. She was so radiantly sure of herself! So splendidly sure of her father! If conversation suddenly faltered and broke off when she came into a room, it never occurred to her that they had been "talking about"

her. They might have been praising or envying her more than her good taste would have welcomed to her face. Probably they had been speaking of something that would have bored her, or of something a girl's dainty ears were better spared. She never had realized that her mixed blood could be a reflection, to many seemed a misfortune. But her instinct was quick in defense of her mother's race. Had she understood any slur in Henry Cotterel's "By Jove!" she would have resented it hotly; it would have angered her.

The slur had been there—involuntary, unconscious: an Englishman's ineradicable sense of superiority. But Cotterel had not intended it. It was his amazement that had spoken.

Lois had heard the surprise, and been roguishly amused by it. She had not heard the slur on the Chinese, or this pleasant acquaintance would not have ripened and warmed as she knew, and Cotterel suspected, that it was going to do—enjoyably, rapidly.

Lois Allingham knew that she attracted this man. It was not a novel experience.

She thought that as they knew each other better she might like him a good deal. She often did. But that wouldn't go far—at least, it never had. Of course, some day it might.

Cotterel harked back to Betty Monroe's stricture. Apparently it rankled.

"She wouldn't say what was wrong with it. Told me to ask Mr. Trench. By-the-way, she insisted that I was not to ask your father's advice about Red Bridges. I wonder why."

"There couldn't be any earthly reason. Betty was teasing you. I told you so. She's always up to something. But she was right about Mr. Trench. He *knows*. He knows more about Chinese things than any other foreigner." A sweeping statement! But the girl believed it. "Father isn't very keen about architecture, I think. He isn't a pundit. Mr. Trench is. He is wonderful."

Cotterel was startled, not at what Miss Allingham had said, but at that something odd he had just glimpsed, half caught again. He had no idea what it was. But it was something. It was something compelling. It was something he had not met before.

Perhaps a pretty use of her girlish lips when she spoke, perhaps a palm-up gesture of her little, finely molded hand, had given an unintended message that he had just barely caught, but had not at all understood.

It puzzled him. It a little thrilled him. A pleasantly new experience—very slight, but distinct.

Were the girl's charming eyes, delightfully unlike other eyes, a little odd?

He caught a glint of something non-English. He was surprised that he hadn't seen

it just that before. Or heard it, for it was in voice, as it was in the pose of head, her peculiarly delicate hands, profile, warm velvet eyes. Chiefly her eyes, he believed. Was Miss Allingham partly French? Yes, he thought that it must be that! She was *chic*. Very *chic*. Or it might be no farther than over the Irish Sea? Hadn't some one told that Mrs. Allingham—this charming girl's grandmother—had been an Irish beauty? And Allingham's grandmother too, hadn't some one added? That accounted for Allingham's undeniable charm, very blue eyes and black hair, pleasant, cultured voice: more than half Celt.

And the daughter showed her Celt ancestry even more. Perhaps her mother too had been Irish. But there was French blood, no matter how far back. He was sure of the French blood.

Or might it not be Spanish?

He admired Spanish beauties immensely—until they became too plump. It was unimaginable that this delicate creature, walking beside him here, ever might grow even a little over-plump.

"What a lot of petty wars they keep having over here, don't they?" he said as they came to the lake's very edge, and she sat down with a smile on a stone on which he invitingly spread his handkerchief.

"Yes," Lois Allingham said regretfully.

"What makes them do it?"

"Mismanagement and poverty—the wars among themselves. China is a country of enormous wealth, but most of it is undeveloped. She hasn't enough ready money to develop her great wealth. It is underground; hard and costly to get and to make marketable. So, most of the people go hungry most of the time. The crops on the surface won't go round. And the peasants are not very intelligent. They do not manage too well. Hunger aches, then it snarls, at last it fights, if it has the strength."

"Yes, I see. But why do they go for *us* so? We spend a lot here, and they get most of it."

"Not the peasants—not many of them. And most Chinese are too overworked to think, I believe; to reason at all clearly. But they all can *feel* and resent. They more and more dislike foreigners being here—and the airs so many foreigners put on. European manners cause more than half the trouble in Asia, I believe. Trouble between foreigners and the natives, I mean."

"Are you always polite to them—to the Chinese?" Cotterel asked lightly as he sat down on the sloping, fern-carpeted bank.

Lois answered him with the prettiest ripple of laughter she had given him yet, he thought.

"Me? Yes, of course, I am. I like Chinese courtesy; it is exquisite."

"I am looking at something more exquisite—I believe the most exquisite thing I have seen," the man thought, his eyes on her face. But what he said was, "I must study Chinese courtesy."

"It's worth it," Lois said with a smile. "But the politest Chinese may be boiling inwardly, longing to sweep all foreigners back into the sea, longing—perhaps scheming—to take or destroy every foreign-owned thing in China. And they ought not to be blamed for that."

"I shan't like it, if they take Red Bridges away from me."

"Take it—your own—away from you! But no one must; nobody could. Who? Why?"

"Well—bandits might come and burn it—after they had looted it, taken every portable valuable in it."

"Oh, no," the girl said reassuringly, with again her pretty laugh. "This isn't bandit country at all."

"How do you know that?"

"My father would not let me be here if it were."

"I see. Well then—any two of China's sixty or seventy armies might select Mo-kan-shan for the scene of a pitched battle. They do really have pitched battles semi-occasionally, don't they? And my pretty Red Bridges might be destroyed that way. Or one army might see it as they strolled by, and help themselves to everything in it, and hack and destroy what they couldn't take away. The generals are just bandits under another name. Every one knows that the Chinese 'armies' are all bandits, and the worst of the lot."

"That is not so! The Chinese armies are raw, but they are gaining in skill and in discipline every day. Some of the generals are great men and great patriots, trying to serve China, not the mercenaries that ignorant foreigners call them."

"Disinterested patriots devoted to the service of China, are they? Then why don't they unite and *do* something for China? Why do they fly at each other's throats all the time?"

Lois Allingham frowned unhappily.

"Oh, it is all very troubled," she said. "They don't see alike. One believes that a certain policy is best for China. Another believes quite the opposite. So, of course, they clash. They make mistakes in the way they fight probably: and the rank and file of the armies are not all well trained. But Europe has no right to laugh at China's soldiers. The Chinese are not a fighting people, though she has had very great soldiers, and waged great wars splendidly in the long-ago. China has loved peace;

respected it, despised strife, for centuries and centuries. An entire nation can't swing round all at once. *I wish that China had had no need to. But she will do it supremely well as soon as she gets her hand in. Be sure of that. Whatever the Chinese do, they do well. And there is nothing they can't do. They have all the qualifications, the essential qualifications for everything. They have no instinct for war. Almost as little for modern 'popular' government. But they have all the ability. The rest will come. It won't drop down to them like manna out of the sky. Europe and America won't give it to them. It will come because they will make it come. International defeat is not for China. National failure is not for China.*"

"By Jove, you care?"

"Intensely," Lois Allingham said quietly.

"I wonder if I'd like them—the Chinese—half as well as you do, if I had been here as much, seen as much of them?"

"Probably not," she said with an odd, slow smile. "I am in a minority, in the Concessions, Mr. Cotterel," she added. "But I am not *alone* even there in my estimate of China. Ask the men who have lived here longest. Ask your own diplomats. And the more important the man you ask, the more wide of experience, more cultured, and finer of character, the more emphatically he will speak well of China—of the Chinese people high and low."

"I have noticed that, now that you put it to me. Can't say I'd thought of it though, I'm afraid. But, by Jove, it's true."

"No one *thinks* about China. It isn't done."

Why was the girl so angry?

"You wonder how I know—think I know—that China won't fail, isn't going to be wiped out, never will be absorbed," she said. "You didn't trouble to ask me; didn't think it worth while—"

"Oh! I say!"

"That's all right, I don't mind. Why should I!"

"I should mind if you didn't care what I thought."

But Lois paid no attention to that.

"How do I know, Mr. Cotterel? The blood in my veins tells me. They tell me!" She gestured to the bamboos across the path they had come, and laid her hand caressingly on a wild white rose clambering close to her seat of rock. "The peonies in the courtyards tell me, and the poppies in the grain fields. Many, many Chinese things tell me. And I do know."

Henry Cotterel was startled. What a rum girl! He never had heard a girl talk like that before. He was not sure just how much he liked it.

But he was sure that he liked Lois Allingham. And her laugh was adorable.

CHAPTER X

"There is nothing in England quite so aggressively English as England out of England is. At its best it is homesickness, I believe. I like to believe that it is homesickness sometimes, and loyalty rather than arrogance. Often, I'm sure, it is unconscious. Look at our clubs, here and everywhere else in the East. They shriek 'England'! Out here we string up a few Chinese lanterns in our gardens, to be sure. But so we do in Streatham and Hampstead. The boys who wait on us so excellently out here are Chinese—the only servants we can get; and, incidentally, the best servants in the world. We none of us appreciate them. Here we are, not a stone's throw from Shao-hing and Ching-tien-wu. How many of us ever have been there? How many of those of us who have, have cared one brass farthing, or taken any but patronizing interest? And our rooms come to a chair from the Tottenham Court Road—the wrong end of it, most of them."

"But, Uncle Paul," Lois reminded him, "you laugh at Lady Saunders' Chinese rooms, and when she wears Chinese robes—"

"Chinese nothing—those freak rooms of hers, a crowded jumble of good and bad! And her Chinese clothes do not suit her, do not belong to her. She does not wear them; she can't. I don't wish her, or any of us, to ape the Chinese, to be 'Chinesey' and ridiculous. That is odious. I do not advocate our 'when in China doing as the Chinese do,' any more than I'd like to see buses from the Strand running on the Western Hills. But there is a mean, an international reasonableness, and a race courtesy we never approximate, either."

"Do you remember, two years ago in London, how vexed you were because Chen Joyu had only English furniture in his flat? English books, English servants?"

Paul Trench smiled. "Yes; I don't pretend to be consistent, Monkey. I happen to like Chinese things—and I did grudge Chen Joyu his expensive English ugliness and his polyglot servants—only one of them was English, and pretty poor English at that. I did not grudge Chen Joyu his English tailor—though I like him much better in the Chinese clothes his fathers wore—he'd have been too conspicuous on Oxford Street in fur-lined, embroidered petticoats, a fan in his hand, a jewel on his cap. But I did, and do, dislike his servile acceptance of English tables and vases and servants. With his wealth, he easily could have had his London house appropriate."

"By 'appropriate' you mean Chinese." The girl laughed at him across the chessboard. They had finished their game before they began to talk.

"I do. Appropriate for a Chinese gentleman."

"But you object to English furniture and meal hours, table manners in Hanchow."

"I do not. I object to English people here not knowing that they are in China; not knowing anything about China, and caring less, scarcely knowing a *pai-fang* from a pagoda, just as I should have condemned Chen Joyu if he had not seen that the Houses of Parliament and the New Forest were beautiful, had not known which was St. Paul's and which Windsor Castle. I disliked his wholesale swallowing of everything British; good, indifferent and bad. I thought it ungrateful. An ungrateful Chinese! I condemn our insolence to China here, downright impudence, because it puts us so in the wrong, shows us up to such disadvantage."

"How you love China, Nunky!" the girl said softly.

"Yes!"

"I wonder you never married—a Chinese girl, like Father."

"Thank my stars, and my own good sense, I never married any one." Trench had flushed a little at her careless words—embarrassed and anxious for the girl he loved. He knew that she never had realized her own mixed blood as a detriment, something of a scar. When would she? he wondered unhappily. He had no doubt that it was inevitable. How much would it hurt her? How would she deal with it! The little laughing girl whom he suspected of enormous steel under her peachy, dimpled skin.

"I believe that Chen Joyu may stay on in England always," the girl said carelessly, as she put the chessmen away carefully.

"Looks like it." Trench did not make the admission cordially.

"I think that he probably will marry an English girl," Lois stated.

"Good God, I hope not!" The words flashed out. Trench bit his lip and flushed painfully. He cursed himself that he might have hurt her.

Lois saw his penitence, but did not understand it.

"Oh, that's all right," she said gaily, over her shoulder, as she took the chessboard and box to a cupboard. "I didn't want to marry him ever."

"No, thank goodness." Trench spoke quickly; said it emphatically.

The girl eyed him searchingly. Why had he gone so red then? She got up, went to him, and perched herself on the arm of his chair.

"You have got a secret, Nunky. You are keeping it from me. I believe it's a sinful secret."

"Probably," Trench admitted gaily.

They were very great friends, the old English diplomat and the careless girl. "I inherited him," she told people. It was not altogether untrue. Edward Allingham had

fagged for Paul Trench, some years his senior, at Eton. It had grown to friendship between them; one of the rare true friendships. And it had held; as such few friendships do—perhaps must. Time and again they had not met for years, but they always had written to each other not very infrequently and freely. And they often had been together.

Paul Trench owned a home in England, and he loved it. But he had not been there for years. All he had loved in his boyhood slept in the churchyard. The old homestead hurt him now. Western modernity rather bored him. Now and then London called him. When London called, he went, and stayed a few months or a year. But he always came back to China. People rasped him less, and loneliness nipped him less, in China than anywhere else.

The “story” of Paul Trench and his aloneness is no part of this. He was alone—that is enough to tell—and he had taken Lois Allingham into his heart and arms almost at her birth. She never had relinquished either of those pleasant positions. He knew her almost as well as her father did; in one or two ways he knew her better. The frail old man—worn out in his country’s relentless service—Teheran, Madrid, Rio, Petersburg, Rome, Vienna—and the quicksilver girl were genuinely dear to each other.

This was his bungalow they were in now.

It was not a show place, not half the size of his little place in England. Several of the missionaries had larger bungalows here in Mo-kan-shan. But this simple home suited him. It was appropriate to the man.

This was his “den” they were in—a larger room than “den” seems to describe. But Trench preferred the word to “library.” There were books in the long, cool room, but they did not dominate it.

Except for its beautiful leaf-shaped windows, it was an English room; and its quiet furniture had not come from the “wrong end of Tottenham Court Road.”

Beside the splendid, quiet Chinese carpet, there was only one Chinese thing in Paul Trench’s den—and the room was large. In the corner farthest from the door a beautiful figure of Fu Shên, the god-of-Happiness, wearing his official robes of blue, stood on a throne of costly red-wood, of severely beautiful angular open-work.

From the window where they were sitting now, the garden stretched a wide-spread fan of green—dark glowing green, pale tender green, the shining fresh green of the dragon’s-eye fruit trees and the darker green of the banyans—painted with warm flowers; the brilliant, riotous, heavily scented flowers of mid-China. Behind the green of the trees rose the hills. For the Englishman had dared to have his house face the hills, instead of keeping them, a protection from evil, behind it. The hillsides were

blue and purple; the hill-tops were rose and gold in the sinking sun.

Birds sang on the flaming azaleas, and in the baubled persimmon trees.

The man and the girl sat silent for a time, "tasting the flowers," watching the far hill-tops, listening to the birds.

It was a habit of theirs: a Chinese habit.

They both knew that Lois would speak first.

She had danced in to him as he sat at a late breakfast, it was nearly tea-time now. Lois ran in and out of his rooms almost as of-course as she did her father's; retied his ties, criticized his clothes, gave him her confidence, expected him to give her his.

Perched on his chair she drew a lingering finger across his face—and sighed to see how white it was against her rosy finger, and to feel how thin. But she said nothing of that.

She laughed instead teasingly.

"I believe you are a better Chinaman than I am, Nunky. Do tell me—you must—why you never have married a Chinese girl?"

"Never could find one to have me."

"Liar!"

Then divining that the subject irked him, she instantly spoke of something else. But she had no idea why her words had troubled him, no idea of how much.

"Lady Saunders," she began, "the funny old dear—"

Trench interrupted. "She *is* a dear, Lois. A very much under-estimated woman. There are few for whom I have the regard and respect that I have for Mary Saunders. She is sterling. And she has more brains in her little finger than most women—men either, for that matter—have in their heads."

"Dear me!" Lois cried mockingly.

"She is very fond of you, Lois," Trench said sternly.

But no sternness could quell Lois Allingham.

"Every one is," she retorted.

"A good many," he admitted, "but by no means every one."

Lois laughed again.

"Monkey, be kind to Lady Saunders."

"Really? You want me to?"

"I do. Very much. Believe me, she is worth it. Perhaps she needs it," he added gravely. "We old ones need very sorely what only you youngsters can give us. And Mary has nothing—nothing but money."

"And an invaluable flair for China."

Trench smiled deprecatingly.

"Of which I'll not make fun again," he said. "I do not admire her cheap Chinese junk. I should regret to see her photographed in Chinese clothes. But I like and respect her. I value her friendship. See that you do."

"Nunky," her mood had changed—in a breath, as it often did—she spoke gravely, "do you ever wonder which of my two countries I care for most?"

"No; never."

"I should think you would. I do. Why don't you?"

"Because I know."

"You know! But how can you? When I don't know myself!"

He smiled at her.

"You know?" Lois persisted.

"I know."

"Which?"

"China."

"I wonder?" the girl said musingly—a little sadly.

"I hope not," she added presently, "because of Father."

Trench kept back a sigh. She had touched on a thing that hurt him.

"If you were right," she went on, "—mind you, I don't believe you are—it might hurt Father, just a little, don't you think?"

"Quite possible. Not unnaturally." It was all that Trench would admit.

"He has been so splendid about it always! My Chinese relatives, my half belonging to China, and all that. But he must love England, his own country, best, I think. Mustn't he?"

"Naturally," Trench agreed.

"He has been splendid about it. Exquisite."

"Yes," their friend said earnestly. "Your father is vintage, Lois."

"That funny expression of yours! And it isn't like you to coin words, invent expressions or labels. You are so conventional always."

"One has to now and then, or leave one's thought unspoken. Have you ever realized how hard it is to express a thought? Very often it is almost impossible. Sometimes it is quite impossible. Words are poor things. They oftener are stumbling blocks than the clear windows that they ought to be."

He made no comment on her statement that he was conventional. He knew how true and how untrue it was.

"**V**intage, **I**" he went on, "*is* a pet word of mine, I believe. For all that, you do not hear me use it often. A dozen times perhaps in my life I have met some one

whom I could describe in no other way; not absolutely perfect, but very fine indeed, a masterly achievement of splendid generations. A dozen or rather more such individuals, and two races.”

“Which two?”

“Yours.”

“English and Chinese?”

“English and Chinese.”

“The French and Japanese don’t think so.”

“I am not responsible for what the French and Japanese think—thank God!”

“I don’t believe you’d get many to agree with you—about the *two* races. Chinese would about the Chinese race—which isn’t exactly a race—of course; most English would agree with you about themselves; but you’d find very few to agree with you about the two.”

“Probably not. It is merely my own opinion. But I believe that I am right. Vintage! I know no other word that will express what I mean. Ripe, tested, finely blent, crushed and mellowed by experiences and circumstances that have been clarifying, strengthening and testing—a score of other prime qualities. Mary Saunders is good sound red wine—”

“You don’t call *her* vintage!”

“And I was not going to say so. She would be, if she had smoothness and two or three of the vintage essentials. No true vintage is rough; it must be smooth. Even the strongest brandy is velvet. Your father is vintage in every way. He always has been—was as a boy when I first knew him.”

“Father is splendid! And he is very sweet.”

“Yes; in the right sense of that usually misused word. All true vintage is sweet. The strongest characters are sweet at core and smooth of surface. The great champagnes—the great dry ones—and the great cognacs have a sweetness through their delicious tang.”

“You don’t call the English sweet, do you!”

“Essentially, the typical English. Very stupid very often, but sweet.”

“And the Chinese?”

“Indeed, yes.”

“I’ll tell you what you are, my Nunky. You are a funny old fellow; the funniest man I know.”

Trench bowed his thanks—bowed as nearly as he could without rising, and with a girl cumbering the arm of his chair.

“I wish I knew whether I am more English or more Chinese. Don’t you wish you

knew that?" the girl said wistfully.

"I do know," he repeated.

"You just think you do. You can't know—not yet. It isn't decided. Truly I don't know myself. I'll be glad when I do; get it over. It bothers me sometimes. And truly, I do not know whether I like England or China better than the other."

Paul Trench caressed her hand, but he said nothing.

They both knew, though neither thought of it, that if she had been wearing Chinese garments, he would not have touched the edge of her sleeve.

Lois went on. "Why do you believe that, whether I know it or not, I care more for China than I do for England?"

"Because you are vintage," Trench told her gravely.

"Me!"

"Yes, you yourself, Monkey and mischief-maker."

The girl giggled merrily. Then, suddenly grave, "That means that you think the Chinese the finer race of the two?"

"I do. The finer and the bigger. The race that will wear best and longest of all the races."

"I don't like you to say that, or to think it. It isn't English of you!"

"Not too dis-English, I hope. Not disloyalty, I believe, Lois. Truth is truth. I don't go about crying what I think of the Chinese. There are not many for whom I care enough to care to tell them what I think about anything of which I think seriously. When you torment me with questions—when we are alone together you ask me three a minute—when you condescend to question me, I do myself the honor to answer you truthfully."

"You think the Chinese the superior race? China the most beautiful country?"

"You go too fast, child. To me China is the most interesting of all countries—but not, as a whole, the most beautiful. To my eyes—the little that I have seen of China; it's vast you know—there are more beautiful natural scenes here than there are anywhere else. But the great spaces of flat, dull miles, and of grim, not unhideous stone, are so much of China, so predominantly China, that China cannot, I believe, be called the most beautiful of countries. The most beautiful, in patches. And incomparably the best-used by her people; architecture the handmaiden of nature."

"And you do think that Chinese are superior to every other race?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish that you were Chinese?" Lois demanded severely.

"My God, no!" the frail old Englishman flashed out. Lois Allingham liked the anger in his voice. She loved the quick fire in his eyes. "I would choose to be

English, even a dead one in a pauper's unnamed grave, rather than of any other race. I not English! No"—more gently—"that's the last thing I'd like. A man can see the good things in other peoples and places without being a traitor to the red blood in his veins."

"Not many men, I fancy," the girl said, putting her hand on his. "Perhaps you are vintage too, Uncle Paul."

"Perhaps I'm a goose—to let you waste so many hours of my valuable time."

The girl laughed.

"I have work to do," he protested.

"What sort of work?"

"Letters."

"Call *them* work?"

"Letters can be the stiffest of all work."

"Then why write them? I don't."

"Just so. But I have a conscience and a smattering of manners."

"That to me!" Lois mocked. "Me—I mean I . . . who you said was vintage."

"In the making. Still in the vat."

"Ugh!"

"To-morrow is mail day—mail day out," Trench reminded her.

"So it is! All right then; I'll be good. I'll amuse myself after we've had our tea."

It did not prove a silent function. They waited on each other affectionately. Lois poured. Costlier rings than most girls flaunt flashed as her little hands that Trench loved to watch lifted the precious porcelain teapot. But she chattered while she poured.

"I wonder who I'll marry, Nunky."

"Whom," he corrected. "A good grammarian and disciplinarian, I hope."

"Who—whom do you think I will?"

"Shall! I am opinionless on that subject, my child."

"You don't speak of it very cheerfully. Are you anxious about it? I am."

"Good Lord!" Trench was embarrassed.

Lois Allingham was not.

"It is a very interesting subject," she said.

"Have you seen him, Lois?"

"Seen who?"

Paul Trench let her English go. "Mr. Right," he answered.

"Oh—him. No. At least, I don't think so. I suppose I'd know if I had. Don't you suppose I should?"

“Ultimately,” Trench ventured.

“Let’s talk about him. Perhaps it will work a charm, show him to us. Twelfth Night charms do in Scotland, and magic pools in China. Shut your eyes, Uncle Paul, shut them hard, and try to see him for me. Do! Can you see him? Is he very handsome? Is he fair or dark?”

But Paul Trench would not help her out. He was not playing.

“Blue eyes or black?” the girl giggled impishly. “Chinaman or Britisher?”

Trench swallowed an oath. She must not suspect how much he should prefer her to marry no one.

“That is the second time to-day that you have said ‘Chinaman,’” Trench said disgustedly. “Britisher is vile. Chinaman is unpardonable. You only say it to rouse me. But, for God’s sake, don’t get into the habit.”

Lois sobered suddenly. “I won’t say it again,” she promised. “I can find plenty of other ways to tease you,” she added softly.

“I have no doubt of that, dear.”

“I am ashamed that I did say it. It *is* a vile, rude word. I boil when I hear it. I am not disloyal really to either of my bloods, Uncle Paul. And I think almost as highly of my mother’s people—the splendid Chinese people—as you do! Uncle Paul, do you think I’ll marry an Englishman or a Chinese?”

“God knows!” Trench said distractedly.

“Or perhaps Kwan does,” Lois added gently.

“There are others,” Trench said lightly. “What about a Scot or an Italian, an American or Austrian?”

“Not for me! My husband must be English or Chinese, or I won’t have him—not if I have to wait ever so long.”

Fan San drew back the door-screen. “Genilman Cot-tel-ill,” he announced.

Paul Trench missed the next day’s boat with more than half of his English letters.

CHAPTER XI

Cotterel's liking to see and hear Lois Allingham grew. Careless of it at first, he began to wonder where it was leading him, and then to ask himself how far he was going to let it take him.

Lois saw and understood, and was amused. She was not in love with Cotterel, or she might have been offended, and must have been hurt by the struggle that she believed he was making not to fall in love with her.

And without being in love with him, a vainer girl might have resented his reluctance to yield to his inclination towards her. Lois did not resent it in the least. She was not vain, she was sure of herself, and she knew how it was going to end. She had no doubt that it would end however she chose.

For some time she was determined that it should run its pleasant course smoothly through many sunny hours, and then gradually go into the nothing from which it had come; as some love melody or delicate caprice—too sweet to last too long—grows fainter and more faint, lighter and lighter, lingers longingly in the air, and then quivers into the silence from which it came.

There was no other man here whose companionship she enjoyed so well. Girl-like she tingled very pleasantly at her sense of power, enjoying it all the more because she knew that the man was resisting her, intended to keep their waxing intimacy entirely safe—safe for him. Did he intend to keep it as safe for her? Was he as anxious to safeguard her peace of mind as he was to safeguard his own?

Probably not. No man was, Betty said.

Lois laughed to herself naughtily. She knew who was in peril and who was not.

After a time she began to consider whether she would not let it—and Henry Cotterel—follow nature's swelling line of least resistance.

Why not? She found the hours they spent together her pleasantest hours. She liked him more and more.

She thought none the less of him because he was trying to keep his freedom. She believed she'd do that for more years than he had, if she were a man.

She knew, without the least knowing why they would, that both her father and Betty would be glad to have her marry before long. Her father liked Henry Cotterel. He certainly did not discourage Cotterel's frequent calling, his increasing attentions.

Well—she must make up her mind before too long. Fun was fun—wholesome and right. But she was not going to hurt Henry Cotterel—she liked him too much.

She was not going to hurt him at all deeply, not going to hurt him more than was

good for him.

Either she'd keep him at her side, and keep him glad as long as they lived that she had, or she would send him away, and without his knowing that she had.

Was she beginning to care? Should she let him make her care? That was the man's job always. Her man would not be allowed to shirk it. He must *make her care*, or she'd none of him.

Could Cotterel make her care? If not, he must be sent about his business before either his heart or his pride was wounded. It was a man's pride that suffered most and longest when a girl refused him, Betty said.

Lois thought it over oftener and more seriously than she ever before had pondered such a problem. Before this she always had known that the men drawn to her did not draw her. And it had been on their own heads that they ever had declared themselves. Some had spoken in spite of her, some had not. Lois had done her best and nicest to prevent them.

Thinking it over day after day, meaning to be fair to Cotterel, but with no willingness to let her own happiness go by default, Lois determined that she'd leave it, and keep it, where it was until she came back from An-hwei.

There in the Chenn-yi *chia*, away from Cotterel, surely she'd learn whether she could be made to care for him or not. And when she knew that, she'd know what to do.

If she were willing to care, she'd let things take their course when she came back. She'd not need to do more than that.

He should not speak until she came back—if she came.

Lois knew he was wooing her, whether he knew it or not. He had not known it at first. He had drifted into it—at first. She believed that he began to know now, and that advances he had made instinctively but without thought, he was making intentionally now.

If she found out, up there in the old Chinese *chia*, that she did not wish to care for Henry Cotterel, she would not come back to Mo-kan-shan. Her father would fall in with any plan that she urged.

But things had moved faster with the man than they had with the girl; and faster with him than she suspected.

Brushing his hair even more carefully than he always did, Henry Cotterel smiled ruefully at himself in the glass.

"Your bachelor days are about over, old chap," he told the other Cotterel. "A poor sort of fool you've been all these years! Not marry! You are going to be

married—married soon, if she will have you.”

Would Lois consent? The man was humble now. Before this he always had known that he could gather if he chose. To-day he had no idea where he stood, no idea whether he could prevail.

For the first time in his manhood, Cotterel was frightened.

The face in the glass was pale, even a little drawn.

He had felt himself slipping fast of late, dreaming a precious dream, then tasting a defeat that still was sweet.

Yesterday he had surrendered once and for all, thrown up his arrogant sponge—tremulous and glad.

Lois, scorning three or four outstretched hands, or declining to make a selection, had slipped too carelessly from her pony. She almost had fallen where the path was rough with pebbles and rocks.

But Cotterel had caught her, and held her one maddening instant, before he had flushed, and put her down very gently and carefully on her feet. He had wanted desperately to catch her closer than he had, telling her then and there that she was where she belonged, and that he was going to keep her there always.

If he had, he would have lost Lois Allingham for ever. She had very clear ideas of how the man who won her would have to woo her. She had planned a hundred or more appropriate love scenes: not altogether an uncommon practise with the majority of girls.

To have her consent taken for granted, would not have pleased her. The strong, domineering man never had attracted her—not even in novels or on the stage. Caresses not blows were the punctuations of all her anticipatory love scenes.

And to have been appropriated roughly and cheaply, while a score of acquaintances and as many Chinese servants stood near and attentive, would have vexed her once and for all.

Henry Cotterel had longed to do it. He had cared no more then for the Westerns and Easterns crowded about them than he did for the sand on the road or the bamboos beside it. But he too preferred a sweeter setting—their solitude. Life had grown suddenly sacred. He feared to offend, and he would not startle.

He had bit his lip, put her down, and kept persistently close beside her for all the rest of the jaunt; speaking to her little, speaking to no one else at all, except when obliged to in reply; but telling it all to Lois Allingham as clearly as if he had spoken. For she saw the light in his eyes, she heard the new hush in his voice, and understood perfectly what she had known all along.

Only she had not intended it to come to this until she had made up her mind, or

ever to come to it, if she finally made up her mind not to take it and keep it.

It was well that she was going so soon to An-hwei, and was to stay there so long. That should be long enough for a girl to find her mind, and long enough for a man to cool, if the kindling she had seen was not of a lasting fire, but only an emotional flash in the pan.

Cotterel, dressing anxiously, was both happy and miserable.

He was glad that he loved her. He was glad even if she turned him down. It made life real at last. It completed life.

But she must not turn him down. If she did, he'd come again and again until he beat down her resistance, and dared to take her in his arms.

And all the days they lived, he would love and serve her. (A sweeping promise that optimistic men often intend to keep!)

A coatless man, blue silk suspenders streaking his white shirt, brushing his hair in front of a looking glass, is not a poetical picture of sentiment. But it may be a true one. A man can feel quite as genuinely in his shirt-sleeves as he can in a dinner-jacket with a pale flower in his button-hole, can feel as intensely at high noon as he can in the moonlight, out among the roses.

He held his extended brush arrested in the air—arrested and forgotten in a throbbing daydream. Girls do not have an entire monopoly of daydreams.

With a smile on his face, and the same smile smiling back at him from the mirror, a monogrammed hair brush motionless in mid-air, the man looked rather ridiculous, but the smile on his mouth and the smile in his eyes were tender—and not unmanly.

The clock struck.

Moreover, Cotterel heard it, and pulled himself together, exchanging a look of self-mockery with the man in the glass, and completed his toilet expeditiously but scrupulously, in a creditably businesslike way.

He was dining with the Allinghams. He had no intention of beginning his frank courtship by being late for a semi-formal dinner.

He was going to show his colors now—quite unconscious that he already had.

And he reached the bungalow so promptly that he was the first arrival.

Mr. Allingham was alone in the drawing-room.

"It isn't like Lois to be late when we are expecting friends," the father said with just a shade of apology. "Perhaps she is making a special toilet in honor of a friend who surprised us by calling yesterday. We thought him a fixture in England. But yesterday evening—Ah! here he is."

Cotterel's eyes followed the host's.

By Jove!

The guest the servant had shown in was a Chinese!

Allingham greeted the newcomer cordially—more cordially than he felt, Henry Cotterel hoped—and then introduced Cotterel and Chen Joyu to each other.

And they hated each other on the spot.

Mr. Chen's clothes could not have proclaimed themselves made in Savile Row more convincingly than they did, if their tailor's tags had been sewn outside, instead of inside, them. No man could have been more perfectly dressed, or in garments more correctly English. Why this offended Henry Cotterel was not too clear even to Cotterel himself, but it did. If an Eastern elects to wear European clothes, all credit to him for wearing them well-cut and of suitable material.

Until now Cotterel had thought that well-to-do Chinese were sensible to wear up-to-date English clothes, especially when they knew where to get them and how to put them on.

Mr. Chen wore his Savile Row clothes as well as any Englishman could, and better than a good many Englishmen do.

Silly, and offensive into the bargain, Cotterel instantly decided at sight of well-dressed Mr. J. Y. Chen. Another absurdity of which Cotterel had not disapproved until now; and which he did not know of Chen Joyu until later. But Cotterel thought him odious. The fellow was a Chink; why the devil did he not dress like one? And what was he doing here anyway? Welcomed. Evidently expected. Going to eat with Lois Allingham! Take her in to dinner, perhaps. Cotterel was surprised at Mr. Allingham! And Allingham was treating the fellow cordially.

The Chink was speaking English glibly, but with a slight Chinese accent that somehow rejoiced Henry Allingham, even if it did not soothe him.

Chen Joyu's instant dislike of Cotterel was more logical, more justifiable. A Chinese does not shed his acute instinct with his Chinese clothes, cannot discard his inborn clairvoyance with his queue. Chen had sensed the Englishman's dislike, and had paid it the compliment of quick return—but not quite in full measure; for Mr. Chen was not in love with Lois Allingham. He did not intend to marry a Chinese, no matter how richly she might be portioned. And he certainly did not intend to marry a half-caste. Half-caste children might, he knew, regrettably be unavoidable; but Mrs. J. Y. Chen—probably to become Mrs. James Chen on her visiting cards—would be indisputably English.

A woman came in unannounced, and the three men rose. Another Chinese!

But at least this one had had the good sense to wear her own clothes.

She raised her clasped hands, shaking them together in mock formality, and gave Chen Joyu the stiff bend of Chinese salutation.

“Well come to our miserable hovel, distinguished born-before!”

Good God! It was Lois!

Lois rigged up in those ridiculous Chinese clothes! Cotterel thought it bad taste. In England, at a “fancy-dress,” it would be all right, but here in China—and this Chinese man looking on, misunderstanding it perhaps—it was too bad. It revolted the Englishman. He even recoiled a little from the girl whom to hold had made his arms tremble and his heart thump yesterday.

Cotterel knew that he would give a good deal for her not to have done it.

And he thought he saw that Betty Monroe wished so, too, when she came.

Had Mr. Allingham expected it—known that Lois was going to do it? He must dislike it! But he gave no sign.

Nor did Paul Trench. But it troubled Trench. Trench knew what it meant: it meant that Lois’ Chinese self was coming—or had come. Chinese Lois was every jot as dear to Trench as English Lois was. But for several reasons he wished that Chinese Lois had waited a few days. He feared that she was going to be hurt, probably infuriated, and Allingham hurt more sorely.

Paul Trench felt that Allingham had been punished enough. Lois had deserved no punishment.

All the guests had come now. Lois went from one to another until she had welcomed them all.

For tiny Mo-kan-shan, this was quite a function. They would sit down fourteen at the table.

By chance, or intentionally, Miss Allingham went to Cotterel last of all. She had not looked directly at him until now. Yet she knew that he had winced, knew that for an instant he had not recognized her, and that when he had her dress had jarred him.

A hint of mischief dimpled her mouth, and her eyes were dancing. But she gave him her hand—English fashion. Indeed, it was only to Chen Joyu that she had given the Chinese salutation.

“It was scandalous of me to be so late; not to be here to receive our guests when they came. My hair took so long to do this way.”

“I’m afraid I got here very early,” Cotterel replied lamely. He did not remember to add that it was his eagerness to be here that had made him come too soon. Lois waited a breath for him to say it.

Then she laughed.

No *faux pas* of costume could hide the sweetness of that laugh. Cotterel heard it as he always had. But even now he did not *see*.

“You do not like my dress, Mr. Cotterel!” she challenged him.

"It is very beautiful," he told her awkwardly.

"Oh—yes, very. But you dislike it. It offends you. You were annoyed when I came in. Why?"

"Forgive me," the man stammered. "I was surprised."

That certainly was true.

"I'm glad that I did not keep any of the women waiting; that only you and Mr. Chen were here when I hurried in. Betty wouldn't mind; but Mrs. Crawford would have been indignant. And she doesn't like me."

Cotterel saw her foot. It slipped beyond the hem of her long tunic as she tapped the floor a little impatiently. A Chinese padded shoe too! The man thought it looked clumsy compared with the other women's dainty foot gear.

Above the padded shoe he caught a glimpse of a white cotton stocking! For some reason, or for none, that white cotton stocking offended his taste most of all, added to his distress and embarrassment.

The girl's eyes followed his.

She pushed her foot out a little farther.

"They look rather big, don't they, for a Chinese lady? This robe needs squeezed feet to complete it."

Cotterel smiled—an unhappy, sickly smile.

"And I can't totter on 'big' feet. No one can. The peasant women shuffle, but only the golden-lilies ever totter. But it can't be helped; for my feet never were squeezed. My mother's never were, either."

What nonsense the girl was talking! Of course Mrs. Allingham's feet had not been squeezed.

"No, indeed, Nina Crawford does not like me. I'm glad I got here in time to receive her properly. She'd have been so crushingly polite when I apologized. Icily polite like you."

"Oh, I say, I don't deserve that!"

"Well—gloomily polite, then."

"But you haven't apologized." Cotterel had pulled himself together. He smiled into her eyes. And the teasing reprimand was a caress. He did not like her being dressed like this. But she was the girl he loved. His surprise, the sharp jar to his taste, had obscured it for a startled moment. But the dear fact stood. Nothing could alter that. No more could any garments, no matter how absurd, alter her loveliness—or even obscure it. Her flower-like beauty was the same, no matter what it wore.

"Apologize—me—to you and Chen Joyu! Of course not—not to men. But I'd have had to, to the women." She half turned to go to Major Crawford. "I'm sorry

you do not like me to-night.”

“Don’t I?”

Cotterel’s tone held her, and she flushed a little. For Lois wore no Chinese paint.

“Well—then—you don’t like this dress of mine. Do you? *Truly!*”

“I’d rather see you in your own clothes.”

“These are mine!”

“You know what I mean. English clothes, I mean; one of your usual very pretty frocks. Or are they ‘gowns’ now?”

“Be a little franker, Mr. Cotterel. You do not like this dress. Tell me why?”

“I—forgive me. You have made me say it—”

“Yes; I want you to say it. I wish to quite understand.”

“I do not altogether like to see you in Chinese dress, especially here in China.” He did not add, “And that Chinese man here, and Chinese servants too to see it!” But his thought finished the sentence so. “I can’t explain what I mean, not exactly. Just—it doesn’t seem quite suitable—especially for you—not dead right.”

“But it is! Especially for me. A Chinese girl has every right to wear Chinese dress.”

“A—wh—” Even now he did not understand.

“This was my mother’s. She rarely dressed in any other way, not even after she was married.”

Henry Cotterel looked at Lois starkly.

Then he saw.

CHAPTER XII

"I dress as Chinese women do—as my mother dressed—very often, because I am Chinese; half Chinese; just as much Chinese as I am English. More perhaps!" Lois Allingham added.

But Cotterel did not hear her.

It is to his lasting credit that he did not show the dismay he felt. Or, perhaps, he was too stunned to express anything: dumb and numb with astonishment and sick revulsion. It amounted to that.

His one wish was to escape.

Henry Cotterel would have given half his fortune to have been able to turn on his heel, and go—to get out into the open, to be alone.

But his conventional training held, and his English behavior.

He did not hear what Miss Allingham said. But he looked at her quietly and courteously, apparently attentively. He even smiled pleasantly, quite a friendly smile, and bowed slightly.

Lois gave him a searching look, then crossed the room to Chen Joyu.
Chinese!

A half-caste!

And he might have spoken—committed himself!

Thank God!

Edward Allingham had married a Chinese!

And he was Allingham's guest; Allingham's and the half-caste daughter's.

Why had no one told him? Surely every one here knew; all the old-timers.

Betty must know, and Monroe—his friends.

Probably they all had taken it for granted that he did know.

And it did not occur to Henry Cotterel that Lois Allingham had purposely deceived him. He was greatly disturbed, but it did not occur to him to blame Lois Allingham. She too had taken it for granted that he knew.

To be as just to her as Cotterel was, Lois *had* taken it for granted for some time now, the little she had thought of it at all. And so had the others. The story of Edward Allingham's marriage was so well known that it was inconceivable that Cotterel had not heard of it. (And it was odd.) And the girl looked so Chinese—to those who knew that she was; was half Chinese.

Even Betty Monroe had assumed that Cotterel had learned it before now. And Cotterel had regained his old good place in Betty's liking and respect when she saw

that he continued to regard Lois both as warmly and as respectfully as he had; that he had neither slighted her, drawn back nor treated her more casually than he had at first, when her attraction for him had been patent, and too, at least to Miss Monroe, had the growing warmth of his regard.

Betty had come to believe that Cotterel and Lois would marry each other. And when Betty had, her only anxiety—a sharp one—was whether their marriage would work, be permanently happy, and its consequences free from bitterness.

But to-night Betty saw what no one else did—saw it all, with consternation.

When she first knew him Lois had been amused at Cotterel's persistent assumption that she was altogether English. Then she too had assumed that he must have learned the fact—again the very little that she had thought of it at all. That his manner in no way changed, his attentions did not lessen but increased, had not made her wonder whether he might not have learned of her mixed blood. To her, never having felt that there was any possible slur upon her birth, that a man, learning of her mother's nationality, might be shocked, think less highly of her, be less willingly attracted to her, never had occurred to her.

She knew that Cotterel was very near, if not actually at, the danger line—if there is a line—between friendliness and love, between enjoyment of passing companionableness and desire to possess. Her chief concern regarding it was to determine whether she did or did not wish his feeling towards her to grow; become actual and fixed.

Until now she often had talked over her suitors and her own reaction to them with Betty Monroe—sometimes, more shyly and less frankly, with her father. She never had discussed her acquaintance with Cotterel, or, if she could avoid it, discussed even Cotterel himself, which perhaps hinted that her own feelings already were more deeply involved than she suspected.

Henry Cotterel will never forget that dinner.

Was he taking in Miss Allingham?

He was glad that he did not.

Would he be seated beside her?

Again he was glad; he was nearer his host than he was to his hostess.

Lucky conversation was not general; fourteen was too many.

The women who sat beside him found Henry Cotterel insufferably dull. One woman was angry, the other was puzzled.

Cotterel was glad when the women left them. He was anything but glad at Allingham's, "Shall we join the ladies?" He had been dreading it.

Miss Monroe claimed him when he came into the drawing-room. Cotterel's

dinner partner did not resent it.

Betty kept him with her as long as she could. She chatted for them both, and Cotterel, without understanding why she did, was numbly grateful that she did.

Miss Monroe felt more sympathy for Cotterel than she did resentment.

But she was seriously distressed—for him, for Lois, for Edward Allingham and for herself.

And she blamed herself greatly. She ought to have foreseen this. She ought to have suspected that Cotterel had not heard it, and had not seen it for himself. And she ought to have told him long ago that Edward Allingham had married a Chinese.

Betty Monroe never spoke of that to any one, if she could help it. She disliked remembering it.

Once before he left, and again when he did, Cotterel went to Miss Allingham, and spoke with her as briefly as he could without being negligent.

He left as soon as he dared. For Lois' sake he would not go too soon. He did not blame her. He cursed Allingham. And he blamed his own thickheaded blindness.

In his whole life Henry Cotterel never had been so glad to get out of a room. And he had been caned twice at school. He hurried from the gate. He drew a long breath when the Allingham bungalow was out of sight.

He wanted badly to go to one or the other of the two hotels, to avoid going back to Red Bridges. That silly Chinese place of his! Lord—it was *half* Chinese. Red Bridges was half-caste too! And he had been proud of it.

He knew now why Betty had not liked it—or believed that he did.

How right Betty had been! Betty Monroe had sound good sense.

Cotterel would have given a great deal not to have gone back to Red Bridges. He wished that he need not see it again. And he blamed it, held it partly responsible. He'd sell it—for any old song. At least he'd abandon it.

He was going home—to England.

But to-night he must go back to Red Bridges. He couldn't do anything else. The place held him in a vice—a Chinese vice.

And he might have pledged himself to a worse Chinese imprisonment! He'd have broken through that entanglement, of course. But doing it would have been ghastly. He never yet had broken his word. Thank God, he did not have to break it now, and in the most dastardly way!

Suddenly Cotterel stood still, halted by a grueling thought.

Was it possible that he might have gone the whole way without knowing the truth? Married! Perhaps children . . .

He found his handkerchief, and mopped his face.

Then he walked doggedly on to Red Bridges.

CHAPTER XIII

But Henry Cotterel was made of better stuff than that.

The next day brought a stiffer counsel and a manlier mood.

He saw the dawn break over Red Bridges—he had not done that before. His Mo-kan-shan home was newly lovely in the sunrise. Why should he forsake it, for no better reason than that he had made an absurd mistake, been crassly blind? He would not.

His love for Lois Allingham—alas for masculine tenacity—had gone in an instant; more completely dead than if it had never been, in the quick flash of time when he had realized her mixed blood; had died so completely that he had felt no pang. And it had left no regret, except for his own unaccountable blunder.

But his delight in Red Bridges, and his wish to live on there for a time, had suffered nothing permanent. In his dismay last night, he had revolted even from Red Bridges; had been reluctant to reenter it. The clear new day washed that rather mawkish feeling quite away.

In the tender sunrise Red Bridges was irresistible. From silver and green, under a pale green and silver sky, it flushed to rose and gold as the young day flushed to redder, more golden glory. Trees that had seemed gray foliaged, showed their true beryl and emerald. Shadow flowers and shadow vines turned to blossom and vines of delicate substance and clear of color—many colors.

The birds sang and chirruped their lusty hymn to the sun, urging it up; chirped and sang a lustier grace before a breakfast of worms and berries.

The “malachite” tiles of the curling roofs, and the red of the carved-out-of-deep-coral bridges, blushed to the blushing day.

Red Bridges creamed with peace and prosperity, glowed with loveliness.

Sell Red Bridges indeed!

He had been an ass. Probably he had made a public fool of himself. All right; he'd face it. He was not going to cut and run.

And he was not going to let poor Miss Allingham down.

Yesterday he had loved her. To-day he pitied her. Poor, poor girl!

He'd call at the Allinghams' this afternoon. His visits there should grow briefer and less frequent so gradually that she should not feel slighted, gossip have no tit-bit.

Little by little, and with chivalrous courtesy, he would make it clear that his attentions were no more than social homage to a girl he admired.

If he had known, when he met them, of Allingham's Chinese marriage, he would

not have become on terms of easy acquaintance with them. But he had, and he would give it an easy death.

For a few days at least no one should see any change in his friendliness. Above all, Miss Allingham should not.

Then he would go away for a short time; see one of the places he ought to have seen long ago.

That would clear the air, naturally and not ungraciously. Men on the verge of declaring themselves do not absent themselves needlessly. No one—least of all Miss Allingham—could consider him her suitor, when he casually sauntered away for a time.

When he came back to Han-chow, if unluckily the Allinghams still were here, it would be fairly easy to retreat, cautiously and kindly, still farther and farther from the false position into which he had so innocently blundered.

Thank God he did not have to pull up these lovely Chinese stakes of his, and ignominiously run as far as Europe; which he would have had to do, if he had engaged himself to poor Miss Allingham.

To jilt a woman who had owned that she cared for you was a heinous thing. But he knew that he'd have *had* to do just that, if his wooing of her had gone the one fatal step farther and she had accepted him. He never could have married a Chinese. He never could have fallen in love with one. He had not loved Lois Allingham; for the woman he had imagined her never had existed.

With all his soul Henry Cotterel hoped that Miss Allingham would not have accepted him. He would have given a great deal to be sure of that.

Cotterel carried out his sensible plan quietly and neatly—to a point.

He called upon Lois that same afternoon.

He hoped as he went that he should not find her again in Chinese clothes.

Better even than that, she was not at home. Mr. Allingham was; and he and Cotterel sauntered down to the Club together.

The next day, in the park, Lois Allingham was dressed very much as Betty Monroe was. But now that he knew, she looked Chinese to him. He was increasingly thankful that he had made the sick discovery in time.

Perhaps Cotterel's thankfulness was craven, perhaps it was sane and justifiable.

He had loved her yesterday, and Lois had known it.

But the rights of race are sacred.

He tried to take up their friendliness just where it had been—and failed.

But he tried; he did his best.

He managed it much better the day after that.

Betty Monroe, watching, feared that he managed it too well.

When, in about a week, he said casually that he was going to Soo-chow—"Shamed not to have seen it before"—for a week or so perhaps, perhaps longer, if he liked it as every one said he certainly would, Miss Allingham instantly gave his going to Soo-chow her sunny approval. And Betty Monroe thought Lois sincere, and was glad.

Cotterel did not half see how beautiful Soo-chow was. Only Chinese eyes can do that. But he *saw* it enough to make him forget everything else for a time.

But Red Bridges called him. At least, he thought that it was Red Bridges.

One brilliant night sitting lazy in his boat where just before him the Temple of Snakes was reflected in the quicksilver water, clear-cut as the Temple itself, the pictured city and hills lit by thousands of twinkling lights, all the night fragrant with lotus, musical with lutes, two-string fiddles and harps, Cotterel suddenly determined that he had been away long enough now. He would turn back towards Han-chow to-morrow.

Soo-chow was matchless; but Red Bridges was home.

He had given himself—and that poor girl—time enough now for the inevitable readjustment of their acquaintance, if the Allinghams were still in Mo-kan-shan. He hoped that they might not be. If they were not, it would be simplest and best all round.

Cotterel was anxious to get back to Red Bridges. He had thought it complete, in its way quite perfect. But here in "Beautiful Soo" he had thought of several more beauties that he would add to his Han-chow home; and he longed to begin them.

He hoped sincerely that the Allinghams would not be in Mo-kan-shan. But, if they were, there was no earthly reason after all why he should not see a good deal of Miss Allingham. In spite of her Chinese blood, her companionship was the most enjoyable he knew. Chinese blood or no, it was joy to look at her—the prettiest girl he had ever known. A safe joy now! No thought of love or of matrimony could complicate it again.

His old mood reasserted itself. Bachelorhood was of all things the most desirable for him. Security, freedom, no will to cross his! Life his very own! And that, he was again convinced, was the ideal life—for him.

He smiled at himself derisively for the odd fancy that had obsessed him—so nearly endangered him. And Henry Cotterel, however little he could approve it, was almost grateful to Edward Allingham for having married a Chinese wife.

The Allinghams still were in Mo-kan-shan.

Knowing himself entirely invulnerable, Cotterel denied himself few opportunities of seeing Lois Allingham.

She said that she was glad to see him back. But she gave no hint of having missed him. She certainly showed no excitement at his return or in his company.

The golden laugh was care-free. The delicate rose in her face never fluttered. The dark velvet eyes never fell or faltered.

Cotterel saw clearly that she was not in love with him. He believed that he could not have persuaded her to marry him. And he was glad.

He liked Miss Allingham more and more. And under the influence of her luring personality, her beauty, the fascination of the golden music-laugh, Cotterel condemned his own old race-prejudice. A Chinese wife never! But friendship; yes. And there was no harm in it when there was no possibility of its going too far, or being misunderstood. If Cotterel was self-centered, he was not mean. He would take great care that Miss Allingham did not misunderstand.

Lois Allingham did not misunderstand.

Again Betty Monroe was puzzled. And again she was anxious.

But there was nothing she could do.

Even Betty could not ask Lois for a confidence that the younger girl did not offer. About many things Lois Allingham was unapproachable.

Betty wondered sorely where it was trending, how it would end.

Lois had no doubt. She was as serenely sure as she had been before—and in the same way, and with the same qualifications.

She smiled over it to herself now and then. But though she was quietly amused, she was not scornful. And the half-caste girl was no more mean than the Englishman was.

And it was for him that she determined to go to An-hwei a little sooner than they had planned.

CHAPTER XIV

Mother-love is vaunted as more than father-love. Why? Perhaps because it is more assertive, has been better and more persistently advertised. Averaged, a father's love is as deep, tender as a mother's. Often it is more unselfish.

Edward Allingham gave himself completely to his child. He lived with her and for her. Scrupulously balancing her Chinese weeks and her weeks of Europe, he himself never aped the intimate Chinese ways. He ate Chinese food, and enjoyed it, when he shared her visits to her mother's kindred, but he never wore Chinese clothes, never forgot, or let any forget, that he was an Englishman.

He loved his half-caste child at its birth. He loved it fiercely at its motherlessness. Year by year the love between them grew. He gave her a great love. She loved and valued her father tenderly. They were proud of each other.

If the girl had grown up less lovely, or less full of charm, less quick of gentle intelligence, less amiable and sunny, less soft of voice, less devoted to him, would Edward Allingham have been so unremittingly, so unaffectedly a gladly devoted father? Less engrossed in her?

The question cannot be answered. For Lois had all of those qualifications, any of which is rich filial dower.

Perhaps he might. With Allingham fatherhood was a consecration—no less devout because it was smiling.

Quite possibly his purpose would have held, even if the daughter had been plain, unattractive and more grotesquely Chinese. Edward Allingham was a man. But his long self-imposed dedication must have been then more of a penance, less a joy.

Firmer friends, best of playmates, each—as yet—preferring the other and the other's companionship to any one else and to any one else's companionship—yet they shared an almost guilty secret and a keen anxiety of which they never had spoken. Each hoped that the other was spared them.

But Paul Trench knew.

Edward Allingham had two daughters. That was their secret. Few, if any, but they two themselves and Trench suspected it—as yet only they, unless a Chinese woman in An-hwei, who smoked scented tobacco all the time and drank priceless perfumed tea to excess, did.

The anxiety they shared, but not equally, was that one of those daughters might, by an irreparable mistake, injure the other irreparably, and hurt the father to the quick.

This anxiety that they shared translated itself somewhat differently in the man and in Lois. His anxiety was chiefly for Lois; he loved her better than he loved himself. Lois, perhaps more selfish, because she was younger and of the self-sex, was anxious for what she foresaw as possible life-long suffering to herself. But too, in a less degree, she was anxious lest her father should suffer.

At times one of Edward Allingham's two daughters was jealous of the other, divining as she did that the father loved one of his daughters somewhat more and with more tranquillity, less perturbation, than he did the other. But this jealousy was the girl's own secret. She never had betrayed it. Allingham never had suspected it.

Lois was both those daughters.

Edward knew that she was two, but that her Chinese self sometimes was jealous of her English self and suffered he never had suspected, just possibly could not have understood.

Lois was two daughters. She was almost two women. In her the two races of her ancestry had mixed but superficially; and she knew that at times she was intensely English and at other times was as intensely Chinese.

There was race-clash in Lois Allingham.

The English and the Chinese, especially of gentle birth, have so many characteristics and essentials in common, and this girl's rather Manchu coloring, slimness and delicacy of line made her amalgamation—body and personality—of English and Chinese seem an absolute blend.

But Lois knew.

She knew that she was two, and that they were not always the best of friends, menaced each other even. It grew increasingly so as she grew older.

Essentially sunny—both of her were—she let this blood-oddity of hers trouble her as little as she could enforce. And she—the daughter of two strong-willed peoples—set her will that the father never should suspect the jealousy that often pricked, and sometimes gnawed her—she herself believed it unreasonable—set her will even more that he never should anticipate, as she sometimes did, that life-long disaster might come to one of her from her other self.

She was English to-day, English to the core.

“Are you really going, and so soon?” Betty Monroe asked her suddenly.

Lois' face darkened. She had been laughing when the other spoke. The question dashed the merriment roughly from the younger girl's face. The dark eyes rebelled.

“I am afraid so.”

“Why go, then?”

“Father'd be sorry, if we did not.”

Betty doubted that.

"And," Lois went on, "Chenn-yi Erh No has sent for me. She has written twice; and we've as good as promised her."

"I can't understand Mr. Allingham," Betty ventured cautiously.

Lois made no reply. Unless she had a little with her kinswoman up in the fortress *chia* of their clan, Lois Allingham never had discussed her father with any one.

"This is China," Betty reminded her. She knew of the pact that Edward Allingham kept so scrupulously. She knew that of not so much as a week would he scant even one of Lois' half years in China.

Lois smiled. She knew that, because foreigners had penetrated here, this was not China in the sense that the Chenn-yi *chia* was, and that all the parts of China were in which no European lived, in which no European ever had been. She smiled, but made no other reply. She often was reticent even with Betty and Trench—the Europeans with whom she was frankest. It was English reticence. When her Chinese self was dominant Lois chattered as her young mother had, as the courtyard women do—most of them incessantly. English Lois was cautious. Chinese Lois had caution all to acquire. Probably she never would acquire it, unless in defense of a man she loved—her father or some other.

Betty tried the other issue.

"Madam Chenn-yi wants you! Let her wait. You are not fond of Madam Chenn-yi, are you?"

"I am very fond of her sometimes." Lois did not add that this was not one of those times.

"You *are* going?"

"Yes."

"Next week?"

"Yes."

"Take me with you."

"I wish I could," Lois laughed.

"Well, why can't you?"

"You wouldn't fit in. And you wouldn't like it."

"I don't suppose I'd fit in too exactly. But I'd behave very nicely. And I'll bet you anything you like that I'd like it. Take me with you, Lois; do!"

Betty Monroe knew that she'd not like it. But she sincerely wished to go with Lois—to protect her from the Chinese influence of the Chenn-yis.

"Not this time. Sometime, perhaps. I'll think it over. Remember, I don't promise, but just possibly I'll ask Chenn-yi No if I may bring you to visit them

sometime. You do not take a guest to the *chia* of Chenn-yi Erh No without permission.”

She changed the subject firmly.

“Shall we go into Han-chow to see Alice Whittiker to-morrow?”

The two girls were in Lois’ bedroom, gossiping away the afternoon’s intense heat, dawdling over English needlework, eating Western sweetmeats now and then. It was too hot to eat many chocolates. Neither took much interest in her needle. It was an English room in an English bungalow. Lois’ pretty rest-gown was not Oriental, although most of the European women in Han-chow wore Chinese coats and trousers or Japanese kimonos in the bedroom privacy of siesta times, sometimes wore them a little less privately. Betty Monroe had a chain of jade—not especially good jade, but it was jade—about her neck. Lois did not. Everything on her had been made in France or in London.

Miss Monroe herself rarely wore anything Chinese. She did not altogether like China; she liked the Chinese less. But she had some liking for her jade beads. She often wore them; the only Chinese thing she ever did wear. She had had them when she was at school in Sussex.

Allingham, noticing that she had kept them all those several years, and seemed to like to wear them, often wished that he had given her better jade. But it did not occur to him to get her a better string now, partly because he knew that she did not care to have Chinese belongings—(secretly he now rather shared that disinclination of Betty’s)—partly because it was not his habit to make gifts, either great or small, to any one but Lois. He only twice had given even Betty—a special favorite of his—anything: the string of jade, years ago, and soon after, the fan that Cotterel had handled more carelessly than Miss Monroe had liked.

He had bought two fans that day in London; cheap enough little fans that had taken his fancy in a Regent Street window. Lois had lost hers years ago—or broken it, and not thought it worth mending.

Lois Allingham had many valuable and lovely Chinese things. But she never wore or used them when she was doing what Chenn-yi No privately called “English penance—in expiation of her parents’ sin.”

Three living persons knew Lois Allingham well; understood her, usually could read her: her father, Betty Monroe and Paul Trench. In some ways, Betty knew her best of those three—when Lois was her English self.

Why, Betty wondered, was Lois on edge—as she evidently was—at leaving Mo-kan-shan just now? It was leaving Mo-kan-shan and not going to An-hwei that vexed Lois, Betty was sure.

Why?

Was it Cotterel or Fairfax?

Betty rather hoped now that it was George Fairfax. She believed that his affection would wear the better, and that he might never wince, both because his love ran too deep, and because he was less thin-skinned and sensitive than Cotterel was.

Betty Monroe had little approval of mixed marriages. They always were risky, never were nice, she considered. But Lois would *have* to make a mixed marriage—modified mixed—because Edward Allingham had made the initial mixed marriage. Lois permanently unmarried was unthinkable. She'd not be allowed not to marry. Some man would prevent that; many men attempt to prevent it.

Betty Monroe judged Cotterel rather harshly now. She believed that with him prejudice would outweigh passion. She was sure that he was holding back because he was too selfishly content as he was to be willing to marry any one. Miss Monroe's lip curled at it. She had had no doubt that Cotterel was much in love with Lois.

She did not resent his recoil when he had realized that Lois was half Chinese. She sympathized with it, approved it. She resented his return to the camaraderie he had renounced with almost cavalier abruptness—resented it because she read it, felt sure that he had returned to his attentiveness to Lois because he enjoyed it and felt it entirely safe now that he knew her the child of a mixed marriage; a fact which he considered protected him from the possibility of his attentions being mistaken for intentions; and quite protected him from their ever becoming so.

Miss Monroe approved Cotterel's determination not to marry a half-caste. She resented his selfish dalliance with one. She was anxious lest it might cost Lois heartache or even injured pride.

None of all which could she discuss with Lois, or even hint at.

CHAPTER XV

Lois looked up from her peach ice-cream, and answered Fairfax.

"No; I can't go; thank you though. I shan't be here then. We are going to China in a few days, Father and I."

"Going to China? I say, what's the joke?"

George Fairfax was not subtle, not particularly quick at reading between odd lines. He could negotiate good, clear print—if it were simple, straightforward English. Allusions, quotations, cross-references, foreign phrases baffled him.

A dozen of them were merry-making lazily under the grateful shade of Cotterel's biggest banyan; a magnificent far-flung tree that could have sheltered a hamlet.

Several of the others also wondered what Miss Allingham was driving at, Cotterel and Lady Saunders among them. Allingham and Betty already knew, and Trench understood her instantly.

"Off to Madam Chenn-yi's before Fairfax's pleasant jaunt comes off?"

"Yes, Uncle Paul."

Then she took pity on Fairfax's evident bewilderment.

"This isn't China, Mr. Fairfax. None of the treaty ports and Concessions are—not really China. They ought to be, but they are not; not what we Chinese mean by China. Up in my kinsman's *chia*, where we are going, it is China indeed. You wouldn't know me up there. Father keeps his British state in any Rome. He is the only European who has ever been there. The natives come miles to see him, and when they do they turn and run like frightened hares. But there, I am as Chinese as any girl in China."

"I'd know you anywhere! You can't talk Chinese, can you?" Fairfax added in an awed voice.

"Of course, I can: three of the Chinese dialects—language is truer; they differ so. I can speak my mother's language as well as I can English. She never learned much English, did she, Father?"

"She never learned to read or write it," Allingham replied cheerfully, "but she learned to speak it—not too well. She never liked it."

"Could she read and write Chinese?" Nina Crawford asked smoothly. "So few Chinese women can."

"Very few. My wife learned to do both. I taught her."

"Cock-a-doodle-do!" Mary Saunders said with even less credulity than politeness or elegance.

Cotterel beamed upon her. "Oh! yes, I could. I read Chinese readily. And I still can brush many of the characters rather well; not as beautifully as Lois does, but very well indeed for a foreigner."

Lady Saunders made an unattractive sound. Snortle is the alphabetic arrangement that reports it with most exactness.

"I should think I could speak Chinese! I'd have a dull time where I am going, if I couldn't speak Chinese," Lois told Fairfax.

"Do you think you could teach me to speak it?"

A girl giggled. Lady Saunders repeated her remarkable sound of disgust. Betty Monroe gave Fairfax a very kind look.

"I am sure I could not," Lois Allingham cried with a pretty peal of laughter. Even now that laugh always quickened Henry Cotterel's pulse. "You have as little Chinese complex as any Englishman I know, Mr. Fairfax."

"You never know till you try," Fairfax persisted.

"Don't be an ass," Jim Crawford advised.

"Oh, yes, you can sometimes," Lois insisted. "I know. Take my advice, and leave the Chinese language, written and spoken, alone."

"Do you have to live Chinese fashion—where you are going?"

"That is precisely how I do live there."

"My hat! Do you like it?"

"I love it."

Betty Monroe saw Cotterel fidget.

Lady Saunders began an independent conversation with Nina Crawford.

"Can you eat with chop-sticks?"

The girl's laugh was scornful.

"That's nothing," she told Fairfax. "Hundreds of Europeans can."

"Any fool can pick that up," Crawford said. "You'd better try it."

"So I shall." Then Fairfax moved a little, putting himself more between Miss Allingham and the others.

"Tell me about the Chinese place you're going to," he begged.

"Well—no, it would take too long. There'd be no end to it. It is very beautiful. You'd think it very curious."

"I bet I'd like it."

"I double the stakes, and bet you wouldn't," Lois answered.

And Cotterel muttered something about "long-eared donkey."

"And I am the most Chinese thing there. You would *not* know me in my Chinese clothes."

"I should! Don't you ever dress that way here? I wish you would!"

"Sometimes I do," Lois said simply, but her eyes twinkled.

She did not look at Cotterel. But Miss Monroe was watching both him and Fairfax narrowly.

And Betty hoped that it was Fairfax.

"I say, I wish you and Mr. Allingham would take me along with you? Couldn't it be done?"

Yes; Betty hoped that it might be Fairfax.

"How long are you going to stay in An-hwei?" Mrs. Crawford asked.

"A year, perhaps, or nearly," Lois told her.

"You and Mr. Allingham going to stay there a year!"

"Oh, no; not Father. He is going with me, of course. But he is going to leave me there. My father will come back for me when my visit is over. But he is not going to stay with me this time."

She was going away, perhaps for a year! Just as well, Henry Cotterel reflected. It let the whole thing down easily and conveniently, gave it the full-stop that was best. At least, it possibly was best for Miss Allingham.

Cotterel was restless all night. He wondered why the devil he couldn't get to sleep. He was perfectly well—never'd felt better in his life. And it was not like him not to sleep; he couldn't remember when it had happened before.

George Fairfax slept like a child.

The next morning he bought a map and a guide book; and studied them for troubled hours to the joyous amusement of half the men at the Club.

CHAPTER XVI

Chenn-yi Erh No had not written to Lois by her own hand. The great and cultured Chinese lady could neither read nor write.

A secretary had brushed the exquisite characters on the long red letters that a trusted *chia* runner had brought to Mo-kan-shan.

He had waited for Miss Allingham's answers.

The letters had been to Lois herself. But with the first, a much shorter letter had come to Mr. Allingham.

Lois answered Madam Chenn-yi's first letter at once. She kept the *tingchai* waiting several days for her letter in reply to the second one.

Before she answered it at all, she took it to her father. She read most of it to him. And they had a very long talk—the most serious talk they had ever had.

As they had talked the man's tender face had grown graver and graver. Once his lips had twitched. The girl's eyes had misted twice.

Allingham prayed that Lois did not know how his heart ached, or that it ached.

When she left him, Edward Allingham took her in his arms, and held her so—very close—for several moments.

Then he kissed her lingeringly twice. They both knew that he would not often kiss her, or hold her on his knee, in the *chia* of the Chenn-yis.

The next day they both had written to Chenn-yi Erh No.

The day after that the runner had started back towards An-hwei.

“Was Lois joking?” Betty Monroe asked Allingham.

They had left the chattering group under Cotterel's banyan, and were strolling side by side through the hibiscus trees on the incense-grass.

“When she said that I'd not stay with her in An-hwei? Or when she said that she might stay there a year?”

He had known instantly what Betty had meant. They usually understood each other.

Betty nodded.

“Both?”

Betty nodded again.

“No. She was not joking.”

“Do you think that you ought to leave her there without you? Right in the deep of China!”

"I must, Betty. And I am sure that I ought to do it."

"Not a whole year!"

"Yes, if she cares to stay. Longer still, if she cares to stay."

"She can't! I hope she won't."

"I hope so too," Allingham said wistfully.

"What will you do without her, all that time?"

"Pretty badly, I suspect. But I must let China—her mother's country—have its chance."

Miss Monroe frowned a little. "Bother China!" was what she felt.

"I have not been doing the square thing by China, not quite keeping my promise to my wife; I believed I was, but I was not."

"I don't see it!" Betty Monroe spoke almost passionately.

Allingham smiled—a little sadly.

"Nor did I. But I do now. Lois showed me."

"Lois!"

"Six months in China to every six months away from China. That sounds fair. But it wasn't fair. Half—or more—of Lois' time in China has been in European surroundings. That was not what her mother wished. And when Lois has been with her Chinese relatives and friends, I have been there with her almost always, my English hand on her shoulder, my English words and thoughts, our intimate English memories. Chenn-yi Erh No has called me to account. And I see that Chenn-yi Erh No is right. Lois sees it."

"Aren't you afraid? I am."

"That Chenn-yi No will marry Lois to a Chinese husband? Yes; I am afraid. I always have been a little afraid of that—with or without Chenn-yi Erh No."

"Wouldn't you prevent it?"

"I couldn't. Not if the man was all right. Lois has strong fellowship with the Chinese. It is her birthright. I cannot prejudge her happiness for her. I do not believe that I have any right to map out her life for her."

"Every right to guide it!"

"I have until now. But now she should have her Chinese year—truly Chinese, unintruded on by me—or as much of it as she chooses to have."

"Oh—I don't like it!"

"But probably Lois will. You are wholly English. Lois, you know—"

"Yes; I know," Miss Monroe said hastily. Allingham, whether from use or from self-discipline, always spoke smoothly of Lois' mixed birth. The subject always embarrassed Betty Monroe. Or, did it hurt her? She avoided it whenever she could.

"I have no doubt that she'll have a thoroughly enjoyable time with Chenn-yi No. And I feel that I owe it to her herself, as well as to her mother, that she should have the searching experiment; try China out. If China wins her from me—well—I must put up with it; that's all."

Betty Monroe groaned. "That must never be!" she protested. "And it couldn't be! Lois is so very English!"

"Think so? Well, you are wrong there. Lois is as much Chinese as she is English. Sometimes I think that at core she is more Chinese than English. There are times when she is uncannily like my mother; uncannily, considering that Lois is half Chinese. At other times she is as like her mother. Has Lois ever showed you a picture of her mother? She has a miniature that is an excellent portrait. I have even better ones."

He had kept them for himself! Would not give even one of them even to Lois!

"Yes."

"You saw how like Lois my wife was!"

"No!"

"Where were your eyes, my child? It might be Lois when she wears her Chinese clothes, her stick-pins, and all that. They are very alike. And, at her best, Lois is almost as lovely as her mother was."

The Englishwoman dug an impatient toe and heel seesaw into the incense-grass. It protested sharply, and a thick cloud of injured sweetness belched up angry fragrance.

It was ridiculous of him to call her "child." He did it often. It had been well enough in Sussex when he had taken her and Lois out of school for a day's treat. But she was thirty now. Didn't he realize that—and other things?

"Whom and how Lois may marry, troubles me a good deal, Betty, either way. It must many fathers of motherless girls. But I, you know, wear my paternity with a difference. I am peculiarly anxious; with peculiar cause. For myself, I never regretted it—my Chinese marriage." (He told the chivalrous half-lie convincingly.) "It is a very beautiful memory." (That was perfectly true.) "But now I sometimes see it unfair to Lois; and wonder, if I had had the sense and the justness to look ahead to what it might mean to our children, whether I should have married as I did. God knows! I was young, sore for my mother, and very much in love."

Betty did not believe that he had ever before spoken quite so intimately, not even to Lois.

Betty Monroe was whiter than usual, her face a little drawn; the string of jade on her throat trembled slightly.

"Where are *you* going to spend Lois' Chinese year?" the woman asked.

"Oh—anywhere!" Allingham said it lightly, but Betty Monroe heard a note of dreariness.

She did not believe that Edward Allingham was an entirely happy man. But she had no doubt that he took his daily happiness directly from Lois' hands. She remembered how constantly he had come to the schoolhouse in Sussex. Would he not suffer in the coming year? Nothing could compensate him for Lois—Betty feared.

"Are you coming back here?" she asked.

"Yes; for a few days. Then I am going to take you to Shanghai."

Miss Monroe laughed at him, and shook her head.

"But I am! I have told Charles repeatedly to send you home—"

"Oh, he has tried. I was asked for 'a year or more.' I am going to stay. I am going to stay the 'or more' as well as the year."

"Not here. I won't have it. If Charles won't, or can't, do his duty, I am going to do it for him. I shall take you to Shanghai, Betty. I very much wish you'd go home—to England."

"Do you think that we are in danger here?"

"Not yet. No, indeed, or I'd have taken Lois away before this. But, frankly, I don't like the barometer. You must go."

"What about Lois—up with the Chenn-yis?"

"She will be perfectly safe. Safer there I believe than in any other place in China. There is not a faction in all this troubled Empire with which Chenn-yi Wang has not enormous influence; authority even. No harm will come near Lois there."

"Will you stay in Shanghai?"

"Not for long. I shall attend to our firm's affairs there—after I have seen you off for England—and then work back towards Lois. I shall leave her Chenn-yi year quite unmolested—unless she sends for me. But I do not intend to be too far from her; to be where I cannot get to her very quickly."

"Probably we'll all trek down to Shanghai together in a month or two, you and Char and I. We'll dog your heels, I warn you, while Lois is away. I know how you'll miss her. You may need me," she added lightly.

"So! I hope you will—in Shanghai. I shall feel far less daughterless," Allingham told her with a look of frank affection.

Betty Monroe nodded and gave him a daughterly smile. She turned carelessly away, and went off through the hibiscus grove, over the incense-grass, as Lois, sauntering between Cotterel and Fairfax, came towards her father.

Betty Monroe's beads were trembling with the heaving of her throat.

"Why ever doesn't Betty marry some nice chap?" Allingham asked Lois a few hours later. "I wish she would."

Lois laughed. "So she will—when Mr. Right comes along. We don't want her to marry Mr. Wrong, do we?"

Allingham laughed. "No, indeed. And I'd be particularly sorry for Mr. Wrong, if she did."

"Rather!" Lois agreed.

"It's time she did marry," her father insisted. "Betty must be twenty-five or six now."

"Thirty," Lois corrected. "But there's lots of time yet, Daddy. Thirty's a girlish age now. Women keep young longer, marry later and later. Girls are women now in their early teens, M.P.'s and international heroes at twenty-one; and flappers again at thirty. Betty has lots of time. She'll never grow very old—perhaps she never has been very young either. Not since I knew her. I call her invincibly young now. There are such women."

"A few," Allingham agreed. "Well, I hope that Mr. Right finds her, and that when he has, Betty marries him."

"He'll be a very lucky Mr. Right," Lois asserted.

"Very!" Edward Allingham said fervently.

CHAPTER XVII

The wall must have cost a fortune.

From the east side of the great gate back to the west side enclosing and defending all of the vast estate, the wall measured a full hundred *li*. At its lowest it was a dozen feet high, at its highest—not counting the house-like turrets—it topped forty feet. It had been well and solidly built. Centuries old, generations of coolies and artisans had spent their working lifetimes on its erection. Caravans had carted and muled its stones from beyond Amoy long before the first Allingham had come to China.

Fantastic, unlike most fantastic things, it was beautiful. Time had mellowed it. Nature had adorned it softly. The flowers and vines that clung to it here and there were graceful. The trees that grew on its top, and the larger trees that leaned above it on its garden side were gracious, congenial to the gray stone of its twisting lengths; at home on and behind it, but not assertive—well-behaved, appropriate. An accrument of time, none of them human artifice or ornamentation, they made the strong old protective wall an integral part of the beautiful landscape, as time-sown plants and time-planted trees so often do in China—making temple, pavilion and bridge look to have grown from the womb of nature, as unartificial as wild lupins and forest oak trees. Such is the spirit of every loyally Chinese garden and of all great Chinese architecture. A temple of Confucius itself—the largest and richest—pays homage to the landscape it adorns and emphasizes.

In the long leisurely length of the old wall there were patches of green stone and of pink, one of distinct blue. In the half century of its busy building the gray granite had given out several times, and the Chenn-yi who ruled here then, impatient of a slow caravan's delay, had refused to let the wall-builders wait: hence the part-colored patches.

But the wall had no appearance of patchwork; the patches—blue, green, pink—were too far apart, too cunningly and gradually stitched into the endless sweep of grey. They looked like lovely, gigantic lichens, and the outer wall grew a thousand lichens—true lichens.

No two of the six small gates were alike in height, importance or decoration. No two of the seven towers—not counting the great gate's three-roofed pavilion—resembled each other except with the splendid resemblance of being indisputably Chinese and orthodox. Of course, the towers all were roofed. Roofs are a hall-mark of China. The seven towers differed in height, their roofs were caps of different

colors; one as scarlet as rowan berries, one as blue as kingfishers, one a vivid green, another a burning bronze, all were arresting, beautiful, pierced with intricate windows.

The wall had been well tended through all its years. Rack-and-ruin, the epidemic scourge of so much Chinese building, never had touched this wall for long. When time had weakened it but a foot, repair had strengthened. Two such small repairs were needed now. They would not be delayed long.

Its outer side was unornamented except for its crenelated, tower-turreted top, and for the mosses and flat vines that touched and toned it; a wall to forbid intrusion, to defy enemies, secure privacy.

The wall's inner side was as ornate as its outer surface was plain. Tiles burnished with color inlaid it in many Chinese patterns; "wind," "rain," "rice-ear," "rat-tail," "willow-chain," two that were oddly Greek. The tiles were not everywhere; they came and went. Stretches of the wall were frescoed. Characters, tender sentiments or proud assertions, marked it here and there—beautiful Chinese characters kept as fresh and uninjured as when the artist hands had painted them. Shields of bamboo or of grass protected them as soon as great-rain came. Great-heat never was allowed to blister them. The wall had its servants and Madam Chenn-yi saw to it that they served it well. All that cost much money, Chenn-yi Wang had coins to spare. Even Chenn-yi No herself scarcely knew the depth of their wealth. The Chenn-yis had been enormously rich for several centuries. Most of them had been lavish in expenditure; Chenn-yi No herself was at times. None of them all ever had been a spendthrift. With them always fortune grew more than it diminished.

The wall boasted a moat, not outside it to make the approach of foes more difficult, but on the wall's inner side to delight the eyes of the family gloating on the shadows that branches and tall ferns threw on the mirroring water, and gloating on the boats and islands of flowers and other devices of bloom and perfume that floated lazily on the spotless water.

Where steps cut into the inner wall, or ladders of lacquered bamboo lashed against it, made ascent to the wall's wide top convenient, tiny boats were moored. More than once a bridge spanned it—bridges more beautiful than a bridge can be out of China, the home of infinite beauty.

Every dozen or so yards throw-down-to-kill balls, great balls of heavy stone, were stacked on the top of the wall. For two centuries or more none had been used. No one contemplated their ever being used again. But they showed this a great noble's domain that would be defended ruthlessly. Too, they were picturesque. They were tended and dusted. Everything was, in the princely, luxurious place. The tiniest

blade of grass that grew here was cherished and cared for, important because it was theirs—the Chenn-yis'. The great missiles of warfare and death were round as perfect globes, polished, glass-smooth. Cut from marble and stone, burnished and burnished again, they had cost no mere song. Their raising and placing must have cost incredible strength and effort.

Cee Kun the half-wit loved to lounge on the wall, sunning himself and playing his flute. He was up there somewhere now. Wên T'ien heard the boy's flute faintly, but could not see Cee Kun.

Wên T'ien came through the cinnamon grove at the hour-of-the-Monkey and paused at its edge. In all his wandering years he had thought of Chenn-yi No's *chia* with quick affection, and had remembered its beauties and treasures with homesick longing. But as he stood now looking at the sun-drenched old wall he reproached himself that he had not remembered it half as beautiful as it was.

The man stood drinking it in for a long time—motionless, deeply moved.

Wên T'ien was unattended. A collateral prince of the great house, he had chosen to come back to it alone and on foot.

But his retinue waited not far off.

And he was minded to take Chenn-yi Erh No by surprise, to see the sudden joy rush and flame in her beloved face. He was licensed to come to her as he would; he could not overstrain Chenn-yi No's love and indulgence. She would laugh at his impudence, never resent it. He had played many a trick on her in the glad long ago, but never one that she had not enjoyed more than he had. He had enjoyed them all very much. How she had chuckled at his naughty trickings! What a golden thing, that rare chuckling of hers had been! It would be good to hear it again. "Is there honey still for tea?" Wên T'ien had no doubt that there was—and for him honey and the honeycomb too! And the years would have changed Chenn-yi No in nothing; her hair might be scantier and whiter, her jeweled hands more wrinkled, she might be stouter, she might be badly more fleshless, but Chenn-yi No would be unchanged. Chenn-yi No was one of the changeless women. Time nor trouble could change her.

He would spend an hour in the grounds, revisiting two or three of his favorite nooks, before he went to Chenn-yi No. This was her siesta hour. He would not disturb her, though he knew that even that he might have done with impunity. Her women would not dare do it. When Chenn-yi No said, "I will sleep," not for news of birth or death would any one of her household dare disturb her, except because of Chenn-yi Wang. And this, the hot hour-of-the-Sheep, was always the sleep time of Chenn-yi No.

He would not disturb her—partly a tenderness, partly a more selfish wish to

greet the sandalwood grove and the lily-lake first, and to be alone with them before he kept tryst with any human-one, even with Chenn-yi No. He honored and loved Madam Chenn-yi, but he revered and loved the sandalwood trees and the lily-lake more—for he was Chinese.

He would not go through the great-gate, nor yet through any one of the small gates, to have the gate servants cry out in welcome; for when they did he must accept their greeting and give them his—the man was gracious. All whom he knew here he would greet presently and gladly, but first he would keep tryst with the lily-lake and the sandalwood trees.

He knew a place where he could scale the wall—if the mound and the stout-limbed sycamore still were there.

And when he had skirted the wall for some yards, they were.

He climbed the gentle mound; took it easily in a few careful strides. He tucked up his long silk petticoat—he must not tear or crush it; whatever the license she allowed him, he would not present himself disheveled or soiled to Madam Chenn-yi. To swing himself up into the sycamore tree was nothing to cat-agile Wên T'ien. Higher. A careful spring. He was on the wall.

Wên T'ien squatted down, still careful of his skirts, careful of the old and valuable knife at his girdle, and leaned contentedly against a pile of death-stones. He was not afraid that he might dislodge one. It would have taken enormous strength to have done that. They were stacked with perfect balance, secure as if cemented firmly. When the storms of winter raged here, trees sometimes snapped off and crashed, but these throw-to-kill stones never stirred. But he had not pulled himself up by them when he scaled the wall, the utter smoothness of their polished surface would have yielded his fingers no purchase.

Wên T'ien squatted down and gazed long and joyously at the well-remembered scene: the temple of Fu Shên over there among the clotted roses, the green roofs of the great low house just showing over the flower-flushed oleanders in the distance. The wide spreading branches of the great banyan tree beyond the laughing, dancing cascade almost hid the gay-colored temple, but did not hide it. A temple sacred to the god-of-Happiness never must be hidden or screened; it must catch every wayfarer's eye, that all who pass that way may take and share its infection of joy. The tallest of the bamboos in the clump between the temple and the banyan tree were fifty feet high. The banyan dwarfed them.

Water gleamed repeatedly; lakes, marble-edged tanks, laughing rivulets, lazy motionless streams. Bamboos, flowers in careful profusion, well-swept paths of burnished sand for the fine shoes of the strolling Chenn-yis, narrow stone paths

winding in and out of the grains and vegetables that the farm servants tended, the persimmons and lemon trees, stones carved with characters that marked where the precious hordes of grapes were buried to keep fresh for years, others over there among the willows told where the great blocks of ice were buried. Blue-clad coolies working in a score of places, blue-clad coolies moving across the fields and gardens, looked dots of color, paler-clad house servants in the courtyards looked atoms. The glistening green of the dragon's-eye trees—how he had gorged the fruit; how he would! The horn-roofed pagoda on the azalea hill. The cypress trees that guarded the burial garden. How well he knew it all! How well he loved it all! Where was his swing?

How Chenn-yi Ton had laughed at him the day he, swinging too high, had fallen out of it! And then, when she had seen that his face was cut, and bled, she had run to him sobbing; and how she had comforted him!

It should have hung under the great oak nearest the honey store-house. Chenn-yi Erh No would not have had it taken down. No—there it was. Probably its ropes of silk had been renewed more than once, and its painted stand-on board too, but it hung where it should.

Wên T'ien sat a long time on the wall.

At last he went to the nearest stair, went down it to the moat, unhooked a boat, and poled himself across, crooning to himself softly as he stood to his task, crooning in his happiness that he had come home again; leaving the wall to Cee Kun.

Wên T'ien was very happy, happier than he had been for years. And as yet life had given Wên T'ien no unhappiness.

When he left the little boat, to drift as it would until a moat servant, finding it, hooked it back, Wên T'ien went slowly to the *jung-hua-shu* avenue; the supreme glory of the lovely place. He went slowly because every step he took gave him an old friend to greet, some old-time joy to renew, and love bade him linger.

The avenue stretched for more than a *li*, stretched straight from the green-bronze turtle, sunning itself—as it had for centuries—at the foot of a hillock foaming with wild white roses, to the wall of marble-lace that surrounded the house itself. All the silk-floss trees were full in bloom: a gauzy cloud of pink. There is—or was—a *jung-hua-shu* avenue in Peking as lovely as this, but only the one, of all China's very beautiful silk-floss avenues and groves of silk-floss trees. Words are apt to profane such pictures. Wên T'ien's thoughts were wordless. His senses reeled. The man was enormously moved; grateful for his heritage, grateful for the gracious beauty of China. Humbly proud of his birthright.

His claim here was close, his intimacy sure and privileged, for Wên had spent

much of his childhood here. And every Chinese has firm and undisputed birthright in all Chinese beauty.

The golden day would not linger for him. He would go to the lily-lake before he went to the house. And if he did, he must go now.

He bowed to the *jung-hua-shu* before he left them. And he spoke to them.

“If I live a thousand years, if I see all of our bounteous Earth’s beauties, these unworthy eyes of mine never will see beauty as exquisite as yours, or beauty that moves me more, O most honorable *jung-hua-shu* trees.”

In less than half an hour he had.

CHAPTER XVIII

Lo-ees slipped from the house quietly.

She was no prisoner here. Chenn-yi No knew, although she could not vision or quite understand, the freedom of the girl's other life; and it was not her policy to jar Lo-ees in any way. Nor did her code of hospitality permit it. She did not approve the "new" ways of which rumors had reached her remotely. But she tolerated them with proud quiet, provided always that she herself suffered no personal actual encroachment from them.

Madam Chenn-yi would not have forbidden the girl, her guest, to go through the grounds unattended. But she would have disliked it—less from an injured sense of propriety than from a guilty feeling that, in not sending serving women with Lo-ees, and a watchful eunuch to follow behind, she would scant sacred courtesy to a guest-maiden trusted to her by a father's confidence.

Lo-ees understood all this. She liked it. In some moods she approved it. To-day she longed to be alone with the lilies. So, she came down the terrace quietly while Chenn-yi No slept.

There was little in the magnificent *chia* that Lo-ees did not appreciate. But of it all she liked the little lily-lake best.

She wondered why? The azalea-hill with the gold-bell-hung blue pagoda on it was more pictured. The silk-floss avenue with its matchless gauze of flowers was incomparably more beautiful. The porphyry temple—sacred to Literature God—was far handsomer. Scores of things and places here were more arresting, more interesting and compelling. But she liked the lily-lake best.

She tip-toed down the terrace steps, careful that her girdle jewels neither caught nor clicked. When she was beyond the house's eyesight she ran softly, not very fast.

For June the day was very hot. The first long rains were over, sudden heat had come, and Lotus moon flamed. But heat is the sap of Chinese life; the girl liked it. Speeding through the trees, speeding past the crab-apples and the host of flowers, flowerlike herself in her light clothes of rose and jade—crimson trousers just showing beneath the long tunic of embroidered crêpe—she did not stop once until she had reached her lily goal.

The lily-lake was a quiet little oasis in the more striking beauties of the sumptuous homestead.

It did not cover more than a few acres. Shallow at its willow-hung edge, it deepened to its center. Chenn-yi No would have been unhappy if she had dreamed

that Lo-ees was going on to the lake alone, no boatman within her call should anything go amiss. But Chenn-yi No did not dream it. She slept soundly on her great down-spread bed, and her sleep was dreamless.

A little tired from her running, the girl slipped down, squatting Chinese-fashion on the moss and ferns, and rested with her face to the water, her elbows on her knees, the jewels on her fingers flashing as her soft hands cupped her soft chin, all her jeweled stick-pins tinkling delicately in a puff of warm, perfumed air. She could not see the honeysuckle on the bamboo trellis, or the heliotrope that lay a carpet under the sun-dial; they were too far beyond the willows, but the little breeze had passed sundial and trellis as it came to her, and the heliotrope and honeysuckle had drenched it with their heavy sweetness.

The girl's riant face was unpainted. For all but that, she was attired as a girl of great birth, and daughter of a house of wealth, should be. And Ki Lee should paint her face before she dined with Chenn-yi Erh No. She need not always do it, even when she dined with Chenn-yi No; Chenn-yi No was lenient about it when they were alone. But this was their House-god's birthday; they would eat their evening rice with ceremony to-night, giving the god the first bowl of wine and the saltiest tit-bits from each dish. Ki Lee must paint her face to-night.

On the whole, Lo-ees, for all that she liked sometimes to slip about the place unattended, was less lenient than Madam Chenn-yi was, more strictly observant of Chinese ways and etiquette. China was all the world to this girl brooding and resting by the lilies.

The lake's water was greener than the softly green willows that tossed and bent about it; a dimpled sheet of emerald water. The water-lilies, for which it was named, did not cover it. Here, near the bank, there was none. But halfway across the water-lilies grew profusely, so thick and matted in places that they looked a rug floating on the emerald water.

They were just water-lilies; flat, broad leaves flat on the water, buds and blossoms lying snug and close on their wide foliage. There was not a lotus among them. The lotus is a queenly flower; it lifts its proud head on its polished stalk high above its leaves, high above the water. These were humbler lilies, low among their green leaves, clinging close to the water that fed and nursed them. Perhaps half of them were white; some were rose, others were mauve, lemon, ruby, apricot, faintly pink. A few were faintly blue. Fewer were a lovely wine.

Lo-ees knew how sweet they smelt when you bent over them and drew their fragrance to you.

She was rested now, she'd go to the lilies.

There were many cushions in the light boat, and it had its long bamboo push-pole.

The girl knelt down happily among the cushions, and drew the pole from its lock. She'd snuggle down presently, when she had drained her fill of the waxy lily-flowers; snuggled down and watched the birds fly overhead, half wishing perhaps that she too had wings; not that she wished to fly away, but because her eager youth was covetous of new sensations.

The girl had no wish to escape; no need of escape. She loved her lot, she very much liked where she was—the little lily-lake and all the wide fragrant *chia*. She had no need of wings. She was free—oddly free for a Chinese girl—a sash-wearer girl of old China. And let who might preside at Peking or in troubled Nanking, this where she was *was* old China, because it was the home of the Chenn-yis.

But she liked to dream of how it would feel to fly. She liked to dream of many things, building herself radiant futures—fairyland structures no two days alike. When she had watched the birds long enough she'd tuck her head down on her arm and dream a daydream of gold and rose.

She had to kneel up to pole. She ought to have stood to the task, but she was skilful at watercraft, and she was not in haste. The long hour was hers.

The girl pushed out to a lily-patch, steadied the punt with the pole. It was shallow enough here for her to do that. Leaning over the boat's side, she fingered a lily, drew her hand across the cool, broad leaves.

She gathered a blossom, a great flower of delicate rose, and broke off a half-open bud. There were flowers to spare here. She would not pull too many.

Lo-ees drew in the pole. She would let the boat drift for a time.

A lark began to sing up in an almond tree. Another lark took up the music: a song of ecstasy. A fleece of snowy cloud softened the sun.

The girl smiled happily. It was good to be here. It was very good to be alive. Surely this was real; and all the rest she had come from but distraught fantasy. Rumors of peril of which so many had whispered or openly chattered down in Shanghai; banditry; provinces clutching at each other's throats! And extraterritoriality! Always that; more and more that: the one international sore for which there seemed no healing. This was China, lovely laughing China, serene, changeless, Imperial. And she was Chinese.

Something the same pleasant fancy was the man's who came from the *jung-hua-shu* avenue, and reached the lily-lake. He knew how real the perils of China were, how sore and grim the problems that tore her, but he snatched at the fancy that they were not, caressed the thought that all must come well—as all was well

here—in his superb, superbly lovely country. He knew that much was ill with China. But he dared to steal an hour from the troubled thought. The day smiled at him, sweet-breathed flowers wooed him, green and silver trees invited him.

He had learned to swim in this old lily-lake. The lilies had been fewer then. But it would be pleasant to do it again some day. There still was room for him and the thick-growing water-lilies, room for a man to swim without encroaching on them.

Should he now?

It would be delicious.

But he was garbed to present himself to Chenn-yi Erh No. It would be too much trouble to divest himself of all these satins and silks, to strip to his vest of gauze and pants of thin linen, and then to dress again. And what for a towel?

But Wên T'ien looked longingly at the clear, beckoning water; looked at the seductive cool water, and saw pale pink water-lilies and paler buds abloom on great plate-like leaves that were greener than the lighter green water; looked and saw too a girl sitting carelessly in a punt's crimson cushions, her hands full of water-lilies, water-lilies held to her glowing face.

Wên T'ien stood spellbound.

The girl had not seen him. Chinese shoes make little sound.

Then she saw him. A smile just flicked her face before she drove her eyes down again to the lilies.

And Wên T'ien knew that the avenue of silk-floss trees was not the utmost beauty he ever had seen. He knew that he was moved as the *jung-hua-shu* had not moved him, moved as no inanimate loveliness ever had moved him.

Who was she?

What was she doing here—unattended?

A fear clutched him. But no—he looked closely, knowing that he ought not to look—the short delicate fringe that told her a maid feathered her forehead.

Wên T'ien thanked the gods.

The girl did not move, or look towards him again. She sat with her face bent to her water-lilies, her lid-hidden eyes fast in a calix of rose satin wax.

A maiden! Of his caste! Lovelier than loveliness!

Wên T'ien knew that he and his fate were at grips.

The man paled, his face stiffened, grew stern. Then he remembered that he was a gentleman. Sudden love, even while he reeled under its blow, in no way relaxed the gentle's strict obligations.

He caught his breath fiercely, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

Through her lashes Lo-ees saw him go. She smiled, a little sympathetically but well amused.

She knew.

She had seen that look on a man's face before. A shameful thing to tell of a Chinese maiden. But for all that, it has happened in China—in old China—tens of thousands of times.

It wasn't her fault, if she had. "There's a world full of men." And she knew that she was fair.

Some day, she supposed—

The stranger's unexpected appearance at the edge of the lake had surprised her almost as much as hers had him. But she had startled him, he had not startled her.

But she wondered who he was? A noble-one—his robes told her that, and so did his face—lost on his way to the house place probably. But where were his attendants? What had the gate-servants been thinking about? Opium probably. How the venerable great-one would anger and punish if Chenn-yi No learned of their remissness. Who was he? Some distant kinsman, or the son of a valued friend? He could not be less than one of those. Even then, Lo-ees believed, it was even gamble that Chenn-yi Erh No would deny him admittance. The antique etiquette held in the *kuei* of Chenn-yi No. It was not her rule to give audience to men who were not her descendants. But she relaxed the strictest rules—when she chose. She might receive the unexpected visitor. Lo-ees was sure that the honorable old-one had not been expecting any one. At least Madam Chenn-yi had not warned her that a guest came. Lo-ees would not have come from the house and the quiet walled and guarded *kuei* courtyards, had she known that a gentleman came, and might be encountered in the outer gardens.

Perhaps his wife was with Chenn-yi No now, had been admitted and welcomed to the old-one's presence, and he waited for her out in the outer grounds. But sacrosanct courtesy must have given him rest-place, and bade servants offer him wine and tea and sweetmeats, in the woman-forbidden *k'o-tang*.

The girl's black eyes twinkled naughtily. She knew that the man had no wife. He was woman-shy.

Well—she was rid of him. He had not lingered long.

Would he tell Chenn-yi No what he had seen at the water-lily lake? Madam Chenn-yi would be vexed—indulgently vexed. It didn't matter. But she thought that

he would not tell the old-one, would speak to no one of what he had seen at the lake.

Sunset was coming, the day-star blazed lower. She must go back. But not yet; the stranger might think she had followed him, if she had the ill-luck to overtake him. One might well overtake an unattended stranger who lost himself in the twists and turns of the garden. The park had many a maze. And men, she knew, had pirate minds. She could not go back to the *chia* yet. She'd be happy here a little longer. The man who had scurried away would not intrude again. He would not come back.

Lo-ees pulled in the pole, and lay lazily back on the pleasant cushions. Little by little the punt slipped back from the rosy lilies. The boat drifted—so gently that the girl scarcely felt it move, so gently that its slow drifting was like delicate music. Delicious!

The girl's eyes closed lazily.

She knew that she slept as she drifted through the happy portals of slumber that is half sleep.

When she woke Chinese Lo-ees took her own time about doing it very thoroughly. She yawned. She blinked. She all but dozed again! Then she did wake up. And she looked at the sun. It was high time she went.

She caught up the long bamboo pole. And this time she got up and stood to her task.

She could not move the boat.

It had wedged itself into the mat of strong stems until they held it in a vice. It was fast in their unyielding clutch; a part of the lily-brocade of green, white, amber and reds that carpeted the center of the quiet lake.

Lo-ees was mildly dismayed. She tugged, she pulled. She tried to untwist a clinging stem.

She failed.

She was chained and jailed. The boat was fast in the lily bed, glued and riveted.

With her utmost physical strength she could do nothing.

She must think.

She sat down in the cushions again, and thought industriously.

The more she thought, the less she liked it.

No one knew where she was.

The servants of the inner wall had seen her leave the *chia*. When she was missed, and they were questioned, they could tell that much, but nothing more. The path she had taken was met by paths that went in every direction. Much of the way she had come had been pathless. She might have marked the freshly sanded paths—

though probably other footmarks had blurred and erased hers by now—but she was sure that she had not marked the grass. The grass was too thick, she moved too lightly.

How long would it take them to find her? The space of the old domain was enormous. Its hidden lairs of shrubs, trees, gullies, were innumerable. There were caves in the place.

How soon after they missed her would Chenn-yi No take alarm? When would they *begin* to search?

How soon would it be dark?

What could she do?

Nothing!

Nothing but wait.

Could she swim to the shore? Easily enough, if she could get free of the lilies. But could she? She swam well. Even in what she wore, she was confident that she could swim to the firm ground. But she dared not attempt it. The long stems would catch and hold her as they had caught and held her boat. Better prisoner here in the dry, cushioned boat, than prisoned out in the wet water-lilies, gyved at her arm-pits, her legs dangling down in the water. If the lily pads held her up!

Lo-ees had no mind to spend the night out here alone in the punt. It would be colder before daylight. She'd grow very hungry, faint perhaps for food—though she need not be thirsty. And she *might* be afraid presently.

But she had even less wish to drown.

Could she not break her way out? They were only lily stems, after all, that held her. Of course, she could. She already had gathered a handful of the water-lilies. Were the stems of the leaves much thicker, any harder to snap, than the stems of the flowers?

Lo-ees went to work again, and worked with desperate will.

Soon she was working with aching fingers. Her back began to hurt too. The long leaf-stems were not so easy to break; they pulled her, and they slid through her fingers.

She must rest awhile; it would be quicker so, she was sure.

How long was it going to take her anyway?

Could she hope to do it before dark? Could she go on doing it in the dark? When the sky-angels hung the Night Lantern out in the sky—could she see the shore to swim to it? Or see the stems to go on breaking them? Lotus Moon was young, the Night Lantern but a thin sickle; and the angels would not hang it up until a long hour of black had followed the sunset's going!

She'd have to break the lily leaves' stems by touch; find them, and snap them by the sight of her fingers, as blind-ones had to do everything.

She would not be afraid to swim in the dark, if only she could find the shore in the dark. She doubted that. She knew that the lake abounded in fish. They wouldn't hurt her. But they'd feel queer against her face and her arms. She'd keep her head up—out of the water—and she'd keep on her stockings, but she couldn't swim, not far, without pushing her arms through the water. Her stockings were thin. Even a small fish could nibble at her through them. Fish had teeth, hadn't they?

She'd be very wet when she got to the bank. That was nothing!

But would she dare go through the dark all the long way to the house-gate? Or in the eerie thin light of the baby moon, if the night proved cloudless?

Lo-ees laughed ruefully, and tried to work faster. Then she stopped to count the stems she had broken. Just thirty! She scanned the patch. There must be a thousand leaves, she thought. How many of them, she wondered, must she break before an avenue of stem-free water wide enough to swim through would reward her? Or, could she not pole the boat through them, if she tried hard enough?

Lo-ees unfastened her tunic, and took it off; a nice and careful disrobing in the tiny boat. But she could work better without it.

She was working desperately now.

The long-stemmed leaves in the boat were piling it high.

Would they sink it, if she went on throwing them in? Perhaps she ought to throw them out across the lilies. But she thought that the boat couldn't sink here, thought that the pads and stems that prisoned them would hold them up.

It was no use!

The more stems she took, the more there were.

It would take her weeks to break out any space that would serve.

She must give it up!

Surely they'd find her sometime.

Would the man who had been here an hour ago speak to some one of the girl he had seen at the water-lily lake, and so give a clue? Kwan grant it!

In the meantime she must sit where she was until help came. She could not help herself.

She believed she was growing frightened!

The girl shivered a little. She pulled on her tunic. She knew that she'd wish it thicker before midnight.

Ah! The pigeons!

And they were flying low!

If she could coax one of them to her, she could write a message, fasten it on the tiny musical instrument beneath his tail—a message to Chenn-yi No.

The pet pigeons were flying home—to supper and night-cote in heaven's-well.

She had an ink-slab and brushes at her girdle. But what could she write on? She must find something! Could she break off a bit from her ivory tablets? They were thin. It must be a tiny piece or the bird would not carry it when she had secured it, if she could, to the wee silver whistle. A short-short message would be enough.

“Water-lily lake near tuber-rose field. Help. Lo-ees,” would serve. Chenn-yi No would understand.

Great Chenn-yi No could not read what the pigeon brought, of course. But the scribe would read it to his mistress.

If only the pigeon-keeper noticed the bit of tablet when he gave the bird its night-grain!

Madam Chenn-yi's musical pigeons were fond of Lo-ees. Twee-tee was fondest. And Twee-tee was the most docile of them all.

“Twee-tee!” she called him.

The girl called him until he was out of sight.

For Twee-tee famished for his bed-time grain.

Again Lo-ees sat huddled disconsolate in her crimson cushions.

A long time went so.

It seemed longer to Lo-ees.

She sat wide-eyed, waiting for the dark to fall—the dark that she feared.

Suddenly she leaned up, clutching the side of the punt with eager hands. She cried out joyously.

“Lord-one!”

CHAPTER XX

Reluctantly Wên T'ien went on, away from the water-lily lake where enchantment had seized him, where Fate had faced him.

It was hard to go.

But a Chinese gentleman could do no less.

Who was she?

He would learn.

Chenn-yi Erh No, who never had refused him anything, would tell him.

The Lord Wên had no doubt that the girl to whom he instantly had given all—man and dreamer that he was—belonged in Lord Chenn-yi Wang's *chia*. Else what was she doing there? How had she come?

What surprising freedom she had! Was it scant hospitality of Chenn-yi No, or excessive fondness and indulgence, that had let that flower-of-all-flowers stray so far from the *kuei*? And all unattended!

What moods, what unaccountable whims the venerable great-one had! Wên T'ien walked on very slowly, not seeing the flowers, not caring for the trees that arched above him; great acacias in bridal bloom, giant oleanders dripping rose, orange and red, a *ginko* whose flutter of red cloth and silk shreds told it possessed of a devil who must be propitiated, or that it was the abode of a god to be worshiped and prayed.

Slower and slower he went.

Suddenly Wên T'ien paused. He was trembling.

He must not go back towards the lake. He must not try to see her again, except in proper time and place, in proper way.

But a longing stronger than Chinese usage, stronger than the man it writhed, was fighting Wên T'ien.

He turned—his hands clutching his petticoat, twisting his girdle.

He stood there for several minutes, and put up his fight—not knowing that the garden was beautiful, not hearing a nightingale serenading the hen bird it wooed.

He fought, and lost.

He went a few steps, checked himself, stood still. Then a few steps more towards the water-lilies. Wên T'ien went very slowly, but he went.

The lady would have gone from the lake by now, have gathered the blooms she wished and carried them away. He would look again on the lake where he had seen her, stand again where he had stood when he had seen her.

That he might do without desecration, without rudeness.

If by any chance, she still were there, or if by sweet misadventure he came upon her as he went, he would not let his eyes disturb her, linger on her. He would pluck them out first.

They would not meet. But if they met, he would turn away, instantly go from her path. She would not still be on the lake. But if she were, he instantly would withdraw.

Perhaps she needed a servant, a messenger, he lied to himself. Perhaps some servant she had sent on an errand had not returned, even had lost his way in the mazes of the bewildering place—easy for a stranger servant to do—or perhaps the catiff low-one had squatted down to have a pipe, and had fallen asleep. And so, perhaps the maiden was in distress, in need. Even now wild animals might assault her. (Here in the *chia* in which no wild animal ever had been, whose wall no animal could climb. Here where for centuries no wild animal had been nearer than forty *li*.) Lord Wên T'ien went more quickly.

But so virginal, so reverent, the young passion that had beaten him, driven him back, tricked him to lie to himself, that when he saw her, still in the boat, still alone in the melting sunset, he drew back, turned away quickly, and went.

But she cried out to him.

Her voice was peremptory and glad.

"Lord-one!" she called to him clearly. She had no need to call him twice.

Wên T'ien swung round; he reached the edge of the lake in a stride, bowed low, then lifted eyes that gave her his allegiance.

A hint of amusement touched the girl's mouth.

But her eyes welcomed him cordially. She was greatly relieved that he was there.

"Look," she bade him. "See the plight that I am in! I slept. This boat—my enemy, to play a trusting girl so scurvy a trick!—drifted tighter and tighter into these greedy lilies here. Them I will not call my enemies, or be theirs; but it may be that they sucked the disobedient-to-me boat into their fast mesh. Boat or lilies or both, when I woke I was caught in the lily stems. Do what I would—I did all that I could—I could not get out. I could not move my boat the fragment of an inch to freeness. We were glued there. I am hungry." She dimpled and laughed. "I grew frightened; I own that I did. I feared I should stay all the night hours here. Never get free again!" Her gay laugh was silver and sweet. Easy enough to laugh so now, since a man, whose eyes showed him eagerly her friend and servant, stood on the shore ready to do her bidding.

"Will you take a message to the house for me, Lord? A message to the Lady venerable Chenn-yi No? You are known to her, born-before? You go to visit her?"

"The august Chenn-yi Erh No knows this worm-one closely. I was on my way to make obeisance to her."

"Haste you to her, then. The darkness comes. I am not man-brave to stay here alone in the night black. Make speed, I ask you. Say to Chenn-yi No that I perish here"—the girl dimpled again—"prisoner to the water-lilies. Say to the noble old-one to send many servant-ones, I crave her; gardeners with the strong knives with which they prune and cut the great trees. Many men with many knives, because many of these stems must be cut away. They look so fragile, and are so strong! I cannot pull them up. A man could not pull them up. They can be cut, I am sure, but I cannot break them off low enough down to release the boat—not without leaning over so far that I should fall out."

Wên T'ien did not turn away to do her bidding. She had expected him to do that, and to do it instantly.

He bowed to her, deeply respectful. A well-bred, well-behaved Chinese bows constantly, almost as often as he breathes, at moments of importance.

This was a very important moment indeed to the Lord of Wên.

He bowed very low.

Then he walked into the water.

Lo-ees the girl gave a cry of dismay; but a laugh lurked in it.

Wên T'ien came steadily on towards her: magnificently cumbered in all the splendid garments and fripperies he had donned to make him fitly presentable for audience with punctilious Chenn-yi No—the rich embroidered petticoat he had so carefully protected from the Great Wall, the elegant shoes, the girdle of silk with its pouch of velvet, its costly smoke-box, the cap with its long feather and valuable jewel.

He did not regret the ruin of his elegant toilet—still less grudge it. But he regretted the impediment they cost him. He wished that he might have cast them off, left them off, left them on the ground—especially the petticoat and the shoes, and proceeded without them, more conveniently clad only in thin singlet and short linen drawers. But only a coolie could have done that.

"I come to you, O very honorable maiden," he said superfluously.

"Go back!" the girl in the boat demanded. "I bade you go to Chenn-yi No. I am not afraid to wait here alone until the servant-ones come."

The man smiled. And he contrived to bow again before he spoke, and when he had spoken, waist-high in the water though he was now, he bowed again.

"Well your low slave-one knows that, flower-and-princess incomparable. I may not leave you alone here in discomfort—"

"I am not!"

"—to be imperiled perhaps. An hour might pass before I found Chenn-yi No, and her servants reached you. Evil might reach you before then. Fear might assault you."

"Go back!"

"Lady, I regret to disobey—"

"You'll have to swim. You can't—if you can swim—in your hampering heavy garments. You will drown, you will be of no use to me when you are drowned."

"I can swim—even in these," the man boasted with a happy laugh.

"Go back, and take my message to Chenn-yi No. You waste time." But the girl Lo-ees commanded him with a shade less determination this time. "Go back, I ask it, lord-one. You cannot reach me. If you did we should be two prisoned by the water-lilies instead of one. If you reach me, you cannot get me out. The boat will not hold two. And if it would, you would be as helpless to get it free as I am. Go back, I entreat you."

The water was almost up to his shoulders now, but courtly Wên T'ien contrived to bow again, though, it must be admitted, not very profoundly.

"Oh!" the girl laughed at him, half angry, half pleased.

"My vitals are torn to disobey you—"

"Mine will be torn"—she made no pretense of solicitude for the possible suffering of his—"if I starve here, or go to the everlasting hold of a water-dragon, as I shall if you catch hold of the boat and capsize it. But you cannot reach it. Only a sharp knife could cut a way to me and cut my way out. You have no knife. If you had a knife, you could not use it, and keep to safety while you did. You will need all your honorable arms and legs to swim with in a moment, if you persist, and if you are a swimmer-one. And the weight of your water-heavy clothes would drag you down, even through the thick lily leaves. And then you would become the slave of the water-demon. Go to Chenn-yi No! Already I shiver." That last was not true.

"I can cut my way to you, lady. See, I have an adequate knife. It has cut through jade and has chiseled stone. The water soaked in my garments delays me a little, I must admit. But it cannot thwart me. I can swim with my legs and one arm. I can float on my back, and use my arms as I will. I come from a South Province, lady-one, where we swim from our birth hour. Assume tranquillity, I entreat you. I come to you. This servant of yours will not capsize your skiff. He will cut you a path. He will bring you to the shore with all safety."

He had drawn the knife from his coat as he spoke—and well for the knife that he did, it already was misted with wet. Wên T'ien looked at it critically, wiped it on his shoulder and tried its edge before he secured it on his head, binding his well-soaked queue about his cap, and thrusting the long knife into his queue and cap with utmost care.

“This contemptible person craves your gracious forgiveness, eminent, highly born maiden, that he has arranged his hair as a servant should not in the jade presence of a master-one. I must commit the enormity, to serve you; otherwise than thus, I might lose my adequate knife as I swam.”

He began to swim then—none too soon, the water had reached his chin; as he spoke his last word he had involuntarily swallowed a mouthful of water.

The girl laughed at that; and the man grinned too as he spluttered, amused also, but not at all embarrassed.

It was more of a feat than it sounds: the swimming of Wên T'ien to Lo-ees. His robes, heavy with embroidery, and heavier with water, were inconveniently long and of hampering shape. His petticoat tangled his legs and feet, his padded shoes were a tiresome handicap, his long sleeves thwarted his strokes, got about his neck, threatened to bind his eyes. He had to hold his head well out of the water, and hold it at a stiff, unchanging angle lest the knife slip and fall from his queue that held it.

Wên T'ien swam on.

He looked absurd, but he swam magnificently. The girl saw that he did. She knew that he was winning his obstacle race.

And the rescuer had not overboasted of his water-ease and -mastery.

He lay on his side, in nonchalant indifference and hacked through the slippery lily stems speedily. And he smiled as he cut. He was glad of his task. He thanked the gods.

She sat upright now, and watched him intently.

The thin-bladed, heavy-handled knife slipped, threatening to fall. Wên T'ien caught it, and held it in his teeth.

He swam on to her, hacking away the long lily stems as he did, swam and hacked his way to her, with the knife in his mouth and adoration in his eyes.

“It is enough,” he said presently, bending his head courteously, in lieu of the bodily obeisance that the courtliest Chinese ever born in that land of great courtesy could not achieve afloat in a lake.

The girl would have poled the boat now, but he begged that he might complete his “contemptible service in his own wormlike way,” and she yielded to the entreaty of his eyes.

Wên T'ien caught the edge of the boat in his sinewy, jeweled hand, and began to swim again, guiding the punt perfectly and smoothly. The girl knew it a remarkable feat.

She began to admire the man.

And he looked less absurd now. He had dropped the invaluable knife among the flowers at her feet in the boat. He no longer had to hold his head rigidly.

Studying him with sidewise glances, pretending to braid lilies together, she decided that this "fish of a man" probably would be rather handsome—when he was dry and clad in dry clothes.

Something hit against the skiff, a thud of silk, a clink of coins.

"Your gold," Lo-ees cried in dismay.

The man's pouch had loosened, torn away from his girdle: a very beautiful, jewel-hung pouch. The girl caught it as it rested a moment against the boat's glass-smooth side; the jangling jewels were saved. But not the bag's contents. A shower of gold pieces hurtled down to the fish—they both saw them clearly as they cut through the clear water. And the gold pieces were many, most of them large.

"Your gold."

Wên T'ien laughed—unaffectedly.

She began to like this man.

CHAPTER XXI

But when the cap with its long feather and jewel button fell off and before he could reach it, Wên T'ien laughed less comfortably.

"The jewel is valuable; you prize it. Chenn-yi No will send a diver to get it to-morrow when I tell her." The girl was genuinely sorry, and the effort she made not to laugh openly at this Chinese Samson suddenly shorn was heroic, did her credit. Wên T'ien's long queue had come off with his hat!

"The sapphire is nothing, most noble lady. I doubt if in this horse Province even great Chenn-yi No has a servant who could dive for it with success. But that this your worm easily can do on some other day, if he finds it convenient, cares to so spend a fragment of time. The sapphire is nothing."

"Tell me not so, Lord. Your loss troubles you, I saw that it did. You deny it, not to trouble me in whose aiding the loss was incurred."

"Kwan knows," the man insisted gravely, "that the loss of the cheap, off-color sapphire I mind not. But, since no not-truth-word of mine shall affront your jadelike ear, I do somewhat regret the loss of my queue."

"Yes," the girl said sadly, controlling her mirth as well as she could, "it was a very handsome queue. But it too the diver shall recover. Chenn-yi No has more than one able diver, horse Province though this is. Your sapphire and your elegant queue shall be returned to you to-morrow. I pledge you the gratitude of Chenn-yi No that they shall; her gratitude for your rescue of an unworthy one whom she loves."

"It was not a bad queue as queues go," Wên T'ien owned with a laugh. "I paid twenty dollars for it in Shanghai."

So, he had traveled!

"But," he added, "I no longer like to feel a queue drag on my neck. I have not worn one for years. But here I dared not present myself to venerable Chenn-yi No without wearing a queue. She approves of none of the new Western ways that so many sash-wearers have adopted. I must replace the hair I have lost before I abase myself at the footstool of Chenn-yi Erh No. And until I can replace the lost queue, I must hide."

"Chut! When she knows that you rescued me, knows how you lost it, she will forgive you. I promise you. Is it long since you saw Chenn-yi No?" *Who* was he?

"Three years have come and gone."

"Almost a stranger! But you will not find her changed."

"Indeed I shall not; Chenn-yi No is changeless."

"Yes; and yet, I think she relaxes, even swerves, more and more often than she used to bend or yield. I, at least, find her more indulgent."

Who would not indulge the flower of all flowers? Wên T'ien thought, and his eyes said it.

They had reached dry land.

Wên T'ien beached the light boat.

Lo-ees stepped out a little uncertainly. The stranger did not venture to offer his hand to assist her, and she found that she was a little cramped from sitting so long in the boat's narrow quarters.

"I thank you, lord-one. Can I send servants to you? Shall I give Chenn-yi No a message for you?"

"It darkens, lady. It will be darkness soon. Permit me that I follow you to the house. Some vagrant might molest you."

"There are none here."

"I scaled the wall," he reminded her.

The girl smiled.

"Some wild animal might attack you," he urged.

"There are none here," she repeated, "none, for many *li* beyond the outer wall, more ferocious than the wild rabbits that forage for peanuts and lettuce."

"Pardon your worm. There are no rabbits in just this part of China. Indeed there are no *true* rabbits in China, though several prolific species that are called rabbits, especially by foreign travelers and writers."

"I bow to the learned-one's scholarly reprimand," the girl mocked him. "What are they then, the gray and blue thievish, very timid ones that look like rabbits, jump like rabbits, run like rabbits, and that we call rabbits?"

"Hares, lady, or squirrel-ones."

Nothing loath, even here, to show her how great and exact his store of information, Wên T'ien added a learned dissertation upon the rodents of China, their similarities and their differences, habits, locals, history, the rôles they had filled in Chinese art and letters and in legend, even in the pharmacopœia. He told it eagerly, until Lo-ees interrupted him with a charming smile and a pretty peremptory gesture.

"Dear me!" said the girl. "But now I go. We may trust my secure safety, even if a not-rabbit should cross my path."

"Forgive me, that I disobey you, radiant maiden highborn and fearless, but this worm, your slave, attends you until you have sight of the house."

"You are wilful, lord-one."

"I am a man," he reminded her. "I will follow behind you at a respectful distance."

But I must see that you have made your going in safety. Respectfully I submit that we should go."

"But not yet, since we go together! See how you drip!" Indeed Wên T'ien's sodden petticoat had made him a lake, almost submerging again his soaked shoes; and his coat was as wet. "You will get more nearly dry—it will not be dry at all—standing here where still there is some sunlight than you could walking under the shadowing trees."

"The dripping of my raiment shall not touch you, eminent royal-one; and for me it is nothing. My motion of walking will serve to dislocate from my garments some of the water that clogs them. I pray you we go."

"Since I must then," Lo-ees said rebelliously.

But she continued to speak as they went; it made it impossible for Wên T'ien to keep the respectful distance behind her that he had promised. To have caused her the inconvenience of speaking to him over her shoulder could not have occurred to him.

Even in the unusual circumstances he was surprised that she continued to speak with him; a disregard of courtyard law that must have enraged Chenn-yi No, had she known of it, a disregard of custom that would have shocked his own mother Wên O-he. But the girl he had guided from the water-lilies could do no wrong in the eyes of Wên T'ien. He was surprised that she chatted to him so unconcernedly, or at all, but he was glad, glad to drink the music of her voice, delighted to answer her.

Who was she? He wondered more and more.

When he saw that her feet had not been squeezed, Wên T'ien was startled, almost repelled. Perhaps she was a Manchu, probably she was; it accounted for her fairness. *Who* was she? How came she to be here?

And the girl was wondering, almost as much, who he was.

Each was baffled and curious because of the other's evident intimacy in the *chia* of Chenn-yi Wang; an other of whom Chenn-yi No never had told.

"*Aie!* Your beautiful garments are ruined! You never can wear them again. You can but throw them to the rubbish heap."

"I shall keep them while I live," Wên T'ien said softly.

The girl smiled.

They went a few paces in silence then.

"Do you know Shanghai well?" presently she probed.

"Not well. But twice have I been there. Those twice I made no long stay."

"The City of the Rams, perhaps?"

"And love it well!"

Why didn't he say where his home was, who he was?

Interrogation is indispensable to Chinese politeness. And the prescribed questioning cannot be too personal—except that a man may question no other man of his shut-ins, his women. “How old are you?” must be the first words spoken to a new acquaintance, courteously treated. “How much did your noble uncle pay for his honorable wooden leg? Is the great and highly skilful bandit Sun Lo Wu your honorable kinsman? For what is your brother's number three son in prison? Is that your best coat? How much land do you own? Is it good and profitable land? Do you not prefer Li Mang's pawnshop to Chu Boo's?” are perfectly polite questions that mean no affront and give none.

Simplicity is a hallmark of the Chinese from highest to lowest. And they are not secretive or distrustful.

But Lo-ees the girl sash-wearer did not choose to question this man more directly than she already had done. And when she was back in the *kuei*—it would not be long—the gossip of the courtyard would eagerly tell her all she wished to know concerning this stranger who was, now that she had looked again, decidedly good looking, in spite of the absurd appearance of his head.

Wên T'ien had let his hair grow long enough in the back to gather into the root of the artificial queue fastened inside his cap. And he had had his forehead shaved several inches back. Scarcely necessary, she considered that unbecoming sartorial sacrifice, since he must wear his hat in Madam Chenn-yi's presence.

“But she might command me to remove my hat.”

The girl laughed that he had read her thought, and had spoken in reply to it. But it had not startled her, for it occurs constantly in China. There are four hundred and fifty million mind-readers in China.

“True!” she agreed. “Chenn-yi No may do anything at any time. She is a stickler who herself never conforms unless it suits her to. And I know another, an English woman, a Lady Saunders. She and Chenn-yi No often remind me of each other.”

“They do me,” was the man's astonishing reply. “The type is not uncommon.”

“You know Lady Saunders?”

Wên T'ien bowed.

“Knew her in Shanghai?”

“No, not so. I met her in Paris, and later in Edinburgh and in London.”

Why didn't the creature say who he was and where he came from?

“Do you know her well?”

“Not well.” The shrug of a wet shoulder that accompanied his words was not altogether flattering to Lady Saunders.

"Did you like her?"

Wên T'ien temporized. "She is a friend of my mother's."

"Do you like her?" The question was imperative this time.

"I do not like her. I avoided knowing her more than politeness forced me. I dislike all English women. I shall always avoid knowing them, as far as I can."

The girl laughed.

"Do you dislike all English men?" she asked him.

"Most of them."

"Not all of them?"

"Not all of them!" And Lo-ees believed that he had said it affectionately.

"Do you speak English?" she said in English.

Even then he did not suspect; had no inkling—mind-reader though he was.

"Incomparably, not so beautifully well as you do," he answered in English, with still one more of his courtly bows.

"You seem to have considerable English vocabulary."

Wên T'ien bowed once more, but she saw that he was quite indifferent alike to the quantity and to the quality of his English.

"Where did you learn English?" she demanded.

"At school."

"Where?" Lo-ees persisted.

"In England."

"Oh!" The man had surprised her. He seemed so typically Chinese, unaltered sash-wearer of the old, unpenetrated régime, notwithstanding that he had discarded his Chinese queue. She would have wagered recklessly that he never had been out of China. Even his saying that he knew Shanghai, a little surprised her. That he knew Lady Saunders amazed her. That he had been in England, and had been there long enough to learn English, she could credit only with difficulty.

"Do you like England?" She spoke again in the Mandarin that she had interrupted.

"No, noble maiden. It is a detestable country." (Lo-ees laughed.) "I try to forget the English language. Some of my countrymen come back to China, after foreign stay, with their Chineseness tarnished, damaged. To me our gods have been more kind. I came back knowing even better than I always had known—as of course I had—that China is the supreme country, we the paramount race, infinitely superior to all others. I am more Chinese, more proud and grateful that I am Chinese, for every day that I suffered exile."

"I think, lord-one, that you were unfortunate in the English acquaintances you

made.”

“They all are barbarians,” the man said with an eloquent shrug. “They are without culture, manners. They have no art, no letters, no real education. Few of them have intelligence. They dwell uncouthly in ugly houses. So devoid are they of dignity and privacy that they spend most of their time in public, out of doors. Yet never have I seen one of them pay homage to a flower, look love at it.”

“But you like some of their men! You said so.”

“Some English men are better than others, better than their nation.”

It was just as well, the girl thought a trifle sadly, that this Chinese gallant of the old school had not seen fit to push his acquaintance with Lady Saunders, had not said much to her.

“Some English men are honest. I have known English men, know several, whom you could not distrust. But—” He dismissed the subject, the entire English nation, with a gesture of contempt, a wide sweep of hand and arm.

His companion bit her lip, much amused, a little indignant.

“Why did you go to England? And why did you stay there when you so disliked it?”

“My mother wished me to go.” That was sufficient reason for any Chinese, prince or coolie.

“I rejoiced greatly when she commanded my return to her. Of a truth, I did not know, until I lived in exile, how greatly I loved China, or know how great my fortunateness that I was Chinese. In deep gratitude for that, I have built in my park at home a temple of exceeding beauty. I would that you could see it.” Greatly daring, he looked gravely in her face. “A very beautiful little temple: its pillars are rose and lemon porphyry and jasper, its altar-table is perfect jade. In it incense burns perpetually. It stands on steps of mosaic. It stands in a garden of peonies. Violets bloom about it when the peonies are not at blossom time. *Ginko* trees shade it; wind-harps hang on them, trembling sweetest music when the breezes graciously come. A crimson lacquer trellis of wisteria faces it.”

Only a very rich man could afford to build such a temple, Lo-ees knew; a man who could disregard, unaffectedly, the loss of a sapphire of price.

“A temple of hate,” the girl said oddly.

“Hate of the foreign devils; yes.” Wên T’ien instantly had understood her. “Or rather, a shrine of forgetting of them. A temple of gratitude for my release and escape. A temple of Love: my love of our China!”

Lois Allingham smiled, as oddly as she had spoken.

After that they spoke of pleasanter things.

They questioned each other of Chenn-yi No, told each other gay tales of her.

Wên T'ien knew and remembered how unprecedented a thing it was that a Chinese girl highly born and exquisitely bred—he could have no doubt that this girl was both—walked, and without downcast eyes, and talked freely, with a man; a man completely a stranger, in no degree a kinsman. Any other Chinese girl doing it, would have repelled him, lowered herself irreparably in his eyes. But the girl he had found marooned in the water-lilies could do no wrong. Wên T'ien was more certain of that than he was of all other verities; surer than he was of his beloved mother's chastity, surer than he was of China's incomparable beauties. It surprised him: of necessity that. But because she did it, it was no blemish in her. She was perfection; above and beyond criticism.

The girl knew as acutely as he how rank her trespass. She knew that a good many other courtyard girls, under identical circumstances, would have done just as she was doing, if they had had the self-confidence to carry it off—which very few of them could have had.

And too, she was not flawlessly Chinese to-day. She knew that her Chinese self was a little languid to-day. She had realized that almost as soon as she woke. She had wondered what Cotterel was doing in the Settlement, wondered what her father was going to have for breakfast, whether Desmond Smith had proposed to Elenore Chambers yet. Several times to-day she had thought in English; a certain sign that her Chinese self was going, her English self coming back.

When China was entirely dominant with her she would not have treated a strange man so unconcernedly and unceremoniously—at least not in the *chia* of Chenn-yi No, nor readily in Hong Kong or Shanghai. For it was Old China that claimed Edward Allingham's daughter. She understood Young China and liked it better than Wên T'ien did, saw its possible future rosier. And she lacked his prejudice that blinded him to such good as there was in the new ways and the stupendous efforts of Young China. But she cordially shared his preference for Old China.

China was not entirely dominant with her to-day—or had not been a few hours ago. She felt a little English to-day, in spite of motif-embroidered trousers and jeweled stick-pins. It came easier to her, more natural, to look the man in the face than to hang her head and lower her eyes; easier to treat him as in the identical circumstances she would have treated an English man, and to chat with him unconcernedly, than it was to remember that she ought not to do it.

As a rule Lo-ees the Chinese girl and Lois the English girl did not clash, because they did not meet. One or the other was, and the other one was not. They did not

modify each other, because their acquaintance was so slight. One of them went right away, as the other came back. It was well for the girl that this was so, for they were unalterably incompatible. They could not make friends. Lois the English girl sometimes wondered if they ever would. Lo-ees the Chinese was sure that they never could. Nor did Lo-ees ever wish it. Lois sometimes wished it. Lois Allingham never was ashamed of Lo-ees of the Courtyard.

Lois disliked Lo-ees less than Lo-ees disliked Lois.

On the rare occasions when they both claimed her (and interrupted each other), no matter how briefly, it troubled and disconcerted her.

It was one of the uncomfortable anomalies of her life and dual nature that she had little voice in when she was Chinese, when English. She could not put off Lo-ees with trousers and tunics. She could not keep Lois out of *chia* or courtyard. When Lois intruded on Madam Chenn-yi's *kuei*, the girl was rankled, a little homesick. Lo-ees could be an embarrassment at Henley and Cannes.

That there was any possible detriment in being of two so different races, or humiliating social inconvenience, never had crossed Lois Allingham's mind. Her father's wealth and her own beauty had saved her that—so far.

But she knew that it was a nuisance to long for Europe when in Asia, to hunger for Peking when in Westminster. You can't buy lychees—worth eating—or mangosteens in Bond Street; you can't hear Big Ben on the Yangtze.

But none of this troubled her often or deeply. Lois Allingham was not often very thoughtful.

She certainly was not troubled by it, or by anything, just now.

She was having a very good time, the best time she had had for some days.

She loved An-hwei, she loved being with Chenn-yi No, but the *kuei* was desperately manless. And Lois, splendidly normal, was dependent upon men for her best contentment. She liked men better than she liked women. A man had been her nurse and playmate, from her birth, for several years—a peculiarly charming and interesting man—and had been her close chum ever since, always and now her best friend and most enjoyed companion.

She was glad to have a man to talk to again.

Fascinated Wên T'ien was not having as good a time as the cooler and far more socially experienced girl was. He was too excited, too anxious to please, too anxious not to blunder, too raw, too unaccustomed to women's society. He never before had spoken to a courtyard woman who was not his kinswoman, except to a few whose hair was white.

But he was tremulously glad to be here. And considering his unaccustomedness

he bore himself most creditably—and not at all unsuccessfully.

He accepted gratefully the frank camaraderie this girl gave him, because to him she could do no wrong; and not because he approved it. He knew what the new day just dawning in China had given Chinese women; he believed that it had robbed them of much more, believed that it had marred them, was convinced that it would rob and mar them more and more. Wên T'ien had traveled more than Lois suspected. He knew the Kuomintang's intentions—intentions better than their performance as yet. Probably no fault of theirs, he was just enough to own. Their task was gigantic—its way would be long. He knew of the great changes that were creeping into China, and into Chinese homes, and knew all that could be urged gravely of their desirability. But he disliked them all. The old ways of Old China were bred in him too deeply, he was too intensely the son of his house for him to be able to like the changes that had come—at least for a time, and would, he was sure, strengthen and increase—for a time.

He liked his fan. He loved the fripperies that he wore at his girdle, he liked the feel of his silks, he was very particular about his embroideries.

He did not regret the queue he had worn as a boy; he sometimes had felt it heavy, it had dragged at times. But he disliked having yielded it to the new ways, although he had done it far more for personal convenience than in obedience to insolent "National" Edict. He admired Chenn-yi No that no man who served her might cut off his queue; was glad that his mother's serving men and coolies might not cut theirs.

He could but feel that *on the whole* unbound feet were kindest. But he loved his mother's "lilies." He knew that he'd be ashamed of a "big-footed" mother. He had winced when he had noticed that this girl's feet were unbound.

He wondered what his mother would say of the maiden's feet?

Could his mother be persuaded to forgive them?

Wên T'ien's thoughts were traveling fast.

A company of golden orioles, fluting in and out of the blossoming nut trees, were singing in the sunset.

The man and the girl stood still on one impulse. Neither spoke.

To stand together before a great picture, to share a lovely landscape, to read a beautiful book together feeds and strengthens friendship. Music has softer, sweeter charm, a greater potency: the one art that moves even more than nature's loveliness can. It stirs the pulse as neither scenes of nature nor any other art can. Shared congenially, it links a man and a maid deliriously. Music makes a path to love: music love's high-priest, messenger—love's voice!

While the birds sang they did not look at each other. But they listened *together*. It moved them to each other.

When the birds' singing melted into silence, Lo-ees and Wên T'ien went on slowly—smiling at each other as they did.

Lois knew that the man interested her. Men rarely bored her—whatever their race. Rarely had a man bored her less.

This new acquaintance would add to her pleasure in her being here—if Chenn-yi No would permit them to see anything of each other.

That was improbable. But you never could tell with Chenn-yi No. And Chenn-yi No's daytime sleep-hours were long.

Lo-ees knew that she rather liked him.

Wên T'ien knew that he loved.

CHAPTER XXII

When they were almost in sight of the house, Lo-ees insisted that the man should disappear; not on her account (though she did not say so) but on his own.

His servants were bringing boxes of raiment, he had said.

"Keep out of Chenn-yi Erh No's sight until they have come," she urged. "But even then, what about your hair, lord-one? You have not another queue among your garments, have you?"

Wên T'ien laughed. "Alas, lady, no. It was my only queue."

"What will you do? I know! Do your servant men still wear queues?"

"Assuredly."

"Then one of them must cut off his queue!"

Wên T'ien laughed with delight, rocked with mirth.

"Nimble of wit, exceedingly able of strategy, you indeed should sit by Cæsar and give direction."

The girl eyed him sharply at that. Who was this man? What was he? No, she concluded; he had not quoted, he had used the words quite accidentally.

"Chenn-yi No will forgive me, I think—if her temper is right."

"If her temper is right," Lo-ees agreed significantly. "Go towards Ts'ai Shen's temple's priests' house now, lord-one. The priests there fare well. Their rice will not displease. To-morrow when Chenn-yi No is in happiness, tuned to indulgence, I will send word to you."

Conspiracy with her!

The man liked the thought of that! His infatuation snatched at such intimacy, and was glad.

"A little more near to the house, and I will wait watching you until I see you in perfect safety, and when you have reached the *kuei*, I will seek the opulent wealth-god's temple-place, or more probably enter the house of Chenn-yi No well out of her august eyesight. The servants know me; they will aid my harmless deception until my own servants come. Even now they may be here," Wên T'ien temporized.

Lo-ees sighed.

"Lady?" he asked anxiously.

"I wonder if Chenn-yi No will take fright when she learns that I was caught in the water-lilies, and could not get out, and will forbid me to go from the *kuei* again except with serving women beside me!"

"This slave begs that you will not go again unattended."

"I will be more careful than I was to-day," the girl promised lightly. "But I will not have chattering, giggling women with me perpetually—it would madden me. Far would I rather never go out."

The look that came on the man's face told her—for all its softness and deference—that such abstinence on her part would have his hearty approval.

"Oh!" she told him, speaking with emphasis, looking at him squarely and almost a little hardly, "in my father's home I go abroad freely, go where I will, go when I will."

It was as he had half feared then! The great lord who was the eminent father and master of this exquisite perfection was not quite admirably antagonistic to Young China. That explained the unbinded feet—which could be defended—and the surprising, though gracious and graceful, self-confidence—which—well, he wondered what his mother's comment on that would be! His sweet, imperious mother!

His mother had allowed him to cut off his queue, had even counseled it reluctantly, when she had sent him among their countrymen who had discarded their Manchu-prescribed queues; many of them men as highborn as he, some of them his kinsmen. But she had relaxed nothing her *kuei* strictness.

In all the centuries since a Son-of-Heaven, who loved his favorite concubine much, had had lilies stamped in the soles of her tiny shoes—that all, seeing her footprints marked on the sanded paths, should *k'ot-ow*, saying, "The mistress of the Emperor has walked here"—no lady of the Wên harem, wife or concubine, ever had been "big"-footed. Still less had any women of the great Wên clan ever had freedom of speech, or of glance, with men who were not their own, men to whom they did not belong.

Wên T'ien's heart grew lead at his thinking of his mother.

He had built a temple of gratitude already in their princely home.

He vowed to Kwan a richer, more beautiful temple, another temple of gratitude—if—!

The necromancers could be bribed. About that there would be no difficulty, if the bribery were large enough.

Wên T'ien's heart grew lighter as he thought of the necromancers.

"Perhaps she will not curtail the freedom she has given me here always, if I promise her that I will not go alone in any boat again."

"You must tell her?"

"Shall I keep from her the courtesy you did me, the kindness?"

"The kindness was to me, Eminent. Let it be our secret."

"Our secret," sounded sweet in his heart.

"And leave the service you did me untold! Did I that, I should despise myself."

"No—not if I beg it. I beg it of you."

And when he urged it, and she saw that he wished it, Lo-ees consented that she would consider it.

Quite possibly it might make for peace between Chenn-yi No and each of them, if Chenn-yi No need not know that they had encountered each other, had lingered together, and had spoken together recklessly and without restraint.

The thought occurred to them both.

But neither he nor she said so.

"Now, come no farther!"

They had reached almost the beginning of the wide mosaic path where a gigantic soapstone dog, whose angry red eyes were jewels, frowned in front of the beautiful bamboos thick behind him. All the long straight path could be seen clearly from the house to which it led, a sumptuous, conspicuous approach to the sumptuous dwelling.

The maiden had spoken imperatively.

Wên T'ien the captive did not dare disobey that tone from those lips.

But it was too late.

Servants were running from the house. Chenn-yi Erh No herself came panting down the terrace.

It was Chenn-yi No who saw them, caught a flutter of silken jade-and-crimson scarf between the bamboos that they had carelessly believed still hid them from all the homestead's eyes.

Chenn-yi No screamed, and tottered toward the inefficient bamboos.

Her painted face—Chenn-yi No was not a widow—was streaked with tears. Her wonderful long, white hair—usually carefully dressed—was disarranged.

She might have fallen upon Lo-ees, the peccant guest, with anger and reproach. But that did not chance to be her mood. The woman's relief took the sweeter expression of joy. It was honey-mood with which she pelted them as she hurried insecurely towards them on her tiny crippled feet.

Was Lo-ees hurt? Had she met with accident?

"Fallen asleep! Forgotten that the day-star went!" Madam Chenn-yi laughed, laughed until very different tears washed her white and crimson paint, laughed until she tottered on her useless feet, and must have fallen, if Wên T'ien had not run to her and thrown a sturdy hand under Chenn-yi No's elbow and steadied her.

Lo-ees was dearly beloved of Chenn-yi No, but Madam Chenn-yi was so

amused, and so rejoiced and relieved that all was well with Lo-ees and that the girl's father need not reproach and curse an erring hostess, that she gave Wên T'ien scant notice at first.

She did not even frown at him when he caught her elbow to save her from falling: an outrageous liberty for the man to have taken—any Chinese to take.

But Lo-ees threw him a glance of warning and hurried to the woman's other side, and when the girl's hand was on Madam Chenn-yi's arm Wên T'ien released his grasp, and bowing profoundly drew back a pace.

Even for the girl to touch another woman, was a great liberty to take; to so touch one older than herself was an enormity.

The Chinese do not handle each other.

The human body keeps its state in China.

Chenn-yi Erh No laughed, and tapped the girl's fingers caressingly with an affectionate fan.

That he and the girl had come together through the bamboos she did not seem to notice, or if she noticed think it odd and scandalous.

Chenn-yi Erh No approved the new ways as little as any great lady in China. But she knew how far they were the ways of Edward Allingham's motherless only daughter. She knew that Lo-ees had no fear of men, had accustomed ease with them. Within wide limits, at her times of sunny mood, disapproving unalterably, Chenn-yi No philosophically endured. Her standard of hospitality was high—higher even than etiquette, wider than her courtyard.

She drew her arm affectionately through the girl's, leaning her weight a little on the younger strength, and availing herself of the security of the girl's surer feet.

"Come, my silly pigeon who turns day into night. You deserve that I beat you. I have thrashed a god for less! But I will feed you instead. I famish. You have a thoughtless stomach, that it reminded you not to snooze by the wayside in the glare of the hour-of-the-Sheep. Ah—la! But that seat of such intelligence as you possess, I make no doubt, has not mislaid its appetite for rice. In that, if in nothing else, my own stomach is reliable. It forgets many things that it should remember, and remembering remind me. I famish. My anxiety for your safety, bad careless that you are, sleepy-headed, has torn my sensitive stomach; it pleads for the solace of rice and wine. Are you famished too, my pretty pigeon? Does not your honorable distinguished stomach bleat for its rice?"

"It had not told me so, noble very-old-one; but you have reminded it. I shall enjoy my rice."

"And we will have it in heaven's-well. It is at its great loveliness now. When the

lanterns are lit on the lemon trees about us, and the stars sparkle in the sky above us, heaven's-well will be more lovely still. And since we hunger, you need not paint. We will eat Don Quy and ginger-dumplings, Way Shon Yue Gob and Yung Lar Chu until our bellies ache, and drain brimful winecups of sweet flame—when we have fed the god. And the girls shall make music. Perhaps the nightingales will sing when, rice and wine finished, we lean on our cushions and smoke in content. Come.”

But she herself waited, and with a pressure of Lo-ees' arm made the girl wait too.

“So, Born-before-me Wên T'ien, you have remembered my existence at last, and the way to our house, have you, laggard and indifferent that you are?”

It was the first attention that she had vouchsafed to the man who stood a little guiltily with his jeweled hand on the stone dog's hoary head.

Wên T'ien drew back a step, very respectfully, his hands deep in his sleeves, and bowed very low.

“Come here, Born-before Wên T'ien!”

Wên T'ien came a few steps nearer; with each step a bow.

“I said, ‘Come *here*,’ Approach to closeness.”

Wên T'ien obeyed, not quite unreluctantly.

Madam Chenn-yi eyed him severely.

The old woman caught a fold of his sleeve in her free hand.

“All the gods!” she screamed. “Could you not present yourself to me decently, Wên T'ien? You are soaked like a sponge. You drip like a peasant-hut's leaky roof in great-rain. Think you that I am your bath-slave? Since when have you taken your bath tub in all your clothes? Another atrocity of Young China, I suppose! Deplorable! Your petticoat is ruined completely. And it was quite a good petticoat—before you gave it to your bath tub. Wên T'ien, you are a devil-one. You have played your old trickery. You have climbed over the outer wall! Curses, that you did not fall over it and break your impudent neck as you deserved! But you fell, I thank the gods. You fell into the moat!”

She ended with a cackle of glee.

And Lo-ees ventured to flicker a glance of relief to Wên T'ien.

“You, knowing him at the Treaty Port and at Mo-kan-shan, have thought well of him perhaps, my poor deceived Lo-ees. Your honorable father has thought well of him. He can bear himself like a gentleman, the scoundrel. But I know him. I know his badness. It is deep as the lair of the angry Yangtsze's king-demon. It is black as the hell-clouds of the Pepper-moon. He has no morals; his manners are damnable. But you shall come with us, villain-one. I will punish you with kindness. I will scourge you

with forgiveness. For it is so that souls of the highest nobility punish. And your inferior stomach too shall have its rice. And because you are the son of Wên O-he whom I love, and because I loved you once, long years ago when you had innocence and some good behavior, you whom I love no longer shall rice with me to-night."

So, Madam Chenn-yi No would not dine in heaven's-well! She had changed her mind about that. And Lo-ees would eat alone!

"I loved you years ago, when you smelt sweet of your mother's milk, Wên T'ien, now vile and rude one. And for the sake of the love I once gave you, not knowing that a curse lay on you, and that you would grow up a demon, and for the sake of your jadelike mother whom I so greatly esteem, you shall have rice with us, while the concubines play to us, in heaven's-well."

Wên T'ien gasped. He scarcely could bow.

Lo-ees too was surprised. But her amazement was less than his. She had gaged the boundlessness of Chenn-yi No's eccentricity and daring as no man could, unless, just possibly, Chenn-yi Wang did.

But Lo-ees was greatly surprised. A man—whose harem the *kuei* was not—admitted to the heaven's-well! Fed there! Not only with many-yearred Chenn-yi No, but with a lady unwed-one not even remotely akin to him! What would the concubines say? What would they think?

The girl's eyes danced.

Wên T'ien was aghast. His amazed head swam. He thought that the dog-monster of soapstone growled. The mosaic path was going round. What would the concubines think? What would his mother say? And Chenn-yi Wang? Wên T'ien's eyes were grave and troubled.

Wên T'ien was much embarrassed.

"Come! Would you have me die of my hunger and thirst, heartless ones? Think you to keep me standing here till the rat-frog has croaked the midnight! Come to our rice. Walk you beside me, Wên T'ien. I have forgiven you," she chuckled.

CHAPTER XXIII

The concubines and serving women clustered in heaven's-well sprang up when their mistress came, and folded their tiny hands in their splendid sleeves.

They were well-trained, and most of them knew Madam Chenn-yi No intimately. But not all of them were quite able to hide their surprise when Lord Wên T'ien followed Chenn-yi No into the sacred, man-forbidden place. And two of them presumed to frown when they saw that the Lady Lo-ees walked beside him: Quang Tee, who had a strict and domineering personality—entirely curbed in the establishment of Chenn-yi Erh No—and Ming Min, the youngest concubine, who had a nun-like face under her paint.

Chenn-yi No saw their dismay, and chuckled.

Wên T'ien saw it, approved it, and was freshly embarrassed.

Lois Allingham saw it, mildly amused but otherwise quite indifferent.

Chenn-yi No caught up its mallet and herself struck a golden gong that hung in its black-wood frame. The little old lady was not without muscle. The gong belched out a strident call that was both deep and shrill. It echoed beyond heaven's-well.

Three eunuchs shuffled hurriedly from the house.

It was not their habit to hurry except only when Chenn-yi No commanded or called. But in her entourage indolence itself took on industry and made speed when Chenn-yi No ordered.

More often than not her erratic rule was generous, but it always was firm and demanding, she brooked no disobedience, she allowed no delay. The eunuchs suffered but ran, when Chenn-yi No called.

"Bring rice," she ordered crisply.

A gesture, that included Lo-ees and Wên T'ien, indicated clearly that she commanded rice for three. "I require it here at once."

Two eunuchs panted off—they both were fat. The third was following them, but their mistress gestured him to wait. "I eat not with a drip-one," she told the Lord Wên T'ien severely—but her eyes danced.

"Bring warmed towels, Tin Sung!" she commanded the outraged eunuch. "Go with swiftness, return with speed, or the coolies shall thrash you till you blubber!"

Tin Sung shuffled off as rapidly as he could, bleeding indignation at every pore.

"Dry the great lord-one," she commanded when Tin Sung the eunuch had waddled back armed with many towels. "Dry his high nobility well and thoroughly, from his beautiful head's top down to his elegant, though ruined shoes' splendid

soles.”

“Squat!” Chenn-yi No commanded next, when Tin Sung’s brocaded back felt like it would crack—and sounded like it too!

Tin Sung squatted.

Wên T’ien, greatly embarrassed, though not unamused, stood stock still, and took his towelling like a brave man, while the fat and angry eunuch pouted, and the slave girls snickered.

Chenn-yi No watched it all, sharply critical.

Lo-ees dimpled and bit her lips. But, disliking Tin Sung as much as his mistress did, she was a little sorry for him—all his pampered over-fed corpulence, all his heavy splendid, jeweled clothes, bent ignominiously over Wên T’ien’s ruined sodden shoes.

Incredibly soon a table was brought and placed, and three stools placed at it; a clothless, ungarnished rose-wood table.

Chenn-yi No took her stool, motioned Lo-ees to sit at her right, motioned Wên T’ien to sit at her left; giving him the seat of honor because he was a new-come guest.

Lo-ees smiled, and sat down after a pretty obeisance of gratitude.

Wên T’ien bowed very low, protested his complete unworthiness, expressed his distress at the mere suggestion that he, worm that he was, should sit in such unmerited precedence in such distinguished society.

Secretly Wên T’ien sincerely was a little askance. He never had eaten in a *kuei* before—not even in his mother’s. Still less had he ever taken rice in heaven’s-well, a sacred heart of the sacred women’s quarters. Except his mother’s, he never had been in a *kuei* before.

To eat with women, he felt a slight degradation. Women should stand and serve, if admitted at all to where their lords ate. But Wên T’ien let that pass because these were exceptional women. She whom he had rescued from the lilies was the flower of the world, and Chenn-yi No was a law to herself—and to every one else who approached her. And whatever he or any other thought, he knew that in bidding him share her rice Madam Chenn-yi considered that she paid him great honor.

This heaven’s-well was beautiful; never a difficult achievement in a Chinese *kuei* of wealth.

The women’s quarters of the low rambling house made its west-side boundary. Its own high walls bounded its other sides. Trees hung over the beautiful carved walls. Vines clambered them. Geraniums and crimson lilies blazed in tubs. A jungle of pink-balled hibiscus, giant oleanders and walnuts flanked the pierced and carven

wall and overtopped it beyond its north side. A peahen sat on her nest under an oleander clump, a little removed, it is true, in the shelter of the wall's quietest corner, quite unperturbed by the shifting colors and gay high voices of the silk-clad women. She knew that she would not be molested or approached too nearly. The peacock strutted about lordly and gorgeous. The monkey chained on its sandal-wood pedestal chattered happily enough; the cage birds more happily. Wild birds flew in sometimes and sang with them in the friendliest way. Fresh grains were put out for the wild birds each day.

Chenn-yi No tapped on the table impatiently with her fan. She disliked waiting. She particularly disliked waiting for the eunuchs. But the imperious woman was not often unreasonable. And she knew to a breath how many moments it must take the eunuchs to reach the kitchens and return.

Rice would be ready on the great stoves. It was a usual meal time now. And always, no matter what the hour, not unpalatable food was ready to be dished and sent; for those who served her never knew at what time Chenn-yi No might not command rice. She exacted punctuality from all others, she did not practise it. And except for the long nap she took every afternoon that she could, she kept no regular hours.

Chenn-yi No did not like the eunuchs. She kept them in attendance, because it had been customary for centuries, in the greatest establishments. Nor, though they irked her more as she and they grew older, would she dismiss them, lest she might seem to yield them to the new Government's edict.

Chenn-yi No did not dislike the concubines. If most of them were even more useless than the eunuchs, they were more pleasantly ornamental; they all were beautiful, and most of them were good little things. She considered that they did her taste great credit. She had selected and collected them herself. Chenn-yi Wang always had been slothful about it, placidly contented to accept his secondaries at his wife's capable, energetic hands. And for years now Chenn-yi Wang had been past attending to such things.

The eunuchs stayed, but almost never one came. The concubines stayed and came. Both were essential to the state of the great house and clan. The retinue never grew less, now and then Chenn-yi No increased it. A new concubine was arriving soon.

"Music!"

Harps twanged. A flute was played.

"So, you wear your head new fashion, Wên T'ien!"

Wên T'ien looked a little anxious. He had known that she would notice it at

once. It was said that Chenn-yi Wang's number-one had eyes in the back of her head and over each ear, and few who knew her disbelieved it. Wên T'ien expected her to berate him soundly. Lo-ees expected it too; she gave him a tiny smile of sympathy.

"You look hideous," his hostess said amiably. "But perhaps it was advisable under present pressures when you went where you have been. And you have vigorous hairs. They will grow again."

Wên T'ien bowed.

Lo-ees' smile trembled and broadened.

"Until you wear again your honorable and becoming queue, let your scalp and brow hairs grow. You look a fool no-one, with all that baldness, foreign-length hairs thick on the behind half of your head, and no queue elegance on your back. *Aie!* Our times are poisoned. Since you wear no longer your beautiful queue, let all your hairs grow to one length, Wên T'ien."

"Your loathsome worm will obey you," Wên T'ien promised ardently.

A concubine giggled softly.

"'Of ten bald men nine are deceitful and the tenth is dumb.'!" Chenn-yi No quoted the proverb severely. "I never have found you dumb, Wên T'ien."

The concubine giggled again—less discreetly. Madam Chenn-yi looked at the girl searchingly, and then giggled too.

Rice came.

It was not elaborate rice. Even here, that could not be expected on such very short notice. Shark fins and ruby-in-pearls cannot be prepared and served almost instantly.

But it was excellent rice; a *pien fan* meal, every-day food: pot luck. Pigeon could not have been better, or omelette or stuffed-peppers more delicious.

And when they had fed the god, seated in his shrine of amber beside the *ginko* tree, carrying the most delicate portions to him themselves, Madam Chenn-yi and Lo-ees enjoyed it all.

Wên T'ien could not eat much. He was fed by a girl's presence. And he was overwhelmed at the enormity of this unprecedented situation. For every possible occurrence there was law and detailed time-honored direction. For the conduct of a gentleman eating his rice with two ladies, one a not-wed stranger, in the *kuei* of a harem that was not his, there was neither etiquette nor aid. The greatest law-giver, Confucius, himself had vouchsafed no hint. Wên T'ien did not know a single adage to help him out. The dilemma was staggering.

Lo-ees was very hungry. And Lo-ees was not at all embarrassed. She was

having a very good time—just the sort of a time that girls like. She ate heartily.

Chenn-yi No ate even more; daintily but fast and long, and sipping her scalding wine with evident relish.

When the rice was taken away, and the table carried after it, perturbed Wên T'ien wondered whether he ought to offer to go or wait for Chenn-yi No's command.

He concluded to wait. It was the truer etiquette. Chenn-yi No would quickly bid him go when it was her wish. And in spite of his sincere embarrassment, he would rather be here than anywhere else in the world.

They lit their pipes—the two ladies lit theirs.

Madam Chenn-yi lifted her eyebrows when she saw that Wên T'ien did not have his.

"The moat shall be dragged to-morrow," she said. "A pipe of yours would be jeweled and of value. Your pouch is soaked of course. Come in by the gate when next you come, Wên T'ien, lest you bungle again and lose your heart and your head, as well as your pipe and fan, and ruin your best petticoat in the moat." She turned to bid them bring pipe and tobacco to the young lord. But she did not need to speak. Ming Min, the nun-like concubine, had anticipated the mistress's command, and proffered to the Lord Wên a pipe of their master's, that she had been trusted to mend, and had just mended well. And Lo-ees, the sash-wearer maiden, held out her jeweled tobacco-bag to Wên T'ien.

He thanked Ming Min courteously enough. He scarcely thanked Lo-ees adequately as he took her little pouch in a hand that trembled; happy, happy pouch that held the fragrant tobacco in which her delicate fingers had dabbled!

Chenn-yi No noticed with a smile that was sinister, but her old eyes danced. And when the man uncouthly spilt some grains of the precious tobacco, Chenn-yi No was merciful and did not rebuke him.

And Wên T'ien believed that Chenn-yi No had not seen.

Lo-ees knew that Madam Chenn-yi had.

It was pleasant in the *kuei* courtyard. The dark and the stars had come. The lanterns were lit. The peacock had closed his splendid fan, and sat near his hen with his head snug under his wing. The cage birds slept. The wild birds had gone.

The music, soft now, that the harps and the flute gave was sweet.

The flowers were maddeningly sweet.

The new moon was a narrow sickle of soft green-gold.

A tiny rivulet on the tiny hill beside the cherry tree made music too; elfin trickle of music.

Chenn-yi No, laughing softly, leaned toward Wên T'ien, and handed him her own tiny fan: a very great mark of gracious favor.

The concubines slipped away to their own rice. Several of them came softly back.

And Chenn-yi No and the young guests who were dear to her sat on, smoked their tiny pipes, sipped scented tea from tiny costly cups, listened, drank the courtyard's delicious odors, and chatted fitfully.

Under the witchery of the place and the hour, under the stimulant of a subtler, sweeter witchery, Wên T'ien found his tongue and used it well.

The old woman smiled when twice he grew a little eloquent—smiled before she sighed.

Suddenly she let her pipe fall with an unheeded clash, as she sprang up with a soft joyful cry.

Lo-ees and Wên T'ien had not heard, nor had the concubines or the slaves. But Chenn-yi No had heard.

Chenn-yi Wang her husband had come to the courtyard.

CHAPTER XXIV

It is not usual in "old" conventional China for a gentleman to come to his wife in her innermost courtyard, and find another lord-one, no kin of hers or of his, there with her, sitting near her, her fan in his hand.

It never had happened in this old, old heaven's-well before. Wife or concubine, every woman who had come to it had known that she would not while she lived go again beyond her lord's outer walls, and very rarely, if ever, out of the *kuei* itself. No maiden born here ever had left this her father's *chia* except to be carried to a husband's.

And only a peculiarly complaisant husband would brook occasionally a close kinsman to enter his *kuei*, never heaven's-well itself. And Wên T'ien was no direct kin to Chenn-yi Wang or to Chenn-yi No.

Carried on the couch he rarely left except for the great red bed, Chenn-yi Wang, the master here, her lord, was coming into the heaven's-well.

The old wife ran to him—quick on her binded feet, at his approach.

The men who had carried the couch, put it down carefully, and backed from the courtyard.

Wên T'ien and Lo-ees rose too, and the concubines and the servant-slaves bent low with their hands in their long wide sleeves.

But no one was perturbed, neither husband nor wife, guests nor concubines, nor attendants.

It never had happened here before. But all who lived here, and the girl, her guest, were prepared for anything from Chenn-yi No. And when she had brought him *here* she had bereft Wên T'ien of all capacity for future surprise.

Chenn-yi No bade his men put down her husband's couch against the heliotrope-covered arch, watched them sharply while they did it, hung about him solicitously.

Chenn-yi Wang stretched out a thin hand, and caressed a fold of his wife's long tunic. And when she sat down close to him, sitting on a low stool for which she gestured imperiously, Chenn-yi Wang took a tassel of her girdle, and held it as if it were very precious, kept it in his hand.

And all of them here knew that in the eyes of Chenn-yi Wang, her lord, Chenn-yi No could do no wrong—not if she crammed all of the *kuei* with silk-clad, fine-featured men not of their kindred.

From their marriage day sixty years ago until now Chenn-yi Wang never had

seen a fault in Chenn-yi No. Until he died he never would.

He made Lo-ees a courtly gesture—they were the best of friends, and Chenn-yi Wang was a courteous host; he threw Wên T'ien a whimsical smile. He had taught Wên T'ien to hawk when Wên was a lad. He gave the concubines a pleasant glance to share among them. But his eyes hurried back to his wife's and stayed there. He had given her his soul when he lifted the red bride-veil from her painted face, and threw his dagger at her feet. And the woman had kept it—whether the virtue and constancy were his or hers. It still was hers, and always would be.

And Chenn-yi No paid him back in coin as royal.

An accident had lamed and disfigured him twenty years ago. His right arm hung limp, his right leg was paralyzed. Sleeplessness, distaste for food, frequent sharp pain, tortured and wearied him.

Chenn-yi No poulticed it all with love. She had kept him alive. A far greater feat—she had kept him entirely happy, entirely content; not finding the sleepless nights too long—beside her, scarcely missing his health—since he had Chenn-yi No.

It was a perfect partnership of love and happiness.

Chenn-yi No bent over her husband in openly brimming affection. Her bubbling voice cooed like a mated dove's. There was nothing imperious about Chenn-yi No now. She straightened his petticoat, rearranged the silk rug on his feet.

Chenn-yi Wang was courtly to all always.

He often forgot his concubines' names, but he never forgot or neglected to show them silken politeness and an appreciation he did not feel.

He scanted none of courtly suavity and consideration as sincere as they were superficial. But from the honied intimacy of a comradeship that had stood the test of sixty odd years and of the irritation of twenty years of pain Chenn-yi Wang had no soul-thing to spare—except to China.

The tortured man lying on the cushioned couch was a patriot.

But he was not thinking of China now. He was thinking only of the woman bending above him so close that old cheek almost touched old cheek.

The man and the girl looked reverently away at the same moment, and as they did met each other's eyes—and smiled: a leap and bond in friendship between them. Only a fleeting glance of mutual understanding and sympathy, a tiny thing. One of the little things from which great things sometimes grow. At least, it told them that they had a language in common: a fluent, spiritual language.

Both were amused and touched at the old lovers' scandalous love-making where others could see—far more touched than amused.

Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No were chatting together busily now. Twice the

old man laughed—the second time he tapped his wife's knee with his fan, in playful reproof.

The concubines knew that they were free to go or to miss them.

Lo-ees seated herself on the long soapstone bench. Wên T'ien picked up a cushion and carried it to her. He was no longer smiling.

"Has noble Chenn-yi Wang failed exceedingly of late?" he asked her anxiously. "Or has my long absence dulled my remembering of the illness in his face?"

"I know not. I came to Chenn-yi No but at the coming of the yester moon. Neither now here, nor on other visits to An-hwei, have I seen much of him. When I do, he is very kind—as long as he remembers my presence."

Wên T'ien smiled again. "He is engrossed very often; absentminded to all else, as he is now. My married sister paid eminent Chenn-yi No a visit once. She was here for a full moon. They gave her great welcome, radiant hospitality. One day she had a long conversation with Chenn-yi Wang—her husband is his kinsman, and in this *chia* one learns license—"

"One must," the girl agreed.

"The next day, meeting in the crab-apple avenue—he in his litter—Chenn-yi Wang bade the carry-men put down the palanquin, and, beckoning, called her to him, and asked her if all was of comfort in their quarters, and if the new-come-one was happy. 'Be kind to her, I charge you, Welcome Sunshine. I think a new-come often must be lonely, long for her birth-home.' Then he dismissed her. He had mistaken her for one of his concubines."

Lo-ees laughed gently.

"I believe it easily. Chenn-yi Wang could not have looked at all particularly at your honorable sister's hair! His mind is not always with his eyes. I knew that yesterday when I chanced upon him in the meadow-of-mint, where he often has them carry him, he wondered who I was. And I had played my lute to him and sung to him while Chenn-yi No served him his early rice."

"I pray that great Chenn-yi Wang is not as frail as he looks."

"Chenn-yi No believes that he grows a little stronger, suffers acutely not quite so often."

"She has kept him alive. Would all the gods she could cure him!"

"That will not be, I fear."

"Alas, no, Lady."

"But she gives him happiness," Lois said softly.

"Great happiness!"

Not meaning to do it, they both glanced again at the two old lovers.

Wên T'ien flushed.

The girl giggled—giggled affectionately.

“What must their ancestors think of them!”

“What indeed!” Wên T'ien echoed.

“I make no doubt that their very honorable ancestors are bitter with anger, turn aside their faces in shame. But distinguished ghost-ones can blunder. Why not? I despise even ghost-ones that poke and pry intrusively. Even the gods should bow before such friendship in marriage. Of a sureness Kwan Yin would not wish to curb its tenderest expression. I think the friendship of Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No very beautiful—perhaps the most beautiful thing in China. I am glad to have seen it. I shall not forget it.”

“I am glad to have seen it,” Wên T'ien told her. “I shall not forget it. And you have given me a very beautiful thought. I shall cherish it. Friendship in wedlock!”

“Why not?” the girl said daringly.

“Why not!” the man repeated devoutly.

Then Chenn-yi No called them.

And when they reached his couch Chenn-yi Wang welcomed Wên T'ien very cordially, and smiled kindly at Lo-ees.

CHAPTER XXV

When she feared he wearied, Chenn-yi No sent for the waiting bearers, and took her husband from heaven's-well, walking beside him, her hand on his sleeve, as his carry-men bore his couch to the splendid sleep-room where the vast red bed had pride of place, as it had had ever since, standing beside it, more than sixty years ago, Chenn-yi Wang had lifted the red veil from his bride's anxious face.

For almost their lifetimes they had shared their bridal chamber in unbroken friendship. And there Chenn-yi Wang had suffered his invalid torture for years now uncomplainingly.

When her red veil had heaped at her feet, and the bridegroom had dashed his dagger down beside it, a girl's great anxiety had left Chenn-yi No's painted egg-shaped face. Anxiety never had touched it again, or had excuse to, until they brought her lord to her mangled—anxiety never to leave her face again.

Before that Chenn-yi Wang had writhed in anxiety, for she had borne him children, and he had feared for her and suffered at her pain.

But Chenn-yi No had not feared. She knew that no ill could come to her in this sanctuary-room of their great love. And through it all she had smiled at child-birth pain, and defied it.

But she had crumpled when they brought him to her, hurt almost to his death, hurt to permanent pain and crippleness. It had maddened her; and it might have killed her, had not her knowing his need of her saved her.

Pain never would leave him again while he lived.

Pain and anxiety never would leave her face again until they lay together in his coffin.

A first wife's bedroom is her own. But, unlike other Chinese husbands, Chenn-yi Wang had no other sleep-room.

They had shared all things, from their marriage hour until this. And when child-birth had barred him from the great red bed—a Chinese wife's absolute possession—Chenn-yi Wang had lain at night on a mat near her door—when he did not kneel beside her.

Since his couch had come into heaven's-well, Chenn-yi No had taken but tepid interest in her guests.

But she spoke to them over her shoulder as she went.

"Sleep well, Lo-ees lily one," she bade.

And she motioned the Lord Wên to precede the couch from the woman-sacred

courtyard. It was enormity that he was there. Even her absorption in Chenn-yi Wang could not cause her to leave Wên T'ien there without her. And if it had, Wên probably would have scurried after her, frightened and embarrassed.

The Lady Lo-ees returned his very formal profound salutations sedately, bowing as formally as he had; her bow the quick jerk of feminine ceremonial politeness.

But when the quick-to-mirth concubine tittered at his going, as she had at his coming, the Lady Lo-ees giggled too softly.

Lo-ees was sleepy.

She knew that conquest had been hers on the lily-pond. Lois Allingham knew that a Chinese heart had fallen at her feet in the lily-caught punt—as actually as a Chinese knife had, and more violently. She had little doubt that she could keep it—the Chinese heart—if she would. But such conquest was no novelty to this girl: a very mild excitement that would not cost her a moment of the sleep she craved. She had been up since daylight long hours ago. Most of them had been active hours. She had found it easy, and pleasant too, to fall in with most things Chinese here. But her life-long English habit of exercise would not give way to courtyard sloth.

She had swung until she grew a little dizzy, and her feet—in spite of their soft Chinese shoes—grew weary on the painted stand-up-on-board, and her soft fingers tired of the silken swing-ropes.

There were several swings in the *kuei*, others in the outer grounds, but the pet monkeys used them oftener than the concubines and slave-girls did.

Lois swung until it bored her. She often rambled for many a fragrant *li*; she had to-day.

And she had tugged at the resistant water-lily stems until her arms had ached, and her temper tingled with them.

Lo-ees was very sleepy.

She undressed carelessly, which no sash-wearer girl should do, and huddled with lazy sleepy speed into the cool looser robe in which she slept here; a proper Chinese robe high to her chin, sleeves long to her wrists.

A nightgown would have been an enormity in this Chinese house. Lo-ees sometimes wondered laughing what Chenn-yi No would have said, if Madam Chenn-yi had seen one of Lois Allingham's nightgowns and Lo-ees in it!

But to-night she wasted none of her delicious weariness on such idle speculations. She cuddled on her hard Chinese bed yawning happily; the round porcelain pillow was down beneath her neck; and Lo-ees slept.

Wên T'ien did not sleep.

But he dreamed.

And between his dreaming Wên T'ien prayed to Kwan Yin and to several other god-ones.

Wên T'ien would have been ashamed to sleep to-night.

But he had no need to force himself to wakefulness.

Not once did sleep approach Lord Wên T'ien.

He kept a devout vigil all night long in the luxurious guest-sleep-room to which corpulent Tin Sung had attended him as surlily as Tin Sung dared.

But Tin Sung need not have been cautiously chary of his rudeness. If he had made the rudest mock-faces at Wên T'ien, Wên T'ien would not have known it. If Wên T'ien had known it, Wên T'ien would not have cared.

It was scarcely day-break when Lo-ees felt, rather than heard, the door-screen pushed back, then closed again when some one had entered the room.

The girl turned over on to her side, and waited wide-eyed and contentedly.

She did not question who had come or why. It had happened several times, at all odd hours of the night.

All her life, even in a London season, Lois had had the inveterate Chinese habit of early waking. In their Dorset home, it was she, not the gardeners, who brushed the early morning's dew from the grass.

She was quite ready to chat with Chenn-yi No.

"Sleep you, lily one? No, rise not!"

The woman must have heard, for no eyes could see yet.

Chenn-yi No struck the flints she carried, and lit a candle. Then she opened a casement.

"So! We will watch the loveliness of day-come together, you and I, child of my heart."

She drew a stool to the window, and sat down a little wearily. But the steady candle light showed her face glad.

Lo-ees thanked Kwan Yin.

It was a fine face, for all that the years and a man's suffering had riddled it. The beauty that had enslaved a bridegroom when he first looked on her egg-shaped face, time and pitying of him had obliterated to all eyes but Chenn-yi Wang's. Chenn-yi Wang was going to blindness now. His sight was dim. For all his powerful spectacles, he brushed the simplest characters with difficulty, and inexactly. He no longer could take communion with the books he so loved, except only by the

reading aloud of the scribe. Their bed's brilliant red grew paler and paler to the sight of Chenn-yi Wang.

The smooth loveliness of the girl-wife was gone from her face. And it was flatter than best egg-shape now. But the greater beauty of wife's devotion, woman's loyalty, was chiseled on it by half a century of undeviating tenderness and fealty: the exquisite dignity of the great-vow well kept for all a woman's marriage life-time. White-haired, soft skin a little shriveled here and there, old-age's brand of uncomely flesh on her, the old woman's eyes were still the eyes of a bride, loved and loving, a young wife securely satisfied in marriage, deeply enriched from life's greatest, most perilous gamble.

"He sleeps at last."

"I thank Kwan," the girl said softly.

"Chenn-yi Wang grows better!" the old wife said passionately. "Slowly," she added reluctantly, "but I see a gaining."

"I see it," Lo-ees the girl said, praying for forgiveness, wondering if she ought to say it. But the temptation to comfort was irresistible.

"The most honorable is happy," the girl said—honestly.

The woman's heart leapt to her, and thanked her.

"Little one," Chenn-yi No told her, "the happiness of such wedlock nothing can damage. Of a truth-tell we are greatly happy, my noble lord and I his worm-one." She added softly, "We have kept our joy."

The girl was silent—reverently.

"See!" Chenn-yi No dropped the amber snuffer on the candle.

A film of pale emerald was creeping over the gray-dark.

"I rejoice that Wên T'ien has come to us. My lord likes better Wên T'ien's reading to him than he does Li Bo's. I shall detain him long-time as I can. I shall send a runner to eminent Wên O-he his mother with my letter entreating her that she command Wên T'ien to linger with us. He is dear to us. He will gladden my dear lord."

The girl on the hard, narrow bed smiled in the safe dimness—nor was Chenn-yi No looking toward her. Lo-ees thought the exertion of that runner unnecessary. She believed that Wên T'ien would need no urging, still less imperative command.

"We are as sisters in friendship. Since many years our hearts have mingled. I am content that my friend Wên O-he will not deny me."

Well—she had learned his name—if it interested her. He was a Wên, and they had named him T'ien. Wên T'ien—rather a nice name. And his mother's honorable name was Wên O-he. Lo-ees liked it less. O-he had a gritty sound. Was Wên O-

he, the mother, gritty? Sand-rough sometimes, or if you displeased her?

"Look, girl! Look!"

Lo-ees slipped from her bed, and knelt at the window beside Chenn-yi No.

A flame of rose flickered through the emerald, beams of silver flecked and javelined it.

"You knew Wên T'ien in the England? Met you too there Wên O-he? Does your father know them? Or in Shanghai?"

"Lady, no. I did not know his name until you spoke it. I saw him not until yesterday."

"So!" Madam Chenn-yi was much surprised. But she had not spoken sharply. She was curious, but not angry.

"*Ah-he! Ah-he!*" the woman whispered. Before such miracle human incidents were nothing, paltry; human confidences could wait.

There was brazen battle in the sky. Day's chariot rushed in flame. Gold, not silver! Crimson, not rose! Heliotrope and cinnabar. Pulsing, crashing, glittering sunrise triumphant. Feathers of many glittering colors decked the lovely battle.

It was day in China.

Day had come to China.

The girl's bedroom was softly ablaze, every costly detail of it sharply visible in the illumination spared, but not missed, from the blazing, brazen sky.

The woman—a law unto herself—laid her hand on the girl's head. She loved Lo-ees.

Neither spoke.

But presently the radiance softened, the sunrise smoothed its plumage.

The sky was at peace.

"It is over," Chenn-yi No said regretfully.

"For to-day," the girl agreed. "But it will be given to us again to-morrow—every morrow; always new, always different, addedly beautiful each new day."

"The gods are good!" Chenn-yi No said reverently. Chenn-yi No who thrashed her gods when they were not good!

Lo-ees stood up, and brought a stool near Chenn-yi No, and sat down, facing her.

She knew what Chenn-yi No wished to hear, and Lo-ees did not wait to be questioned. Chenn-yi No often did not sleep long. When he stirred, or seemed about to stir—at any hint of it—a servant, one of those left on watch—would hasten to Chenn-yi No. And Chenn-yi No would tarry for nothing then.

Lo-ees told the little story briefly. She told it with nice truthfulness. Truth itself

could not exact that a girl, in her nightgown, on a carved uncushioned stool, her little feet naked on a carpetless floor—tucked up intermittently about the legs of her red-wood stool—should tell what a man's eyes had said, what a something in his voice and his embarrassment had told. It would have been unkindness; even a sort of treachery, to have dragged all that in. And it must have sounded an unmaidenly boasting. And perhaps she had been mistaken!

But she told all the material facts.

Twice the listening woman nodded sagely; once oftener she laughed.

"Go not on the lake—or any water—unattended again. Would you kill me? Take Wên T'ien who swims, and has a knife, with you the next times. And I believe that he can pole a boat, and can row one. I know of nothing useful that he can do. But I wager that he will prove a useful playmate," was her cheerful comment, the only comment Chenn-yi No troubled to make.

It was ungrateful of the woman to say that Wên T'ien, who read aloud so much to Chenn-yi Wang's content, did nothing useful of which she knew.

But that was not why the girl stared in surprise.

"Chut!" Madam Chenn-yi, rising, answered the girl's thought. "There are new ways on us now. I approve them not. But he who comes to a low gate-arch, and may not turn back, must bend. And my lord and I must keep us much apart—on many days, it may be—because of his illness. I would not have either of our young guest-ones unamused. It is good for children to play. It is well for youth to laugh. Wên T'ien has lived in your father's country. He knows its ways of social freedom. You are steeped in them—when you are not here with me. Yes; I am not a fool-one, girl. Because of much, we can relax a little—just a very little, Lo-ees—the full strictness of our wise Chinese laws of etiquette and conduct. Your father would not disapprove it." (Lois wondered if he might not?) "And what I permit here in the *chia* of Chenn-yi Wang, none may question."

Lo-ees slipped quickly from her stool, to attend Madam Chenn-yi to the door, and slid the panel back for her.

"To-day, if my lord is able—he is much better—we will go to the mint field he so likes. Wên T'ien shall attend him, walk beside his palanquin, and you shall go with me. Forget not your face-paint, child-of-my-heart, since we have a guest."

Lo-ees bowed, with her fingers squeezed into her sleeves. She could not get her hands in, as she should; the sleeves of her sleep-robe were too narrow at the wrist-bands.

When she had closed the panel, she perched herself again on the red-wood stool. She nursed her knees gently, considering several things.

So! Chenn-yi No would fan it! That much was clear.

Was her father awake yet? What would he do to-day? Think of her for one thing, she knew. Had Nell Ridley won the tennis prize? Had Mr. Cotterel put up the new devil-screen before the main door at Red Bridges?

She hoped that Chenn-yi No would not make her paint her face every day. After all, she was half English.

Lois Allingham was peeping over Chinese Lo-ees' shoulder.

A lark was singing on the old crab-apple tree, singing to the great day-star. Or was it a love song?

CHAPTER XXVI

At the hour-of-the-Serpent Chenn-yi No sent for Lo-ees and for Wên T'ien. They hurried to her, and reached the door of her sleep-room at the same moment.

"I am afraid so!" Lo-ees answered the question in the man's eyes. "I believe it must be, or she would not have bade us come to her here."

"I fear it," Wên T'ien echoed.

They did not speak again until Chenn-yi No came to them.

It was some time, seeming longer as they stood together waiting.

There was no embarrassment.

Lois Allingham never was embarrassed.

Wên T'ien was too anxious.

They both were sincerely anxious.

They both loved Chenn-yi Wang. Neither of them was without love for Chenn-yi No.

When the door-panel was drawn back noiselessly, Chenn-yi No came to it, and spoke to them very softly. And her face was stricken.

"It has come," she told them. "It is a worst time. Go. Amuse each other."

The panel was closed.

Amuse each other, knowing that the room from which they were shut was a rack!

They smiled at each other sorrowfully, at the impossibility of that.

Amuse each other!

When before, in all China's history, had that been enjoined on a man and a maid, sash-wearers, both unwedded, of new acquaintance, of no kin? And by a matron, highborn and scrupulous!

Surely never since the long, long-ago day when primitive human life had been wild and lawless, China sashless—if such an unthinkable day had ever been in China!

But Chenn-yi No had spoken.

She was all law, Law itself, here.

They could not join in mirth-making now. Even in the *chia* of imperious Chenn-yi No, in China as in antique Rome, none was bound to the performance of impossibility. None could be.

But she had bade them go together. They could obey her in that. And neither of them wished to be alone in this shadow of suffering that hung a pall over the radiant,

sun-flooded *chia*.

"Will you come into the garden, lady?"

And Lo-ees turned and went with him.

They gathered no flowers. There was no laughing between them. All their talk was grave and quiet—when presently they talked together, out among the willows where the larkspurs pierced the clotted ferns.

When rice time came, they ate apart—of course.

But when Lo-ees sat stitching rather idly where cherry trees shaded the coolness of a great roofed well; when the day's greatest heat was dwindling, Wên T'ien, chancing to pass near her, came a little nearer and bowed somewhat requestingly, and Lo-ees welcomed him with a smile that was permission.

And again they talked together until the sudden dark sent Lo-ees hurrying to the *kuei*.

But there were many morrows.

There were few in which Lo-ees and Wên T'ien did not see each other.

And if the gods of China gnashed their teeth in anger, no one heard them.

Health and illness fluctuated in the great red sleep-room.

There were days when Chenn-yi No hoped again. There were days when she must have despaired, but that the white-haired, lion-hearted old woman forbade herself despair.

There were days when Wên T'ien or Lo-ees, or both, were bidden to the great red room to chat a little to the ill man on the big red bed. He said little, but listened with a quiet, friendly smile.

He liked Lo-ees to bring her lute with her. He liked Wên T'ien to read to him.

And they liked to listen to each other, if they both were there.

There were days when Chenn-yi No came to them while Chenn-yi Wang slept, a faithful servant watching by him.

Often at the hour-of-the-Monkey Chenn-yi No would come to the open casement, and standing there, beckon Lo-ees to her, enquire of her comfort, how the servants served her, were her days too dull?

It came to be an unofficial, unacknowledged appointment between them.

And if Wên T'ien too chanced to be within Chenn-yi No's hailing, she beckoned him also, and the three chatted through the window.

Wên T'ien usually was within the woman's hailing—when Lo-ees, the girl, was.

Occasionally when Chenn-yi No sought them at the casement they were not to be seen. And the woman smiled. They had wandered far to-day!

She had charged them—more than the once—to amuse each other.

And Chenn-yi No smiled, well pleased that they obeyed her.

Even there were days when Chenn-yi Wang was carried from the house, his couch put down on the terrace, that he might lie there and drink the air, or put down in one of his favorite garden nooks, that he might lie there and taste the flowers.

But the days were most that Wên T'ien and Lo-ees shared, days when each would have "eaten solitude," had they not shared them.

Moons came and went.

Sometimes Chenn-yi No, watching from her casement, saw them when they did not see her, saw that they forgot to watch for her coming to the window. And Chenn-yi No drew back, and did not call them to her.

Often now a runner went to Wên O-he. Always he carried a letter that Chenn-yi No had had the scribe brush from her dictation. And always the steadily trotting *t'ingchai* brought back from Madam Wên a reply letter to his mistress.

The friends drove a steady correspondence while Chenn-yi Wang kept his illness and Wên T'ien and the Lady Lo-ees went together through the gardens and coppices, sat together by pond or lake, walked together on the wall—sometimes went beyond it.

Chenn-yi No sanctioned it—pitying so, she said, the cruel dulness of their days here, bereft as they were of host and hostess, deprived of all the galas she would have made for them abundantly, had it not been for her lord's illness.

The moons came and went.

Lo-ees did not offer to cut short her visit at the *chia*.

Wên T'ien did not threaten to go.

They were patient, undemanding guests.

And Wên O-he did not send for her son.

A few days after Lord Chenn-yi's sharp attack Lung Wang the Dragon King up in the trembling sky kept his birthday, as he always does, with rain. Soft torrents slaked the thirsty earth—beneficent god-sent rain for which great agricultural China prays and thanks the great Lung Wang.

Chinese detest rain, even the rain they so need and supplicate. Few go into it who are not obliged to work or to journey in it.

Wên T'ien had learned in Europe to tolerate rain and not to shrink from getting wet. Lois always had loved the rain, loved to be out in it; one of her English traits—she had several—that never left her, or changed for Lo-ees the Chinese.

The rain did not always keep them in. The girl liked it, the man liked to be where she was.

There was a grotto in the far garden, another on the cyclamen hill, where you

could sit and watch the rain from which you were sheltered by the wide-open grotto's projecting roof. Several of the courtyards were covered—pleasant, roomy courtyards.

They both were free of the guest-hall and of the "reverence-books"—as free of the room-of-the-musics and the flower-rooms.

Lung Wang's great "watering-can," pouring down on China, did not keep them apart.

They watched the rain-processions side-by-side. They sprinkled each other joyously with the dripping bamboo rain-wands, and half *k'o-towed* towards it when the great dragon of painted corrugated canvas zigzagged its cumbersome way along to the shrieking of all the *chia's* children and the beating of many drums.

For no due Chinese rite was scanted because of the illness of Chenn-yi Wang. That would have outraged him. And always the gods must have their due.

Lo-ees and Wên T'ien peeped in at the lavish, ornate feast provided for the rain-makers. The bringers-of-the-rain all were coolie men, for no woman can bring down rain; Lung Wang is no celibate, but he keeps his scaled she-ones in their place. But the rain-bringers pretended not to see the sash-wearer maid-one, though when she had gone they whispered together of her unveiled and unpainted face; and wondered.

It rained too long, and much too hard.

Then Chenn-yi No left her lord for a hurried hour, and went to Lung Wang's temple and thrashed his image there herself, and upbraided and threatened the imp-god Cloud Pusher who moves the clouds about in the sky.

Wên T'ien and Lo-ees decked, as she was, in willow branches, went with her and helped her thrash and curse. But they gave Golden-Snakes the goddess-of-Lightning peanuts and honey. And even fearless, imperious Chenn-yi Erh No did not defy or reprove dangerous Golden-Snakes. And they offered honey to Feng P'o, lest he send cutting winds to lash them, and Lo-ees gave some to the little Shrimp Goblin because she loved his naughty face.

It was great fun, but they enjoyed their hours after in the room-of-the-musics quite as much.

And the next day the rain ceased.

A Chinese poet named six-month, "Lotus-moon," as all China calls it now; named it so because Buddha's flower's birthday is late in six-month. The late June rains bring the lotus into bloom. The Chenn-yi gardeners called the lotus "rain-flowers."

They opened as the rain ceased, and Wên T'ien led Lo-ees to where he knew

that the lotus bloomed soonest and thickest.

They "worshipped" the lovely blossoms together for a long hour. But they scarcely spoke—and when they did, almost whispered.

Wên T'ien was very happy.

Each moon they grew a little nearer in acquaintance, a little more warmly contented to solace each other's loneliness.

As Chenn-yi Wang slowly grew better, or they, youth-like, a little forgot the sharpness of his illness, grew accustomed to it, often they made merry together.

The Chinese never "grow up"—in the sad hard sense of growing up.

Often their talk was grave and of things they believed important.

Often they played.

Sometimes they romped. Wên T'ien the boy and the girl that he was wooing.

Before long it was courtship all the way.

Whether they made music together with only the bamboo and red-stemmed willows to hear their lute and fiddle, or dabbled their hands in the greedy gold-fishes' pool, or wandered on the fragrant, fern-covered hill-sides, discussed life gravely while they lounged on the carved marble terrace, or chased each other through the fruit-trees, always Wên T'ien wooed her.

It was not the impetuous love-making that a Western lover must have pressed after a time, probably after a short time, in such a place, so together and alone. Chinese lovers woo more gently.

But Lo-ees knew it for what it was. And Wên T'ien hoped that she would come to: come to understand what he was trying to tell her, very tenderly, very gently.

If she married Wên T'ien—and she knew she might—Lo-ees wondered if she might not miss the more violence of an English lover.

Even quiet George Fairfax would have wooed more vehemently than this—if she ever let him woo!

Charles Monroe would!

Was Betty having a good time in Shanghai? Lois hoped so.

How much did they miss her—Betty, Uncle Paul, her father—and Henry Cotterel?

She liked Cotterel. Way off here, in China that *was* China, she liked him very much indeed. She wondered which she liked the better, more sincerely: Henry Cotterel or Wên T'ien. And which of them should she like the longer—in the furnace of the great-intimacy, through long years?

She knew that she liked Wên T'ien, and that her liking for him grew.

He was charming. His Chinese deference was compelling to the half-Chinese

girl.

Always he kept his humble distance, respected hers scrupulously.

In the Harvest-moon Wên T'ien was as punctilious towards her, almost as ceremonious, as he had been in the Lotus-moon.

And she knew, and respected his self-control, even when it a little chilled her, as sometimes it did.

She did not misunderstand it.

She knew that his senses ached.

Once—in the Hungry-ghosts-moon Lo-ees saw the throbbing of Wên T'ien's heart through his light robe. She had seen his face twitch and his fine hands tremble—even greater betrayals in the sternly self-controlled Chinese sash-wearers.

Wên T'ien leashed his tongue. But often his eyes spoke.

More and more he longed.

More and more the girl responded—or believed that she did.

The growing of a mutual dearness, a mutual leaning, happy comradeship, sweet approach was inevitable: a man and a maid so together, so alone—and she was as close in blood to him as she was to any Englishman who had wooed her.

So lax grew Chenn-yi No's rule of them, that in the Seventh-moon they went together, Lo-ees in her palanquin, Wên T'ien walking beside it, to a city fair where the cricket-peddlers were most of the vendors.

Wên T'ien bought many of the tiny musicians in the pretty rush and bamboo prisons.

As they journeyed home Wên T'ien had to bend low, his hand on her palanquin to steady it, to hear the music of the crickets in their tiny cages on the girl's silken lap.

But after a time she made him carry the cages—all but one—to the wild white roses at the wayside and release the tiny creatures. And the man, protesting, loved her for her mercy to the little crickets.

But one—the best and sweetest and shrillest—they kept to carry their gift to scholarly Chenn-yi Wang. He would like its tiny music. And it is seemly that a Chinese scholar has a cricket chirping in its cage on his study table when he reads or writes.

Though Lo-ees had made Wên T'ien set free the wee beasties he had bought her, she went willingly with him, a few days later, to find and gather golden-bells.

Past the ripening grain fields, over the fragrant patches of browning clover-flowers, through a corner of an orchard where the crabs and dates ripened fast, through the brilliant autumn foliage which only China and parts of the United States

and Canada know, they went to a grove of perfumed cassia where, it was said, the golden-bells liked best to live. And Chenn-yi No insisted that the prized little golden-bells bred best among those *kuei hua*, bred baby crickets that grew as sweet throated as the cassia blossoms that bent down the trees above them.

Lo-ees had her lute. Wên T'ien had his silver flute. He had a book of poems. And, if it passed the early-rice hour, she should not hunger, for he had carried too a grass basket of fruit and little fragrant cakes.

When they had rested and eaten and made their own music for a happy hour, it was the girl who reminded the man of the business that had brought them here to the cassia trees. And Wên T'ien put down a little reluctantly the volume of poems he was about to open.

Then the hunt began.

The tiny bronze-and-gold crickets were nimble-legged. It was not an easy chase.

But they caught a good many.

Lo-ees caught the most. Her fingers were more delicate, though less sensitive, than Wên's were.

But he was the most skilful at caging them—in the emptied basket of sweet grasses. Its meshes were loose, but not large enough for the tiny golden-bells to escape through them.

The man and the girl sat for a long time, and listened to the tiny concert. Like most orchestras in which strings predominate, it took these prisoned musicians some time to tune up, and the tuning-up was a not too pleasant scraping.

"They are angry," Lo-ees said.

"For the moment. They never like their cages at first. But they are happy-go-lucky-ones. They will be the best of friends with each other and with their sweet-scented prison almost at once."

And it proved so.

First violin got his band in tune, and off they went confidently and happily, chirping their brittle, elfin music in amiable harmony.

The Chinese ears that listened loved it.

But again the girl's heart failed her.

When the day-star warned them that the hour-of-the-Dog had almost come she commanded Wên T'ien to release the wee minstrels.

And Wên T'ien smiled into her eyes with more tenderness than he had dared to show before, and with a something of masculine possession, and obeyed her; opened wide the scented jail.

The golden-bells hopped out with dainty, pretty speed, and scattered quickly—all but one.

First violin jumped on to Lo-ees' gauze sleeve, and gave her an unaccompanied solo.

When he had graciously given still another encore Lo-ees rose. But the wee chap sat on contentedly on the soft fold of green and silver gauze.

Even then she would not take him with her, would not keep him captive. She carried him to a clump of sweet-scented wild geraniums, and put him down softly among the fine-cut, fragrant foliage, and left him there.

And Wên T'ien followed her as she moved away towards the marble terrace of the great house; and presently he walked beside her.

On the golden morrow he read to her from the neglected poems, reading with expression.

And Lo-ees the girl agreed with Chenn-yi Wang the old man that Wên T'ien read more beautifully than Li Bo the scribe did.

And day by day Chenn-yi No fanned it.

In the Moon-of-hungry-ghosts Chenn-yi Wang was worse. Chenn-yi No scarcely left him, rarely looked through the window. And Wên T'ien made much headway.

In the Harvest-moon Chenn-yi Wang was greatly better. But Wên T'ien did not lose ground.

Chenn-yi No never had match-made before, but she was match-making hard now. Perhaps it poulticed her pain at Chenn-yi Wang's illness, let a helpful breath of love and life into the sick-room.

Trusting them both, loving both, Chenn-yi No could not have felt—as she did—justified in letting them be together, and alone, as she did, had Wên T'ien not been traveled, accustomed in England to English ways; for she remembered that Lo-ees, red-lily-one, was half English, used to Western ways and Western freedom, as a birthright.

Chenn-yi No disliked remembering that this girl she so loved was half English. It racked Chenn-yi No.

But marriage would cancel it! A wife was the daughter of her husband's parents; the fact that makes mixed-marriage—especially when the husband is the Chinese—less abnormal to the Chinese than it is to Europeans of equal sensitiveness.

There is another fact less pleasant to record. But justice is not always pleasant. And truth does not flatter. Except half-caste Lois and Edward Allingham, Chenn-yi

No had met no Western. It is the Chinese who have seen nothing, or seen least, of Westerns who resent them least. Kublai Khan welcomed Marco Polo. Kublai never had cause to regret it. Other Chinese have been less fortunate. Wên Lo-ees would be all Chinese from the moment that she drank from the red-tied wine-cup.

And sometimes even now, here in the old Chinese *chia*, where all that was best and sweetest in Chinese homelife predominated, and never a care came—but for the illness of Chenn-yi Wang, so calmly borne and so devotedly tended that it had much beauty and no sting—the girl forgot that she was in part English.

Always China has absorbed and made Chinese every alien race that has conquered China, and has stayed to rule there. No wonder then that Lois Allingham, the child of a Chinese mother, and taught and trained in much that was Chinese, drifted more and more into Chineseness here in the Chinese home where no Western thing intruded; a Chinese man, whose eyes were eloquent, at her feet, telling and vowing—without words—Chinese love and fealty.

Chenn-yi No saw it all, and approved. She had her ways of seeing, even when she did not glance away from Chenn-yi Wang's bed.

Often and more often she sent a *t'ingchai* to Wên O-he, Wên T'ien's mother. But there were other days!

There were days that this seemed a flower-decked dream, a pretty painted picture; Mo-kan-shan and distant London the reality, familiar and congenial.

Then, Lois was grateful that Wên T'ien had traveled, knew her England somewhat, and could answer her in English when her homesick tongue spoke to him in English.

Wên always did it promptly and cheerfully. Whatever her mood, he never failed to fall in with it, match himself to it.

If this Chinese lover lost a little something that an English suitor wooing her more vigorously—a little more muscularly—might have gained; if Wên T'ien did, he made no mistakes. He never offended. She felt his unaffected chivalrous deference about her as a garment of softest silken down. She thought better of herself because Wên T'ien's estimate of her was indubitably so high. It was very pleasant.

If she yielded to him, and even, as their years went, her English self came back now and then, would that be an insuperable barrier? A trying uncongeniality? A rift between them?

Need it?

Would not Wên T'ien meet her all the way, then as now?

He spoke English very well indeed.

He had been in England—spoke of England approvingly. Might he not like to

travel there again? Traveling that was leisurely lingering?

He had worn English clothes in London; he had said so. She believed that Wên T'ien looked well in English dress, wore it easily; that it suited him.

And she believed that she could hold him—always securely hers—even through the perilous rocks and swirling rapids of marriage. Lois Allingham had lived too long in Europe to believe that marriage all was smooth sailing.

Yes; Wên T'ien made no mistakes. If his wooing lacked brutality, it had exquisite finesse.

When Chenn-yi No had told him of Lo-ees' English father and of Allingham's marriage, Wên T'ien's face had paled—what would his mother say!—but his love did not falter. His rose-of-all-the-world was white-lily too—that was all!

Lo-ees wavered, doubted.

Wên T'ien had no doubt. From that first hour by the lily-lake, in the Lotus-moon, to the day he told her, in the Chrysanthemum-moon after the mauve roses had been gathered, Wên T'ien never wavered.

Wên T'ien would neither waver nor change.

Foot-sore runners went back and forth between Chenn-yi No and Wên O-he. They wore out many stout straw sandals.

Chenn-yi No had great influence with Wên O-he.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was Rose Day in the *chia* of Chenn-yi No.

The Lotus was queen of the estate in the Lotus-moon, of course—queened it in terrace tubs, on twenty lakes, bloomed in the temple ponds. And now in the lovely Chrysanthemum-moon the lotus still bloomed. The queen-lilies were too skilfully planted and managed to lack their flowers as soon as the wild lotus did. Here Buddha's flowers lifted up their lovely cups until Great-Cold came.

But to-day was Rose Day, a day of high, though brief, ceremonial and of long industry. For the lovely mauve roses were at their exquisite best, ripe for their harvesting.

Not all of them would be culled, Chenn-yi No loved her gardens too well for that. But the make-jelly acre, back of the nightingale-coppice, would be roseless to-morrow. To-day at dawn it was a sheet of satin mauve; so thick the roses that the red-tipped foliage, green and smooth as the foliage of Maréchal Niels, could be seen but here and there.

On Rose Day, Rose-Harvest-Day, all other work that possibly could be neglected was left undone. The cattle and birds were fed and watered; they had to be. The children were fed. The servants had their rice, but they had to eat it quickly. The dozen clocks in the largest guest-hall were wound, if due for winding, *that* never was neglected except while a Son-of-Heaven lay dead but unburied. But little, if anything, else was done. The Chenn-yis' great red bed would not be made until dark, perhaps not made until to-morrow. The kitchens' fires might go out, carefully as they had been stacked against it. Ivories, bronzes, lacquer and cloisonnés would remain undusted. No one told the House-god good-morning or begged the Kitchen-god to be good: you really hadn't the time. At the Great Wall, the long outer wall, the small gates were barred and left; only one keeper was left at the great-gate. The watch-towers were manless except for a dummy soldier or two. Even the vegetable beds in the large kitchen-garden were hurriedly tended, and left.

Every one must gather the mauve roses, or wait on those who did. Even spoiled Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower, kinsfolk orphans who lived here, had their tasks to-day, and were expected to perform them somewhat. They were appointed Chenn-yi Wang's messengers.

Long before day broke—and the days still were long here—the great house was astir. It seethed excitement. Even stern Quang Tee was excited—and stolid Li Bo the scribe. The younger serving maids ran about laughing softly—giggling rapturously

when they ran into each other, extremely careful not to bump against Chenn-yi No, their mistress, or against fat Tin Sung, the sulky eunuch.

Tea was drunk, early rice-bowls emptied, at the hour-of-the-Tiger: a hurried meal that would have to stay them for more hours than any often fasted in the *chia* of Chenn-yi Wang—unless, of course, one of the family had died recently.

Then the procession; Chenn-yi No carried in her palanquin, priests attendant two by two before, and following her; the others—four hundred and more all told—coming after in right precedence. Babies nodded on their mothers' shoulders. Children walked demurely hand-in-hand, the tiniest toddlers gallantly held up by sisters, some of them not much older.

Old-ones, whose years and years' infirmities and great honorableness gave them immunity from work, hobbled along on sticks or leaning on strong young shoulders. Man Pig the blacksmith carried his grandmother.

As it chanced Wên T'ien and the Lady Lo-ees were walking side-by-side. And no one minded, not even the priests; the scandal was stale now, surprise was dead. And if Chenn-yi No was complacent, or even—as it seemed—approved, what other here presumed to know better than that eminent old-one, the mistress of them all?

A happy, willing procession, smiling as they went, chuckling when one stumbled in the half dark; the one who fell and sprawled, as heartily as those near him.

Po Jung, the blind overseer of the Chenn-yi musicians, fingered his harp, Jo Kik played his flute softly.

The temple reached, only a few of them could go into it; it was so small.

Chenn-yi No descended from her litter and went in ahead of the priests; it was her right: the priests were her servants. Most of the gods in the temple too were her servants. Not Kwan—even Chenn-yi No held Kwan Yin in unwavering reverence; besought her always, never commanded, never reproached or upbraided even when Kwan, as she sometimes did, denied some wish of autocratic Chenn-yi No. But the other gods were the woman's servants and employees. And she let them know it. But she worshiped them scrupulously. And on the whole they served her well.

Chenn-yi Wang secretly leaned—as most educated Chinese do—more to the agnosticism of Confucius than to any devout god-cult. And what he thought or believed, his wife did. Their years had welded them. They were one. Hers the voice that commanded oftenest—since so much he kept his couch. But the mind that determined and commanded was their mind. There was no narrowest cleavage between Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No.

Madam Chenn-yi was lavish, and she liked variety. There was quite a happy

gathering of deities in the Flower-god's small temple.

Shang T'i was not among them. No woman was allowed to worship Shang T'i, the Supreme God. Not even a man less of state than the Chief-one of the Empire might address Shang T'i. So what use would there have been in giving Shang T'i house room here?

But Wên Ch'ang (though Literature-god had a temple of his own in the immense *chia*) and the goddess-of-Small-pox, Lu Pan, to whom the carpenters pray, Ma Wang, who protected Chenn-yi Wang's many and valuable horses, T'ai Chi, T'ai Sui, Niu Wang (patron god of cattle), the Fire-god, and several more, all were here. Most of them were larger, better-dressed, better-tended than the god whose temple this was. For the gods keep their precedence even in another god's sanctuary.

To-day no one paid any attention to Lu Pan or to T'ai Chi.

They made at once for the inconspicuous altar of the Flower-god. The god itself was only a long foot high. Its face needed painting, one hand needed a new thumb and first finger. Flower-god needed a new robe very badly. Chenn-yi No promised him all those, if to-morrow's jelly proved half as delicious as last year's had.

When Chenn-yi No faced the Flower-god's altar, a priest struck a gong; at the sound all in the temple bowed low in the pigmy god's direction, both the few who had followed the mistress through the temple's entrance and the many who, for lack of space inside, had had to remain outside.

All made deep obeisance, and then stretched out their hands in supplication.

In the temple's dimness Wên T'ien's fingers caught in Lo-ees' scarf. She heard his whispered apology. She did not see the red rush to his face, but she felt his hand tremble as he withdrew it. And Chenn-yi No smiled in the dark.

The service was short, almost curt to offer a god-one. As many roses as could must be harvested while the day's first dew was on them.

A priest chanted a prayer. Madam Chenn-yi lit a packet of prayers and threw them into a basin of lead. Packets of joss-sticks were lighted quickly, thrust into the incense burners nearest the shabby little Flower-god, and all hurried out and to the mauve roses. Only the oldest priest and a slave girl who was lame remained behind in the temple, commanded by Chenn-yi No to give each of the other gods here an offering of incense, doing it as her proxy. It was not Chenn-yi No's day for giving prayer or fragrant dole to Wên Ch'ang or to the Hell-god, to Lu Pan or to the Wind-god. But as well one day as another, she argued; and more convenient to her to pray off them all now, since she was here. And she gave them—the other gods—a hurried and general obeisance as she backed to the door.

Lo-ees and Wên T'ien followed close behind her: their duty and privilege.

Wên T'ien glanced anxiously at Lo-ees in the more light of the temple courtyard. She gave him a demure almost-smile. Her eyes, before she dropped them, were not unkind. And Wên T'ien vowed Kwan Yin an absurdly large thank-gift.

The chair-men lifted Chenn-yi No up in her palanquin, careful not to jolt it, and padded down the temple steps, across the courtyard, along the sanded path beyond the fields of sugar cane and through the cherry walk that led to the mauve roses.

There are many delightful jellies made in a sweet-loving world. Gigantic fortunes have been built on a foundation of jam. There is no other jam that can approach, no other jelly that approaches, the delicious jam and jelly that are made from the mauve Chinese roses. In all China these precious preserves never have been made better than the wife of Chenn-yi Wang made them. It was fitting that their making was a rite.

To-day was the gathering.

To-morrow would come the less picturesque, but quite as essential, boiling and boxing.

That the gatherers should tire less soon, and touch the precious petals more deftly and with tenderness, Chenn-yi Wang's musicians, and others hired from the nearest city, played.

Great sheets of fair white muslin were spread on the ground at the edge of the field of roses, and in shelter of the nut trees' and persimmons' wide-spread heavy-leaved branches. The sun was scarcely up, even yet. But the heat of the day would come—a fury at noon—and so the muslins were laid where the cool shade would stay when the rest of the place was cooked and hot.

The gatherers began their delicate, fragrant toil. They all worked swiftly. Chenn-yi No worked swiftest of all. Her tiny hands were bare, not a jewel on them, not one on her. She had discarded her heavy nail-protectors. The spirals they had guarded—two fingers of each hand—had been swathed for to-day in soft cotton-batting; light in weight, yet it kept the long, twisted never-cut nails safe, uninjured. How deftly the old-one worked, without the use of four of her fingers (her hands rather disabled by them and their nails' thick bandages), plucking the tender mauve petals with incredible speed, not bruising or fraying a petal, could only be believed if seen.

They all worked well. Chenn-yi No worked best.

At every breast hung a broad, deep basket, leaving the pickers able to use both hands at once. The baskets, woven of scentless grass, were immaculately clean. The pickers all worked swiftly, letting the gathered rose heads and petals instantly fall gently into the baskets. The deftest pickers pulled off only the petals. And they were paid more than were the clumsier who plucked the entire rose heads.

When a basket could safely hold no more, a coolie child waiting behind the gatherer, slipped off the cord that held it necklace-fashion, replaced it by another cord and empty basket, and carried the rose-filled basket, and turned the gathered roses out onto a sheet of muslin.

Each time an urchin made his delivery, the man in charge of the muslins gave him a bright tally-bead—if the rose petals were in perfect condition, which they always were. Her servants preferred Chenn-yi No's bounty to her wrath. A basket emptied, the child hastened back to its post behind a gatherer. More of the basket carriers were boys, some were girls.

They all worked in couples: a gatherer and an attendant child.

The perfume that rose from the rose-heaped muslin sheets grew almost overpowering as the harvesting went on, and the sun rose towards its noon-hour height; and so sweet that it called the bees, and they came to it a noisy-winged army. But they were denied their booty to-day. Fan-servants guarded the gathered roses well; sweeping the bees away with long-handled fans of peacock-feathers, or beating them back with scarves. The fan-servants were well covered—heads, arms and hands—in close-meshed gauze. The defrauded bees could be very angry.

But a feast, almost as good as a feast of mauve roses, was spread for them a few yards away—pools of syrup and hills of crushed sugar-cane, and a cage full of Chenn-yi Wang's own bees, full-voiced and half tame, served to call the wild bees to the honey-making foods lavishly laid out with great care not too far from the forbidden roses, not too near to the roses.

Nothing had been forgotten that could add to the day's success, or that could protect it.

Every one worked, and worked with happy will. But there were two that did not work long, or work with quite creditable efficiency while they did. They both were slow-fingered. Twice Lo-ees let a rose fall to the ground; Wên T'ien was even guiltier. He gathered foliage, thorns and all, more than once, and threw it into his basket. The coolie child, waiting for the basket, was scandalized. The delicious jam was not made out of foliage or yet out of thorns. She must contrive to get those disgraceful oddments out of the basket before she delivered it, or the tally man might beat her rather than pay her a bead.

What would Chenn-yi No say, and what would the great old-one not *do*, if *she* saw? the child wondered.

But Chenn-yi No knew—and smiled. Those who said that she had eyes in the back of her head were not so wrong. Chenn-yi No knew. She had known for some time now which way love's wind blew. And to-day was one of the days she

approved it. It had grieved her yesterday, to-morrow possibly it would anger her. For there were days—they grew fewer—when she disapproved it, or seemed not to advocate it. Chenn-yi Erh No did not always wear her purpose hanging at her girdle for all to see. But to-day it chimed in with her mood and desire.

All was going well to-day. The roses never had been more or more perfect. Her husband was happy on the terrace. Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower often were a terrible handful. But because they were orphans and dependent upon Chenn-yi Wang's charity, the tiny torments must not be reprimanded severely or treated strictly. But to-day they were good and docile; playing quietly at Chenn-yi Wang's feet, or trotting to and fro with his salutations to his wife.

The wilful mites had adopted Lo-ees imperiously when she came to the *chia*. And she had been their constant and willing playmate—until Wên T'ien had climbed over the wall.

Lo-ees had neglected them since then. And they had resented it shrilly.

But they still adored her, and they adored Wên T'ien even more.

But Bamboo Flower and Playful Tiger were bitter that their Lo-ees no longer was at their disposal. And they blamed her. They should have blamed Wên T'ien; for it was his doing, and his solely.

They made no effort to join forces with Lo-ees and Wên T'ien at the mauve roses. Chenn-yi Wang had many sweetmeats on the terrace.

Wên T'ien cried out in dismay.

Lo-ees looked at him questioningly. They were gathering side-by-side—the little they gathered. Both their basket attendants were disgusted with them.

"You have torn your finger. A thorn has dared—"

"So it has," the girl laughed at him, examining her finger, "has tried to, I mean. You ought not to have told me. The scratch is a nothing. I didn't feel it, I scarcely can see it. I should not have known it." She gathered a rose.

"I entreat you, gather no more. You may poison your exquisite finger."

"Poison! With what? These rose-petals are not poison. Chenn-yi No does not make poison jelly—not for herself and her own household to eat. What she may make for her enemies, who shall say? Not I. But these are not poison roses, Lord Wên T'ien."

"Even so, yet the wound may fester—"

"Fester!" Lo-ees scoffed contemptuously.

"May fester, and festering cause you pain. I plead with you, jade maiden, give over this harvest of roses. There is medicine in the rill that trickles through the

Emperor-lilies, and in spotted clover leaves there is comfort and cure. Let us go to the beneficent silver rill where the white violets still bloom among the tall tawny lilies—it is not far—that you may immerse your injured finger in the healing water. I will find a spotted clover leaf, and bind it on your finger when it has soaked sufficiently. Those clovers have great virtue to heal wounds.”

“Wounds! You are absurd, Born-before Wên T’ien,” she laughed at him gaily.

“My heart is torn—by the thorn of a rose.” Wên T’ien looked Lo-ees full in her eyes as he said it, oddly rid of his shyness now. Perhaps the scent of the roses had gone to his head.

The girl gathered another rose.

“Let me lead you to the rill among the lilies!” he whispered.

Lo-ees considered a moment; looked towards Chenn-yi No. Madam’s back was turned, and she was absorbed in her work.

“Well,” the girl owned, “I don’t think that I gather roses very well. You, Wên T’ien, certainly gather them very badly. It is no great fun standing here hour after hour. I believe that I will rest a while, watch the harvesting from just beyond it. But you must go on gathering, Wên T’ien. You must work very hard. You must gather for two. You have not wounded your finger! It would be a crime, if we both deserted the harvest of indulgent Chenn-yi No. Take my basket; see, I’ll hang it on your arm; and you must fill both baskets at once.” She drew the basket cord from her neck.

Wên T’ien held out his arm.

Lo-ees gave no sign that she saw the flash in his eyes—if she did. She hung her basket on his proffered arm.

The basket-attendants of the Lady Lo-ees and the Lord Wên T’ien, watching and listening breathlessly, almost danced in their rage.

“Work well!” Lo-ees commanded, turning away.

Wên T’ien laughed. It was rather a masterful laugh. There had been something masterful in the flash of his eyes a moment before when he had given her the full look that she had not seen—perhaps. He took her half full basket off of his arm, he took his basket off from his neck, dropped them unceremoniously on the ground, and followed Lo-ees away from the roses.

The two mites, the basket-attendants of the defaulting lord and lady, looked at each other in wide-mouthed dismay. Ang Lun began to cry. The boy looked half a mind to follow her example.

Chenn-yi No swung round on them with an angry laugh. There was a softer mirth in her eyes.

“Go you, and play,” she told them. “You need work no more to-day.”

Kou Mi gasped, but Ang Lun, greatly bold—bolder than he of the meek sex—exclaimed to her mistress, “But, great lady, Po Jan will beat us when we go to him with baskets not half filled! And what of our beads? We have but three each now! Truly the great lord and the young lady gather most poorly. *They* are no much loss to your honorable, distinguished jelly-bags. But what of our beads? We were willing to work, to work most industriously until the hour-of-the-Boar.”

“Begone. You waste my time. You need not take those baskets to Po Jan, I will send them to him. Tell him so, if he see you and question. You shall have beads at the hour-of-the-Cock. I will give them to you, more pay-beads than you would have earned if you had toiled till the hour-of-the-Dog had come twice, lazy young varmints that you both are. Begone!”

She did not have to say it again. The children scampered away side by side, their little yellow faces aglow.

But they were greatly puzzled.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Lo-ees as they called her here, when they used her English name at all—laughed, caught Bamboo Flower and Playful Tiger each by a tiny yellow hand, and hurried—as fast as their wee baby feet would let her—through the moon-gate. That the great old-one had not actually forbidden them, but only frowned and shrugged, when the girl had begged that they might go, was permission enough. But they must make haste, lest Chenn-yi No changed her mind and called them back. Changing her mind sometimes seemed Chenn-yi No's chief occupation, her principal—if feeble—intellectual exercise. And it had been so for several days now.

It was the worst thing about Chenn-yi Erh No.

The woman was weary from many days and nights of vigil, wearier still from her rack of alternate fear and hope. And yesterday she had made her mauve jelly, the day before she had stood for hours gathering the mauve roses.

Harvesting the roses had not cost her much. The early morning air had been crisp and cool, the gathering swift and sure. And Chenn-yi Wang had been at ease on the marble terrace, happy on his cushions, books and tablets near him, slaves to obey him squatted near him, Sacred Rat the white-faced monkey who adored him, never teased or pestered Chenn-yi Wang, curled lovingly beside him; Chenn-yi Wang better than he had been for many days. Chenn-yi No's heart had sung as she gathered her roses. And she and he had sent happy messages back and forth while she let the delicate harvesting keep her from him.

Yesterday in the great cook-house had cost her more. A score of servants stood there to obey and wait upon her. But she trusted no one to do the chief part of the almost sacerdotal cookery, to stir and watch as she did, trusted no one with the precious confiture's perfection. Of necessity the cook-house had been heated hot. The fumes from the great bubbling cauldrons had been fierce roasting. The great long-handled spoons were heavy, her hands already a little weary from yesterday's rapid petal plucking. The gathering had been quick, easy—if anxious—work out in the open air.

The jelly-making was long, hard and arduous. Long before it was half finished, Chenn-yi Erh No's tiny, crippled feet ached excruciatingly. She could not sit down to her jelly-making. She would scant none of it, and would depute but little of it. Worst of all, she had thought Chenn-yi Wang a shade less well yesterday—when she left him at daylight. Only a slight shade not so well, or she'd not have left him; the slave-ones might have made and ruined the jelly, or the mauve petals might have

dried and rotted on the cook-house floor.

To-day's restlessness and changeableness were a consequence of brain-fag and nerve weariness.

Lo-ees sensed this, and ran away from it more to leave the woman alone and quiet than because she wished to go to the music-patch to-day—much as she loved it—and still less wished to take the rompish children with her.

But Bamboo Flower and Playful Tiger were no psychologists. They thought the noble old-one, their great aunt, meanly waspish, much to be avoided in her present humor. And, until their fat little legs tired, they tugged at Lo-ees, to speed her on their way, harder than she tugged them. For they were in panic lest Chenn-yi No should call them back.

And probably the old vacillator would have called them back now before they had had time to make good their escape had not the blue tulips caught her eye, diverted her wavering mind. Benn Tee was arranging the tulip tubs in twos and threes between the dragon's-eye trees. Madam Chenn-yi stood watching him for a moment or two—long enough for the girl and the babies to get out of sight—before she bade him take the tulips away, and ring them round the crescent lake half a *li* away on the other side of the house.

The coolie took up a tub and trotted off cheerfully. He was not surprised. Since he had to toil from early-rice to last-rice, as well one thing as another. And to do Benn Tee full justice he did not dislike toil. He always had toiled. He knew that he always would toil. Not to work, except on the exempted holidays, no more occurred to Benn Tee than not to breathe. He would have considered one as undesirable as the other—abnormal even—if he had known that he breathed.

Benn Tee did not know even that physiological fact. Unneeded information never had lashed him, body or mind. He liked his rice, he liked his pipe, he liked the festival times when they came, he liked his wife, he liked his tasks, he liked old Madam Chenn-yi. Perhaps he liked her best of all; he believed her kind and just, and he was grateful to her that he had the honor of being the servant of so old a mistress. The snow of her hair ennobled him. Benn Tee was an entirely contented man. He took up a heavy tub, and trotted off with it happily—knowing that when he had ringed them all in front of the willows at the crescent pool he probably would be commanded to carry them back to the dragon's-eyes, or to carry them to the foot of the pagoda on the citron hill. It was all one to Benn Tee the Chinese garden coolie.

Chenn-yi No went back to the house, and the girl and the children went gaily on their happy journey.

Lois was going to a secret tryst. Only she and Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower

knew of the place, her very own, her treasured privacy; and they would not tell; Bamboo Flower had promised, and she could trust Bamboo Flower, trust the mite to the death, she believed; and Playful Tiger couldn't tell, was too young, hadn't the vocabulary.

The secret had been hers for years. She had found the sweet patch several years ago, the second time that her father had brought her here to visit Chenn-yi No. She had told no one, not even her father.

It was only recently that she had shared it with Bamboo Flower—Tiger, who couldn't talk distinctly, didn't count. But Playful Tiger, she believed, would be a great musician some day, and because she did she felt that he had a birthright to hear the elfin music which she would have preferred to keep to herself,—her own treasured bit of beauty and nature, wonder, fairyland. Her secret, and China's.

They were going a long way. But five-year-old Flower was sturdy, and she—Lois—would carry Tiger presently. And Lois knew several short cuts, and feet-and-legs she was wholly English, used to long country walks. Even in China, and when it was hottest, Allingham and Lois kept up that English habit as much as was practicable. Chenn-yi No regarded it as an enormity. But she accepted it as an incurable disease cursed upon Lo-ees by English blood; accepted it pityingly and not un placidly, as she would have accepted tuberculosis or measles and several times had accepted fire and earthquake.

A man saw them by accident, drew back a little—not to be seen by them—and waited a long time to watch them, not spying upon them, not curious, but appreciative of the picture they made—they and the place.

Above the sandy cove was a riot of green and rose; harp-flowers thick in the grass trembled in the light breeze.

The great *chia* was in one of China's lovely lake-districts. There were many lakes in Chenn-yi Wang's far-flung domain.

This, in a far part, remote from the house, and hidden, was the last of a chain of lakes all linked by narrow runs of water; the lakes from their other end flowing underground into the mighty Yangtze.

Here, where they sat, the overhung lake was sea-like when the wind blew high, bay-shaped, a hill-locked cove.

The bamboos were in bloom. The wild plum trees were thick with fragrant blossoms. Across the cove, lifted above the shore by long steps of lead-encrusted, twisted iron, the bronze roof of the Fish-god's rather shabby temple sparkled in the down-pouring sunlight. A peacock and his hen strutted across the temple threshold.

Pink-breasted cranes were beaking for titbits in the wet sand where the Fish-god's priests had planted a great gong, secure on its heavy platform of granite.

Lo-ees sat dreaming her own dreams, but alert to watch the children, squatted near her, intently building a pagoda of sand and twigs.

Silk-floss trees were clumped just behind her, weeping-willows a little farther towards the north, white and lemon wild roses clotted among the pendent willows.

Nearer the softly lapping water, growing on the broad belt of yellow sand that stretched between her and the lake, a few dainty sand flowers were scattered: sea poppies, harp-flowers, Kwan's own flowers—tiny wild ones—delicate transparent poppies. The babies would have culled them for her, but Lo-ees had forbidden it sternly.

They were a pretty pair, those Chinese babies, squatted at their futile architecture.

Playful Tiger had been well milk-named, for he was both. Bamboo Flower had not been mis-milk-named. The tot was very dainty, fragrant with a sweet breath of strong personality.

Flower wore the robes of a great lady. Her green trousers reached her jeweled red shoes, her violet silk tunic was almost as long as the satin trousers. A tiny pack of very tiny flower-buds made a gay rosette above one rose-flushed amber baby ear, a jeweled tassel hung behind the other. Her buttons were coral. She wore many amulets, and on one wee finger a little diamond.

Because she robed her in charity, Chenn-yi No robed her richly.

And because those tender feet must be bound soon now, her *amahs* and Chenn-yi No and Lo-ees yearned over Bamboo Flower, and indulged her.

Lo-ees almost hoped that the great old-one might consent not to squeeze and break the little feet after all. Lo-ees had ventured to ask it once, when Chenn-yi No had been much pleased with her, and Chenn-yi No had answered mildly.

Playful Tiger's costume was remarkable. He was covered—feet, head and all—with black-spotted orange-colored long-haired velvet. Only his face and hands were not covered so. Claws hung on his sleeves and at his feet. A tiger-head, with great teeth, angry red-glass eyes, vicious mouth agape, rode jauntily above his forehead. All this was not in honor of his milk-name, but to deceive the demon-spirits that lurk about to steal precious boy-ones, but are careful not to molest tigers. His many amulets all were costly. A score of small rattle-bells hung on the absurd animal head, and the boy wore many other tiny rattle-bells. Evil spirits are cravenly afraid of bells, even of bells no bigger than peas, and with a tinkle no fiercer than a raindrop's.

The water, silver, green and blue, was glass-smooth, but the high day-star shot it

thickly with javelins of gold.

There was not a sound.

Lois, she as impervious to the sun as they, and the two children squatted on the soft yellow sand at the bay's edge.

Wên T'ien easily might have joined them, but he moved away swiftly and noiselessly.

When he judged that no sound he unavoidably made could reach her, Wên ran.

It was some distance to the house, even for a man, but Wên T'ien scarcely slackened before he got there.

In the sands of Earth there are many music-patches.

Strangely few have heard of them. Fewer believe when told. Men walk upon them and never hear them. Men live at their edge and never hear of them.

But the music-patches are.

Incredulity cannot accept them.

Science cannot explain them—yet.

The phenomenon is two-fold—different and distinct.

The flat stretches of sand, that sing at the edge of sea and lake, are the more, but rare.

The sands that slither down hill-sides, singing as they move, are rarer. Their music is clearest and sweetest when high winds are "right." Perhaps temperature too has a part.

Neither always will sing. You cannot coerce them. They have their own moods, and are indifferent to yours.

Lo-ees knew that these singing-sands of hers often kept their silence from which nothing could wake them, neither the tread of human feet, the dribbling of human hands, the dragging of metal, nor any else.

But she thought that they would croon to her presently to-day. She had caught an elfin whisper. If they sang, when they sang she would call the children from their play. And Tiger, pushing his fantastic "head" still farther back, off of his ears, would lie on his plump spotted belly, and listen in quiet ecstasy: an artist rapt.

In one thing, possibly this place whose music secret she had found, and only she, was unique: both phenomena were here. The sand of the cove's high cliff sometimes sang as it came to the lake. Lo-ees had heard it once or twice. And the sand, flat on the lake-shore, made music too—when it would or when the wind, playing on it, found it in tune and responsive, note answering note; sometimes a violin rising through the accompaniment, sometimes eolian harps of golden sand at the edge of a

listening Chinese lake. The music-patch, here at her feet, had two voices, one the deeper, both incredibly sweet. And it sang more often than did the sand that sometimes swept in slow or hurrying sheets down the cliff, creeping lazily, or storm-lashed and frantic.

This was her music. She had found it.

English Lois marveled.

Chinese Lo-ees accepted it simply, unquestioningly: one more sweet thing between them—Nature and her.

Neither told. Neither English Lois nor Chinese Lo-ees.

Yes! Another whisper—a louder whisper.

Lo-ees turned her head, to call the children to her; and saw Wên T'ien coming towards her.

Lo-ees wondered if he had found her by accident, or had he seen them leave the *chia*, and followed them?

Then she saw the servants at his heels, the children's head *amahs* and trusty Lao Ten; and she knew that Wên T'ien had not come here by accident.

Crafty Wên T'ien!

He had seen the direction she had taken, and because the children were with her, he had found the *amahs* and Lao Ten, who was lusty as well as trusty, and had brought them with him.

The servants squatted down at a respectful distance, and lit their pipes. They had had their orders, the girl was sure.

Wên T'ien came nearer.

He bowed profoundly.

The girl's eyes sparkled.

The babies dashed upon him, clambered on him, clamored him to stay.

Seeming to consent—and nothing odd in that, since he had come to be here while Lo-ees was—Wên T'ien's eyes asked Lo-ees' permission.

She gestured it.

The man bowed his gratitude, and his eyes thanked her too.

Wên T'ien sat down at her feet. And the children swarmed over him.

Wên T'ien was patient with them—for a time.

How long? Lo-ees wondered, smiling slyly at the butterfly on her red shoe.

He played with them. But he would not rise and go with them as they demanded.

But when they begged him for a story, he told them one.

Chinese children's stories are long. The story that Wên T'ien, sitting at Lo-ees' feet at the edge of the music-patch, told was a very short story.

Playful Tiger pouted. Young as he was, Playful Tiger had a passion for stories. All Chinese are born with it. Bamboo Flower demanded another—better and more of it.

Wên T'ien took a coin from his pouch, and spun it high up in the air.

"A signal," Lo-ees told herself.

And the servants put away their pipes, and rose.

The *amahs* came toward the children.

"Honorable little bud-ones, come," Ma Ni the *amah* said coaxingly.

Playful Tiger screamed defiance. Bamboo Flower threw a pebble at her naughtily. They both clutched Wên T'ien tightly.

Wên T'ien loosened their soft grips determinedly, and beckoned Lao Ten.

"There is a Punch-and-Judy show coming to the *chia*," he told them. "If it is not at the great gate now, it will be to-morrow or to-morrow of to-morrow. Go watch for it. San Ko the gate-keeper is a stupid-one. He may send the Punch-and-Judy away. Tell him, Lao Ten, that he is to admit it."

Lao Ten bowed obedience.

Playful Tiger looked doubtful. Bamboo Flower protested.

"See, it is a gold piece. You shall have it for the Punch-and-Judy man. Or, if he has not come to-day, you shall have it for sweetmeats and toys. And I will pay the Punch-and-Judy man another coin of gold to-morrow or when he comes, that he make his puppets give their best performance. It is a very long one."

Bamboo Flower considered it.

"Do you promise, Wên T'ien, that he *will* come?" she demanded.

"I promise."

"When?"

"To-day; now. Or, if not to-day, to-morrow or on to-morrow's morrow, if you go at once."

Lo-ees, listening, thought that it would be to-morrow's to-morrow. Wên T'ien would have to send a runner—no, a cart—to the city for that Punch-and-Judy.

"You can buy beautiful sweetmeats and many toys with this," the younger *amah* said excitedly, stooping down to pick up the gold piece that the lord-one had spun high into the air. She held it out toward them on her open palm, and smiled ingratiatingly at Playful Tiger and then at Bamboo Flower.

"There are no sweetstuff booths, and there are no toy-maker's booths, in our *chia*," Flower said severely.

"I will send a runner," the older *amah* promised recklessly.

"Will she?" Bamboo Flower asked Lo-ees.

"She will!" Wên T'ien answered.

Lo-ees laughed. "I am sure she will, little treasure."

Still the children hesitated.

Lao Ten picked them up, one on each shoulder, and pranced off just like a horse, the *amahs* smiling as they followed.

Wên T'ien had disbursed himself of three coins before he had spun up the gold piece. His arrangements with the three servants had been swift, but they had been thorough.

"It was a shame!" Lo-ees rebuked. "They did no harm here. I brought them with me."

"I had a need," Wên T'ien told her.

And the girl knew that their hour had come.

She held it off a little, knowing that she could not hold it long.

"Listen!" she bade.

Lao Ten with two sturdy children on his shoulders was crunching along the yellow sand.

"Listen."

And Wên T'ien heard.

Caught back, at least for the moment, from all things personal, as the Chinese always are, by any loveliness of nature, Wên T'ien sat very still, listening to the singing-sands.

The *amahs* made little sound as they went, though they were big-footed, but Lao Ten, large and heavy, was heavier shod, and Lao Ten was well loaded. Little music notes followed him as he walked.

Wên T'ien's fine face twitched.

For a moment he forgot Lo-ees. Love's last breathing space! A girl's last respite.

Then he remembered her, and he thought that the sands were singing fairy marriage music. To them!

Wên T'ien's mouth grew very tender.

A moment longer he bent towards the sound, then he turned—still listening—and spoke to her.

"A music-patch! I have not heard one before."

"Are there others?" Lo-ees was incredulous.

"Many others."

"Are you sure, Wên T'ien?"

"I am sure."

"I am sorry."

"But why?" Wên T'ien asked with a tender smile.

"I found this long ago. I know not what it is. But I thought them mine. My secret."

"They are yours, fair-one. And we will not speak of them. They shall be our secret. Lao Ten heard them not as he went with Playful Tiger kicking on his shoulder, and Bamboo Flower bubbling in his ear. And the *amah*-ones heard not, or even they, the dull peasant-ones, must have exclaimed, paused to listen. They are your very own, rose-one. All the loveliness of Earth is. I would heap it at your feet—as I am there."

"What is it, Born-before Wên T'ien? What makes it?"

But Wên T'ien was not going to tell his learning now. Scientific and geographical facts or even lore were not for now.

"Kwan's voice," he answered. "Love makes them."

Lo-ees, turning a little from him, scooped up a handful of the yellow sand, and dribbled it through her fingers. And Wên T'ien with his elbow in the sand, his chin on his palm, watched her.

He did not speak—yet.

Wind rattled the rushes growing at the water's edge and caught the scarf of gauze Lo-ees wore across her shoulders; caught the gauze and played with it, and tossed an end of the long scarf into Wên T'ien's face.

He bowed his face into the delicate fabric, and held it close.

Then, the gauze held close against his breast, claiming it, insisting his right to keep it, Wên T'ien looked full at Lo-ees, pleading for more, beseeching her for something sweeter, more delicate, than the gauzy-silk his hand caressed.

"Lo-ees!"

The day and the place were provocative.

Youth pulsed.

The girl paled before she flushed softly, very beautifully.

And she felt her being surge to the surging of his pounding heart.

Lo-ees met his eyes.

Still holding the gauze that she still wore, Wên T'ien moved a little nearer, and his arms stretched out to her in entreaty.

Then—

Lo-ees was in his arms.

For a long time neither spoke.

They had no wish to speak.

Perhaps the singing-sands knew that they had no need to speak.

Neither thought. Love is thoughtless.

Wên T'ien held her very gently.

It was not a custom of his people. His arms had not embraced before.

He was kneeling beside her now.

The little head he loved was cushioned on his satin shoulder.

She felt his heart beat under her hand that he held above it.

Wên T'ien, worshiping, felt the great world swing on its axis.

A lark was singing to the sunset. Then, nearer still, a thrush.

Yellow sand slithered down the cliff-side, the soft wind that drove it softly thrumming and plucking thin and gentle music from the drifting sands.

And the moments were Love's eternity as the man and the woman sat together on the singing-sands, the water lapping softly at their feet. The wild plum blossoms scented the golden day. And a girl and the man who loved her drained a cup of happiness together.

CHAPTER XXIX

Lois Allingham woke slowly and smiled, remembering a smiling dream.

She did not often wake slowly. But she did this morning.

For a moment she forgot where she was, believed that she was in Han-chow, leaning with Cotterel on the red railing of one of his lacquered bridges.

So vivid had been her dream!

Rather a charming dream; remembering it, Lois dimpled.

Then—she realized where she was, and dashed up roughly from her Chinese bed.

She wanted her father. She wanted Betty. She wanted London. She wanted Henry Cotterel—perhaps most of all.

And she was in China; caught and jailed in China as she had been caught and jailed in the water-lilies the day that Wên T'ien had come upon her, and they had begun their writing of the pretty, fantastic, pitiful little comedy.

Farce!

Not too creditable to a proud English girl! Not too maidenly!

Chenn-yi No had been partly to blame.

Well—what had been, had.

There was no dodging that.

But that was just what she was going to do; she was going to dodge it for the future. Her father should come and cut her out—as Wên T'ien had cut her out from the water-lilies.

She had made a mistake; that was all. It was not the first mistake a girl had made, and it wouldn't be the last. An innocent mistake, just a girl's misgaging of herself. But she would not tell her father of it. It might trouble him. He might not understand it—not altogether. (Odd that Lois did not remember her Chinese mother, but she did not just then.) She always had told her father of everything that had bothered her. But she would not tell him of this. She would not tell Betty—Betty least of all. She would tell no one, unless, just perhaps, she told Paul Trench.

Paul always helped. Paul always understood.

Alone in China!

Alone in China—with nothing English with her, nothing English near. Not even an English nightgown! (Not quite cricket that; for it was forgetting the Rue de la Paix.)

Lois tore the high collar of her Chinese rest-in robe open at the throat—tore it open a little viciously. It was such a hideous nightgown!

Lois knew that, if she had had English clothes with her here, she would have put them on, worn them to-day. But she had none.

Probably Chenn-yi No would have hated them.

And Wên T'ien?

She believed that Wên T'ien would not hate anything she wore, anything she chose to wear, or how she wore it.

However she had misgaged herself, she had gaged Wên T'ien correctly.

A gong sounded from the cook-houses' keep-time tower. First-rice was ready, when she chose to order it. Pigeons' eggs floating in broth, curried cherries, toasted frogs, sweet-bread dumplings for breakfast! And green-amber, over-scented tea, and warm wine.

She wanted Quaker Oats and streaky bacon, marmalade and stewed apples; four things she always had so disliked that she had been excused them at school in Sussex. But she wanted them violently now—perhaps because she had dreamed of Henry Cotterel.

Perhaps the Chinese are not altogether without reason in believing that sentiment—yes, and love too—often live in the stomach.

But even now she was grateful to Wên T'ien that he had loved her. The highest compliment a man would ever pay her, she believed. But Lois would have given a great deal if he had not loved her.

She was grieved sincerely for gentle Wên T'ien.

But she wished that she need not see him again—only to pain them both inevitably.

They had had a pleasant time together here—a charming friendship; as graceful and delicate as a picture painted beautifully on a jeweled fan of pale silk, as perfumed as the mauve roses in Chenn-yi No's own garden: a delicious comedy, wine-rippled, shot with human warmth.

It had been entrancing yesterday—sitting on the singing sands beside the quiet molten lake, the silk-floss trees a tender blaze of blossoms, their heady odor a haze of thick perfume. It had been enchanting; fascination.

She would not forget the singing-sands.

She'd not forget yesterday.

But it had gone too far.

It knifed her to fear that Wên T'ien would remember it with a pang. Not a passing pang, she feared. She believed that Wên T'ien's pang would stay and fester; a life-long sore.

To him it had not been just a pretty comedy, an exquisite episode.

And, honest with herself, it had been more than that to her yesterday on the singing-sands. A thing so sweet, that for herself she could not quite regret it.

What girl could?

But for Wên T'ien, she regretted it sadly, repented, blamed herself.

Perhaps the girl need not so have blamed herself. Propinquity, young blood, sex just opening its spotless, fragrant bud to blossom in the sunlight, circumstance—arch-priest and archer traitor, Circumstance—perhaps most of all, and the singing-sands: all those more to blame than she, or Wên T'ien.

And now they must pay—she and he!

Usually it is the woman who pays most, when such debts have been incurred. For a man rarely remembers, a woman never forgets. But Lois Allingham knew that it was Wên T'ien who would pay the most, incomparably the more.

It would be her task, hers alone, to disillusion him—as mercifully as she could—to convince him that what he had felt life-core's fiber was but a tender comedy.

She sickened at the task.

But she would not shirk it.

It was up to her. There was no one here who could share it.

Alone in China!

How she wanted out!

Thank heaven, her father would come for her. He would not fail her. Together they'd frame some excuse that would not hurt Chenn-yi No. Chenn-yi No had enough to carry now, without an added straw.

What excuse would spare Wên T'ien? Poor Wên T'ien! He could not be spared.

The girl's eyes filled.

Well—since she could not spare him, she would not spare herself: the only reparation that she could make.

She dressed quickly. And when she had she went resolutely towards the camellia courtyard where Wên T'ien often read until his early rice—or, more often, paced up and down watching the courtyard's fan-shaped entrance.

She went deliberately: a surgeon with a knife in her hand; determined to cut quickly, to be cruel to be kind.

But when she saw the lovelight in his eyes—Wên T'ien was in the courtyard—the girl's heart wavered. She was moved; pitied Wên T'ien, even swung a little. Her will did not falter. But the man drew her, as he often had. Lo-ees was not sure that she wished to slash at yesterday.

In her room she had determined that she would write to her father to-day, and

ask him to come for her.

But she did not.

Chenn-yi Wang was worse.

While Chenn-yi Wang was so ill, she could not make her first move towards what she knew Chenn-yi No would regret. Lo-ees could not add even a straw to the heavy cross that again bent and bruised the older woman's already-so-scourged shoulders.

And they drifted on—Lo-ees and Wên T'ien.

And Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower did not regain their playmate.

Wên T'ien did not again put even his hand on hers, or on any thing she wore.

Even his eyes caressed her less than they had almost from the first. But they caressed her, leapt to her when he saw her. He spoke to her a little more formally than he had after the first few days. But though Wên T'ien ruled his words, he could not always control his voice; it told her again and again what he would not word. And his color came and went when they were together.

Lo-ees understood it all.

Because he so loved her, he would not woo her again, or approach her wooingly or with ardor, until he had lifted her red veil! Or, at least, not until they had exchanged the betrothal gifts—which was almost marriage, and made marriage inevitable.

But always he loved her.

There were days when she loved Wên T'ien.

She loathed herself for the vacillation she could not help.

She drifted.

And the pendulum swung—now to England, now to China, now to Wên T'ien, now to Red Bridges.

Light? No.

Slight? Scarcely. Slight souls are not tortured as Lois Allingham was now.

She was paying the terrible birth-price that Edward Allingham and Shang Yon Yee had condemned her years ago. Her parents had eaten sour-grapes and her teeth were on edge—that was all. The crime—if the word is too harsh, call it blunder—had been theirs; the punishment was hers: one of the terrible dispensations of human inheritance that lead some to think the old Persian's "Man's Forgiveness give—and take!" justified.

She was determined not to deceive or mislead Wên T'ien.

And yet—and yet—she was unwilling to give him up.

But because she saw a duty, she spoke to Wên T'ien, who she knew would not

speak to her of what had been between them at the music-patch, and would not speak to her of what he wished and hoped, except through their parents. And she told him all.

And Wên T'ien laughed at her tenderly.

He understood the maiden shyness, and loved her still more for it. And when she was franker, passionately frank in her desperation to make him understand, and told him her reluctance, Wên T'ien "understood" again, and revered her anew.

Every Chinese bride pretends reluctance. No nice girl could fail to do that.

Their hour at the singing-sands, her dearness and her nearness, had overmastered him. And in her flower-like graciousness she had yielded to him.

Wên T'ien could not regret it.

But his impetuosity should not attack her again, virginal lily-and-rose whom he loved.

To Wên T'ien, even now they were wedded—but for her sweet sake, and for their families' honor, all the due formalities must be observed, before—

Lois sensed his serene sureness. And she feared it.

In desperation, she questioned him.

No; he had not written to his mother. The delay knifed him. But it would be unlucky, or so Wên O-he would believe, for him to write to her, entreating her approval of his marriage, from this *chia* of sore illness. And it *would* be unlucky; for it would prejudice her against the marriage her consent to which he was confident that his splendid mother would not refuse, if he made no blunder.

He would make no blunder.

Probably it would be best for him to go to Wên O-he, fall at her feet, and petition her with his own lips, face to face. Unless Wên O-he journeyed first to visit Chenn-yi No. Many runners had trotted back and forth between the two venerable ladies. He had reason to suspicion that the visit was contemplated. Chenn-yi No had hinted it.

Wên T'ien's face glowed at that possibility of what would be best of all.

When Wên O-he saw Lo-ees, Wên O-he would consent at once. She would consent gladly, and would speed the match-maker to Lo-ees' honorable father.

Wên T'ien wished anxiously that he were as sure of Mr. Allingham's consent as he was of his mother's—when she had seen the lily-and-rose of all the world.

But of this, his secret anxiety, he did not speak to Lo-ees.

And he had great confidence that his mother would not fail in any thing that she undertook.

They would love each other very dearly, she and his mother, he told Lo-ees.

The old, old promise that so many men have made, heeding not their inability to keep it! A promise that every man born-of-woman is powerless to keep!

Lo-ees was not so sure. She knew that Chinese mothers-in-law did not always love a son's wife, or over-indulge her.

In any case, the mother's consent must not be asked yet—if ever. She was not ready.

Lois had great difficulty in convincing Wên T'ien that she would not, no matter who urged it, consent to betrothal between them—not yet, if ever.

But at last she did. And she suffered at the suffering she saw in her lover's face. And when she told him, and convinced him that it was true, that if he proposed their betrothal, either to his mother or to her English father—who would not force, or even urge her—until she told him that he might, he would lose her forever, the pain that gathered in Wên T'ien's dark eyes hurt Lo-ees so that she very nearly retracted and promised him that the betrothal should be performed, if Wên O-he and Edward Allingham both consented.

Much as it pained him, Wên T'ien took it charmingly.

Again they drifted.

He showed no rancour, and no sense of having been thrust back unfairly.

And Lois Allingham knew that day by day Wên T'ien was gaining with her.

Chenn-yi Wang grew much better.

There was joy in the *chia*.

Again the man and the girl read and sang and romped together in the courtyards, made music in the gardens, wandered by the lake and to the hill-sides.

But they did not go again to the singing-sands.

CHAPTER XXX

When Lady Saunders said that she was “off to Chang-sha to look into things herself,” most of them laughed at her.

Betty Monroe jokingly offered to go along with her.

But the two men who knew her best were seriously alarmed. They knew that she rarely threatened idly, but was almost sure to carry out whatever project caught her whim, no matter how venturesome.

Allingham and Trench did all they could to dissuade her. They left undone nothing they could think of to prevent her—short of locking her up. Desperately they even canvassed the possibility of doing that, assessing grimly the consequences of her venomous wrath, if they presumed to do it, and succeeded in doing it.

“You’d have to marry her then!” Betty told Trench mockingly. “Nothing else would appease her.”

Edward Allingham threw Miss Monroe a sudden look of reproach.

Trench merely laughed, but a slight color came on his thin face. Neither of the others ever had seen that before.

Betty cursed her tongue, and gave it a vicious little nip between her teeth.

“A man might do very much worse than that,” Trench told her with a touch of affectionate maliciousness.

Betty was grateful to him.

“Oh,” she mocked again, “I’ve given you up long ago.”

“I am relieved,” Trench told her with a courtly bow.

“We must do something,” Edward Allingham said, cutting short the badinage, going back to the situation which both he and Trench believed serious.

Trench nodded.

“Yes; but what?”

“Can’t we get an order forbidding her to go towards the danger-zones? Isn’t it worth trying? The Municipal Council surely could issue an order that she would have to obey?”

“Would she?” Trench spoke anxiously. “More likely she’d evade it. Any sort of ‘order’ would infuriate her. She would never have consented to come to Shanghai with us, if she’d not been keen to see on the spot whether she thought it better to sell or to hold her Nanking Road property. And now that she has sold it, there is—in her opinion—nothing to hold her here.”

“And,” Miss Monroe added, “she got a fabulous price for it, didn’t she?”

"A very good price," Allingham said cautiously.

"Daylight robbery," Trench said.

"A damned clever woman." Allingham spoke admiringly. "The way she played Ling Pi and Mo Foy against each other was nothing less than masterly. I doubt if there is a man in New York, or even in Chicago, who could have done it better."

"The poor, stripped pagoda-tree!" Paul Trench murmured bitterly.

"Dry your eyes!" Betty Monroe advised him. "You can't rob a Chinese, get the better of one in a business deal; no European can."

"Europeans have been doing it pretty well ever since Hamel landed at Quelpart," Trench said grimly.

"I'm afraid that that is right," Allingham said.

"Who was Hamel? Where is Quelpart?" the English woman asked.

Paul Trench groaned.

Edward Allingham laughed.

"Oh," Trench told her, "never mind. You wouldn't like Quelpart. Hamel wouldn't interest you."

"Anyway, I like Lady S. better than I do either Mo Foy or Ling Pi,—"

"You are rather better acquainted with her," Allingham reminded her. "Have you ever seen either of them?"

Betty ignored the interruption. She usually did. "—and I'm glad she got the better of them both."

"But," Allingham expostulated, "she didn't. She only got the better of one of them—if she did."

Betty made a mouth at him.

"Well, Lady S. is peculiarly pleased with herself over it. Lucifer is Uriah-Heep-humble compared to her ladyship's pride in her Rockefeller pull-off. And if you two are keen to stop her dancing off to Chang-sha to get the better of a few more rich natives, all I can say is, look nippy, my dears; look very nippy, or you'll be late for the fair."

"We will," the men said together.

Betty Monroe grew grave.

"You both are anxious about the present shindies!"

Trench nodded.

"Yes," Allingham said.

"I wish Char had come back to Shanghai with us!"

"So do I, Betty. And I very much wish you would go home on the next boat, my child."

Betty Monroe frowned.

"Well, then, I won't! And you need not call me 'child,' in your love of sarcasm!"

"Betty!"

Trench was studying a rather poor bamboo bush that grew just outside the window, apparently deeply absorbed in it.

"I'll be thirty-one next week!"

"Shall you, dear? You don't look it; you look about twenty. And when you are angry you look about ten."

"I don't know what I look—or care. I feel an old forty."

"Nonsense, child. I beg your pardon. It slipped out. And to fifty, thirty-one seems youth indeed."

"A woman of thirty is no longer a girl," Betty insisted—"let alone a child."

Mr. Allingham shook his head at her with an affectionate smile.

"What," he asked her, "shall I give you next week, for your birthday?"

Trench's scrutiny of the bamboo intensified.

They were in Mrs. Temple's pleasant drawing-room, alone in it. Mabel Temple, with whom Miss Monroe was staying, was out. Energetic in every place and in every climate, she was out much more than she was at home. Her social tastes were catholic. She had played tennis before tiffin. She was going to dine with the Urquarts, and dance most of the night away in the French Concession. But she was dividing the afternoon between bridge at one of her several clubs, a committee meeting at another, and a famous American traveler's lecture, at one of the mission halls, on "Linguistic Clash and Confusion on the Gold Coast"—as if Shanghai had not troubles enough of its own without borrowing others from Accra and Sekondi!

Betty Monroe belonged to few clubs—to none that were exclusively women's—disliked bridge—had no flair for missionaries, traveling or otherwise, and as little flair for linguistic complications. She had refused to go with Mabel to any of those, this afternoon's diversions.

Miss Monroe had not been lonely; one of the fortunate ones who revel in their own company, she never was lonely. But she had put down her novel contentedly when Trench and Allingham had been shown in; and had given them tea in Mabel Temple's stead.

They three had chatted of lesser things at first, but when the room was clear of afternoon-tea debris and of servants Edward Allingham had spoken at once of Lady Saunders and the escapade she was threatening.

Mary Saunders had driven a magnificent bargain with Ling Pi.

Both Allingham and Trench were undecided whether she had been wise or

unwise to sell. Allingham was inclined to think that, on the whole, she had been ill-advised. Trench now was inclined to believe that she had been wise. Allingham clung to England's invincibility in Shanghai—at least in Shanghai and in Hong Kong. Paul Trench was secretly betting on China—not now, but in the years to come: long years, perhaps, after Mary Saunders was at rest beside her husband in Happy Valley—if even there she would do anything so meek as rest. Allingham doubted it. But each of the men was far from sure; not at all confident that he was right regarding her sale of her Nanking Road holdings.

Both Trench and Allingham wondered, not unanxiously, if she had not made a life-long foe of Mo Foy.

Rather more than slightly intoxicated by what she was convinced had been her immense business acumen, Lady Saunders itched to “do it again.”

Sir Thomas Saunders had had many and scattered Chinese holdings. His wife was his only heir.

Among much other property, he had owned a valuable site in Chang-sha. Most of his real estate had been where by Chinese law no foreigner could own even a foot of ground. But Sir Thomas had had his methods and his widow had inherited them. It is not difficult to get a needy or grasping Chinese to buy for you, and hold in his name. And, provided you have a sufficient grip upon him, it is safe. The grip may be that you hold securities of his, or know facts that he dare not have divulged. The only essential is that the grip is tight enough and cannot be loosened except by you, and cannot be evaded by him. No Chinese may own land in our Shanghai Settlement. But several Chinese do. No alien *may* own real estate in several parts of China where aliens *do*. International equity does not exist in Republican China.

There seemed little doubt that Chang-sha properties were imperiled now—no matter who owned them, Chinese or foreigners. But, for all her surface impetuosity, cautious to a fault, and for a woman oddly impervious to rumor, Mary Saunders, though much inclined to sell all she had in Hunan, and to realize on it now, was determined to judge for herself on the spot.

Her own business ability had grown her god.

She reveled in it.

While Sir Thomas had lived she had been allowed no voice in his business affairs, and had been allowed very little knowledge of them.

They had been congenial, really good friends. They had admired and liked each other. He had been quite fond of his wife, and was proud of her. But, indulgent to her in all else, he had severely excluded her from the slightest participation—even verbal—in his prosperous affairs. She knew that he was rich. She had had little idea

of how rich.

She had respected his martinet attitude regarding all his business affairs, and his undeviating adherence to it, too sincerely ever to attempt to change or to modify it.

But through all their married years—twenty odd years—she had quietly studied business, watched business methods, watched market reports, listened to the business talk of successful men whenever she could, silently deduced her own conclusions of how business fortune and failure were brought.

Almost before her husband's funeral—a very handsome funeral—his widow had flung herself, as full canopied as Minerva from the brow of Jove, into the battle of money-making, and into the sterner, stiffer fight of money-keeping.

"Hunan's a fool part of China for any Western to buy land in," Mr. Allingham remarked indignantly.

"Damn-fool part!" Miss Monroe murmured softly.

"Far too risky," Trench added regretfully.

"A lot you know about it, Betty," Allingham told her. "You couldn't tell us the names of ten of the Provinces of China, to save your life. And you are not to swear. I won't allow it."

Betty made a face at him.

"Coming?" Trench asked, as he rose. "I must go."

"No; not yet. Mrs. Temple may not be much longer. I'd like to see her."

"She will be," Betty Monroe told him.

"Very well; I'll wait."

"I must go alone, then," Trench said, and went towards the door.

"Afraid you must," Allingham agreed, "unless you take Betty with you."

Trench gave her an affectionate smile. But it said, "Good-bye," not, "Will you come?"

"I must go and dress soon now," Betty Monroe told Allingham. "And when Mabel comes, she won't have a moment; and it's long past visiting time."

Mr. Allingham only smiled at her.

But Paul Trench was well out of the room now; and she turned to Allingham fiercely with:

"I wish you'd beat me! My outrageous tongue! I'd like to cut it out!"

"Please don't. I'd miss your merry, loving tongue badly. I'm much in debt to that wilful, reckless little tongue of yours."

"Did I hurt him? I'd rather hurt almost any one else."

"Paul? Oh, no; of course not. You embarrassed him." Allingham laughed a little.

"There isn't anything between them, is there?"

“As if there could be!”

“You never can tell.”

“Oh—yes, you can, sometimes. There are such things too preposterous to be possibilities.”

“He wouldn’t, would he?” the girl persisted. “He couldn’t! But why did he flush so? I could beat myself, though.”

“Much too warm. Trench blushed with horror.”

“Would she? Does she?”

“Why not ask her? Don’t be too grotesquely absurd, child—I mean, girl.”

Betty Monroe was silent for a few moments. She believed that she had stumbled upon a fact—scampered on to it unawares. A fact that Mr. Trench knew, without sharing or liking it. She believed that he had flushed in sympathetic annoyance for a woman.

Paul Trench, exclusive, fine as rare ivory, dreamer, pundit, and Lady Saunders, gregarious, rough-hewn, up-and-doing, not over-educated, red-faced, buxom, with hands twice the size of Trench’s! The picture was absurd and scandalous. Allingham, slow of mirth at such things, chuckled softly at it. But Betty Monroe did not. She sighed—at a thought that saddened her.

Allingham was watching her oddly.

“Penny!” he offered.

“Thank you, no. I’ll keep what I was thinking to myself. Wish I’d kept my tongue to itself just now. I believe he *was* hurt.”

“Rubbish. You make too much of it—a nothing.”

“I wonder why Paul Trench never married.”

“Quite a number of men don’t,” was all that Edward Allingham answered.

He knew the old story that never would be blurred. But his noncommittal eyes, lazy but frank on Betty Monroe’s, told her nothing. To no one, not to Lois, still less to Betty, would he have so much as hinted at that so old, still living, story. And he always was on his guard with Betty. He never had considered her discreet. Allingham was wrong there. Most men mistake a gay tongue for a reckless one.

“There, there, cheer up. You always have dropped hot bricks, heavy ones, ever since I have known you. You always will. You can’t help it. To-day’s was only a tiny pebble.”

Betty let it go then.

“You miss Lois badly,” she said. “Can you stick the year out? If she doesn’t change her mind and send for you to go and get her long before that!”

“Miss Lois! More than I enjoy. But not half as much as I should if it were not for

you. You have been very, very kind to my loneliness.”

“Are you anxious about her?”

“Because of all these civil warlets? No. If there is an entirely safe spot in China now, I am sure that that spot is the *chia* of the Chenn-yis.”

“Are you sure that they are only warlets, as you picturesquely call them?”

“Well,” Allingham admitted after a moment, “Paul calls it war. Paul is much more China-wise than I am. And bloodshed certainly seems to be increasing. But then, they have so many more weapons, and ammunition now to shed blood with: weapons and powder that Christendom has sold them—is particularly pleased to go on selling to China. In confidence—just to you, Betty—while I confidently believe that Lois is peculiarly safe, I wish that she were in England. I must go to her, of course, if things thicken too much.”

“Could you get to her?”

“That is what *is* troubling me. I could get there now, probably quite all right. If things did get much worse—and they may suddenly—anything can happen in China—I might not be able to get to the Chenn-yi place any too easily.”

“Why not go now, then?” The woman’s hands tightened on her fan.

“I promised not to go inside the year, unless she sent for me.”

“The promise doesn’t hold, if Lois is in danger!”

“Certainly not. But I believe that she is not in danger. In my opinion—I think Paul shares it—all these fireworks and ructions near the Yangtsze do not menace that part of An-hwei at all and won’t. When I do, if I do, it might be too late for me to get to her. What ought I to do, Betty?”

She flushed with pleasure, touched at the appeal and confidence in Allingham’s voice.

“Get her! Send her word that you are called home. Go for her—or send for her, if you think that would be safer. It certainly would be quicker. Get her here, and take her to England. *I’d* enjoy a little warfare—”

Allingham almost believed her. He remembered Betty in 1914, a belligerent school girl, keen to make ammunition or bandages, be bus conductor or milkman or nurse, or go to the front as a vivandière; keen to do anything she could, and several that she could not possibly; keen to do anything except knit socks.

—“I’d enjoy a little warfare. But war and trouble are not for Lois.”

“My God, no! I’ll have a serious talk with Trench to-morrow.”

“Here he comes—and Sir Martin and Jack Bradley are with him.”

Late as it was, Trench had come back. He had met Sir Martin and Bradley almost at the Temples’ door.

The three men came in unannounced.

"A counsel of war!" Allingham murmured to Betty Monroe.

And so it proved.

Trench had secured John Bradley and Martin Keith for the conspiracy to defend Mary Saunders against herself, no mean allies. They both were municipally powerful. Both had means. Both were staunch. Bradley was as nimble-witted as a woman.

The counsel opened at once. It was too late for tea. Betty did not think of cocktails, no one did.

The four men discussed methods, made plans and discarded them, for a long hour.

None of them attempted to exclude Betty Monroe from their counsels. They all knew that Miss Monroe could be very useful on such occasions.

"Of course, she must not go," Keith said earnestly.

"Of course not! Rather not! My hat!" Bradley said vehemently.

They were all agreed about that.

"The ayes have it. The voting is unanimous," Betty stated quite needlessly.

Quite. But how to prevent her? Mary Saunders had a way of doing as she wished.

For once Betty Monroe listened much more than she spoke.

She avoided looking at Paul Trench. Allingham noticed it, and was amused. He knew that Trench was far too concerned for a wilful woman's safety to be remembering a girl's flippant, ill-judged raillery.

"We've got to stop her—the dear old fool!" Bradley insisted.

"Dear old pepper-pot!" Miss Monroe added witheringly.

"We have got to stop her," the three other men echoed. But they added no endearments of the absent woman.

And the next day and the next they repeated it to one another: "We have got to stop her."

But they did more than talk. They went to work; decided on a plan, and cautiously proceeded to carry it out.

And while they were, Lady Saunders quietly slipped through their fingers.

Sir Martin Keith shook his head; perturbed and penitent.

"I ought to have moved more quickly," he said self-reproachfully.

Allingham and Bradley swore. And Bradley added, "Drat the old woman!"

"You'll be old some day," Betty Monroe spat at him. And Edward Allingham was amazed to see that there were tears in her eyes.

Paul Trench said nothing.

He even showed less interest than any one who knew him only slightly might have expected.

When Sir Martin and Bradley and Trench left them Allingham and the girl sat silent for some minutes; troubled by the same thoughts which both felt disinclined to discuss any longer now.

Presently Mr. Allingham turned to Betty Monroe, determined to find something pleasanter to talk about. Gruesome speculations as to Lady Saunders' whereabouts and possible plight were depressing without being useful. Betty had been such a cheery little friend to him, so gay and daughterly, in Lois' absence, that she deserved a happier companion than he had been to her to-day.

"Well," he demanded gaily, "what shall I give you for your birthday?"

"Nothing!" Miss Monroe said indignantly. "To offer a woman of thirty odd a birthday present is a rude sarcasm."

Allingham laughed at her contentedly.

"Then I shall be sarcastic next week! Just a little uppish to-day, aren't you?"

"Perhaps I am. I am tired."

"Poor little girl, I am sorry. And I won't try to tease you again—blunderer that I am!"

The man laid a remorseful hand on the girl's smaller, browner hand.

"Good God, Betty, you *are* tired! Your hand is trembling. There, there, child!" He smoothed her hand comfortingly. Lois always loved it.

If Betty Monroe's hand had trembled a moment ago, it trembled no longer. It stiffened and was entirely still, clutching the shut fan it had been holding loosely.

"There, there!" Allingham repeated kindly but firmly too, evidently believing in the medicinal efficacy of the meaningless, if soothing, formula. "She'll be all right—if she really has gone. She talks a lot, you know. Threateners don't often *do*. And even if she did carry out her threat, and got away with it, I don't believe she'd come to too much harm. The devil looks after his own, you know. And Mary Saunders is a firebrand, but she's no fool. They won't dare do her any harm; she knows too much about more than one Chinese plutocrat. She could blow up quite a few Chinese acres and a *yamên* or two. She'll be all right. And if she were not, it wouldn't be our fault. As for our own girl, take my word for it that Lois is all right, dear. Do you think I'd be sitting here trying to drive your blue devils away, enjoying myself in Shanghai, if Lois were in the least danger, or any chance of being?"

"No!" Miss Monroe said it quickly with an odd smile.

"That's all right, then!"

Giving Betty's fingers a final fatherly pat, Mr. Allingham noticed the fan under

her hand. He pulled the fan out, opened it, and looked at it disapprovingly.

"Bless my soul, Betty! A new fan's what I'd better give you for your birthday! What ever do you keep this old thing for? It never was much of a fan, was it? And it's downright shabby! I'm ashamed of it! Betty! You are blushing! I never saw you blush before. What's up?"

"Am I?" Miss Monroe challenged him carelessly with an indifferent laugh. "First Paul, now me! Your turn next."

"I hope not!" Then a sudden thought, a possible explanation of why the best-dressed girl he knew cared to use such a fan, electrified Allingham. Was it a keepsake—a precious keepsake? With all his heart he hoped it was. Thirty wasn't old—but it was old enough.

"Betty, who gave you that fan?" Allingham demanded sharply.

Betty Monroe looked Allingham straight in his eyes.

"I bought it one scorching day at Margate. I've hung on to it—and I shall—as a memento of a bad bargain."

"I don't believe you!" He opened the fan again, and studied it; puzzled.

"Hello! I remember! I gave you this, Betty. I bought two one day in Regent Street—before they spoiled it—two just alike, only Lois' had red roses on it instead of these pink ones. My word, what a lot of money I used to waste on you two kids when you were at that school! I paid a pound for that tawdry fan, a pound for each of them; four or five shillings for the two fans, I suppose, and one pound and sixteen shillings for the privilege of buying them in Regent Street!" Suddenly Allingham's face crinkled with amusement. Then he laughed heartily.

"The joke's on me, Betty! Do you know, I was wondering if a sweetheart hadn't given it to you—Mr. Right, you know. I wish he had; I'd be delighted to have Mr. Right arrive."

"So should I," Miss Monroe said gaily. "But the poor man can't, for he was drowned at sea many years ago."

"I wish he hadn't, then! And he hasn't. You are fibbing again, my girl. I hope he comes soon, Betty, my dear. But, I say, now I do know what I'll buy you next week for your birthday: the nicest fan in Shanghai. And you can throw that old horror away."

"I've got too many fans already!" Paul Trench might have heard a touch of bitterness in her voice. Edward Allingham did not. "No," she said cheerfully, "I shall not throw this old horror away. It's almost the only thing I have now that I had in Sussex. I was jolly happy at that school."

"So you were! And you keep an old worn-out fan, that wasn't worth having

when it was new, in memory of those jolly schooldays. Lord, but girls are funny!”

“Precisely. In jolly memory of a jolly old school, of Miss Kennedy, Monsieur Mureau, Fräulein Bluckerheim and the rest.”

Mr. Allingham patted her hand again before he got up.

“You always were a loyal little soul,” he told her approvingly. “Well, here’s your treasured fan. But, I say, Betty, don’t carry it about in public again, certainly not when you are wearing such a lovely dress!”

“I won’t,” Miss Monroe laughed.

“That’s a good girl!”

Allingham never saw that old purchase of his again.

“I’ll not forget the birthday,” he promised as Temple came sauntering towards them from the gate.

“All right. But not a fan!”

“No? Then, it shan’t be. And, Betty,” he added, “when Mr. Right comes—I am counting on him, you know!—when Mr. Right comes, count on me for a particularly nice wedding present—better beads than those; sparkling ones from Regent Street—where I bought you and Lois those fans.”

The day after that Paul Trench was missing from his hotel. No one had seen him at his club.

CHAPTER XXXI

But Betty Monroe did not get the birthday gift that Allingham had promised her. It was very unlike Edward Allingham to forget.

Turmoil came to dam his memory of lesser things. Betty Monroe's birthday was a bad day in several parts of China—Shanghai was one.

Bad news was coming from Chang-sha.

Shanghai heard less of it, and thought very much less of it, than editorial London did.

Europeans in Shanghai are surfeited with such news. The London newspapers have many pages to fill.

The Settlement was more absorbed in Extraterritoriality just then than it was in everything else. That monumental international mess was worse and worse, threatened ominously. Indisputably it was a dirty question—with dirty weather ahead of it. It is so, and will be for many a long day. What to do about it divided opinion; counsels clashed.

No one knew exactly what to do. A confusing number knew what to say. The serious subject was torn to useless tatters.

But extrality still bored Miss Monroe; her mind was more free to listen to the mutterings from the increasing danger zone, and freer to be disturbed by the news as it came.

Allingham was not particularly surprised when Betty walked in on him as he sat alone at breakfast. She and Lois had always claimed, and had, welcome in each other's homes—at all times and at all hours. If Lois required some brotherly service, she demanded it of Charles Monroe as a matter of course; sent him on long, difficult errands, bade him find in some haystack a particular needle, employed him to fetch and carry, match ribbons, with equanimity; rewarded him with careless thanks; or, if he failed or blundered, berated him promptly. As for madcap Betty, she had adopted Lois' father almost as soon as she had Lois, years ago in Sussex. Lois had no rival in her father's heart. But Betty soon came next. Between the four of them there was no ceremony, scant reserve. Betty had promised Lois to "take care" of Lois' father in Lois' absence. She had kept her word—at more cost to herself than even Paul Trench had suspected—and this was not her first appearance at Allingham's solitary breakfast.

Miss Monroe poured a cup of coffee for herself, standing beside Allingham, and drank it slowly.

"Can't we go for Lois now? I am sure we ought to."

Lois' father reached up his hand and put it on Betty's.

"Sit down," he told her, "while we talk about it. I still believe that Lois is particularly safe."

"Why? Mr. Trench has not gone to Chang-sha because he liked going, or looked forward to a pleasant time there, did he?"

"No; but that is just why; not my only reason, but my chief one. Trench loves Lois dearly. If he had had any doubt of her safety in An-hwei, he'd not have gone to Chang-sha; he would have stayed here to act with me for Lois. He knows that if communication with An-hwei were cut off by a shifting of the fighting localities—most improbable, but it might—that I might not be able to get through, but that he would be able to."

"You feel sure that he has not gone to Lois; that he has gone after Lady Saunders?"

"Perfectly sure. He would not make any move about Lois without telling me. And he would not think it right not to share with me any anxiety he felt for Lois. He has sprinted after Mary Saunders all right. And I hope he's found her."

"Will she listen to him, even there? If he does find her?"

"She may have to—there," Allingham said grimly. "Or she may be glad to. Shall I peel a peach for you?"

"Not yet. Toast, please."

"You look upset, Betty. You are, aren't you?" Allingham asked solicitously.

"Oh, no; I'm not upset. I am afraid." She did not say of what she was afraid.

Allingham made his own interpretation; quite a wrong one.

"Don't be, then. Lois is safer than we are here; I promise you that. And Shanghai's safe as houses—yet awhile. We may have a few more pleasant varieties of inconvenient strikes—probably shall. They'll peter out, as they always do. Shanghai's all right."

"But you'd like me to go home—to England."

"I'd give a very great deal to see you go! When will you?"

"When Char will go with me."

"And so he ought. I wrote to him yesterday."

Miss Monroe made no comment. The statement seemed to her quite ordinary.

"I told him to come to us—that he was needed."

"I hope he comes!"

"Of course he will. I rather implied that you needed him."

"Perhaps I do." But she laughed.

"Of course he'll come. And when he gets here, we'll make him take you home."

"We can try." Betty did not add that for her own going there was another indispensable proviso: that she would not leave China until Lois and Mr. Allingham were together again.

"That's a good girl. We'll try, and we'll succeed. And you may trust me—and Paul Trench—to take care of Lois."

"If things got—well, as bad as they once or twice have been in China—and Lois was still up there, with old Mrs. Chenn, do you believe that you could get to her, or get her brought here safely?"

"Trench could. I might be another matter, if half China flamed up, fired up fiercely, but Paul could get through. He could get through anything in China—in the hottest part of China—the one European in China now who could. Parkes, Gordon—all that splendid crew, all of that caliber—are dead. They can serve China no longer—unless their spirits can."

Betty Monroe made no comment. But she saw no reason why Englishmen should serve China.

"But Paul Trench can go unmolested where he likes here. He has an unfailing talisman."

"Yes?" Trench interested her if China did not.

"He loves China, and he sincerely respects the Chinese. Moreover he is just to China; sees her handicaps and sees how little they lie at her own door, appreciates the Chinese angle, her attitude—as far as the driven country has one—and appreciates her terrible dilemma; a dilemma that would be insuperable to any people smaller than the Chinese."

The English woman dabbed mango jelly rather viciously on to another piece of toast. It jarred her—on her birthday—to hear Edward Allingham peaning China's super virtues.

"Trench loves China, and he respects the Chinese people," Edward Allingham repeated. "That is his talisman."

Miss Monroe was helping herself to another cup of coffee, while Mr. Allingham was peeling a best peach for her, when Sir Martin Keith came in unannounced.

Sir Martin—most punctilious of gentlemen, one of the old school—sat down without waiting for an invitation, and spoke without so much as "Good-morning" or any other pretense of salutation to either of them. And one of them a woman!

"Hell is let loose. Chang-sha is in flames."

Doctor Ridley, a splendid fellow, who had given fifty devoted years of service and healing to China, had been shot down in his own house, his wife standing beside

him. Slaughter reigned in Chang-sha.

Allingham laid down his fruit knife. Betty Monroe let her napkin fall.

Chang-sha became a slaughter-house.

Americans, Japanese and English were pushed on to boats and sent away as fast as it could be managed; women and children forced to go.

Thousands of Chinese fled with them, huddled anyhow on to any available foot of deck room.

Shanghai threatened to be over-crowded and food-short once more.

The air was fetid with horrid rumors. The facts that came through were almost as bad.

No word came from Paul Trench.

Nothing had been learned of Lady Saunders.

Better news came.

Then worse came again.

The usual seesaw and ebb-and-flow of Chinese Civil War intertangled with growing, and well-fed enmity to foreigners. The Soviet was not altogether guiltless of instigation and re-fueling, but less so than was said. It was a Chinese conflagration; poverty and extraterritoriality fed and fanned it.

Of course, it probably would blow over again.

Until it did blow over a number of gruesome things would happen. They were bound to. They always did.

When the dissevered finger came, Mary Saunders' mosaic ring still on it, the Settlement gibbered with rage.

Allingham was not the only Englishman who turned sick.

Betty Monroe's face twitched piteously when she heard it. Bradley saw that her eyes filled with tears. But she did not let them fall. Her tears could wait, they would keep; perhaps there was something she could do.

The usual threatening letter of expostulation was sent to the Chinese "Government." With the usual result.

Rich Shanghai could not let Lady Saunders die at ruthless bandit hands, or even suffer the misery of being detained by them for an avoidable day. Lady Saunders, an old English woman with a sore dissevered finger.

Shanghai—the Settlement—did not barter. The enormous ransom was paid.

The large sum was gathered in a few hours, overgathered, twice what was needed.

Allingham would have paid it all; several other rich men would have done so gladly.

Half a dozen Chinese contributed. Mo Foy and Ling Pi contributed handsomely.

Mo Foy's contribution was peculiarly handsome. Bradley looked at him in surprise—almost expostulated—when Mo Foy laid down the splendid sum of gold pieces.

"They will like it in gold," the Chinese said.

"Why do you do it, Mo?" the Englishman asked.

The Chinese smiled.

"Born-before, we have many adages in China. One is, 'The pleasure of doing good is one that will not wear out.' So"—he parted the gold he had brought into three smaller piles deftly and softly with his fine yellow hands, and touched one of the heaps with his delicate finger-tips—"this I give selfishly, for my pleasure. Another Chinese adage is, 'To save one life is better than to build a seven-storied pagoda.'"
The finger tips moved to another bunch of gold. "So, I give this to acquire merit with our gods. 'When you drink from a stream remember the spring' is another proverb that always has sounded to me to be words of reason; a just commandment. The lady so misused in blood-stained Hunan now, has aided me to enrich myself. I paid her a large rent. It profited me greatly, my Nanking Road business, nevertheless. I would have paid my landlord lady twice what I did pay. But—my praise for it is to T'sai Shên!—she did not know. So,"—the fine yellow hand lay palm-down on the third heap of gold—"I give this in gratitude."

"But she turned you out, after all those years!"

The Chinese shrugged.

"Such things he who does business with women must expect. Ling Pi and I gambled; Ling Pi won. Shall we blame a Christian lady that two 'heathen Chinese' played fan-tan? Not I, Born-before."

"I say, Mo, you are a damned fine fellow."

Mo Foy bowed.

"Not so!" he deprecated.

"And," Mo Foy added, "Lady Saunders is old. Her hot-iron-disfigured hair is white. It would ill become me, a Chinese man who values manliness, and was for years her so-profiting tenant, to hold back a little contemptible gold from her service when she suffers in peril."

"By Jove!"

"And, Born-before Bradley, there is something else. One more Chinese proverb, permit me to tell you. 'A diamond with a flaw is preferable to a common

stone with none.' The venerable English lady is not without flaw—"

"She is not."

—"but she is of the diamond kind. I admire and like her. I always have. Indeed, I may say that I have an affection for the lady—a respectful affection."

The two men exchanged smiles.

And Jack Bradley registered an oath to tell every word of it to Lady Saunders—if he ever saw her again.

Across the seas the two great Continents of Christendom were horrified—again—and said so.

The Kuomintang was worried, and showed it.

Westminster and Washington muttered and hesitated, conferred and considered. The International Settlement on the Whang-poo acted. But they in the Shanghai Settlement were nearer Chang-sha—on the spot, so to speak; more nearly concerned, touched to the quick, lashed on the raw.

CHAPTER XXXII

Shanghai gave a comfortable sigh of relief. There was jazz again. The clubs brightened up.

Calm returned to Hunan again, or pretended it had—for a time. Much of Changsha was in ruin. But the ashes no longer smoldered. Several fortunes had been destroyed. Well, they must be made again, that was all.

All of it had happened before out here in China, and probably would happen again.

Lady Saunders would come back minus a finger. She'd had no business to go! After all, one finger wasn't a head, or even an ear, a nose, or a limb.

"Perhaps she'll stay put now," an American woman ventured.

"Not her," the American husband predicted. And most of Mary Saunders' acquaintances agreed with him. Those who knew her best agreed the most emphatically.

No one felt any anxiety lest she might not be released and sent in safety and with courtesy to the agreed place.

It had been in the bond. And say what you may of Chinese bandits, you cannot say that they do not keep their word.

The ransom-price was on its way to the bandits' intermediary. When it reached them, they would do the rest. They were bandits, and blackguards, robbers, torturers of women; but they were Chinese ones. They would not break faith.

Every one in Shanghai was sorry for poor old hot-headed Mary Saunders. No one was anxious about her now.

"I hope to goodness that Mr. Trench comes back with her," Betty Monroe said to Allingham.

"I hope so," Allingham said with little conviction. "But he's all right, Betty."

The girl went on with her task, and the man went on with his.

Allingham was writing a letter of careful instructions to his Hong Kong manager. Betty was putting fresh flowers in his vases.

She and Mabel Temple and Bradley had lunched with him to-day. The others had gone an hour ago. Miss Monroe had elected to stay "to see to things."

She had pestered Mr. Allingham's efficient and faithful servants about several of those household "things."

"Can do, Missie," they had told her pleasantly, and then had proceeded to carry out such of her orders as they fully approved.

Finished with the servants, Miss Monroe had busied herself a little longer without interrupting Mr. Allingham. She had seen that Lois' own room had been dusted and aired. She had straightened a picture, and had plumped up a cushion.

Then she "saw to the flowers," doing it in the study last of all.

Even then she did not interrupt Allingham. She moved about quietly, and he wrote on steadily.

It happened suddenly.

Allingham glanced up, as he folded his long letter, just as Betty Monroe put down a bowl of butterfly-lilies and mignonette near his writing case.

"You do it very beautifully—arrange flowers. Butterfly-lilies! My little wife's favorite flowers. She wore them very often, and mignonette too. What are your favorite flowers, Betty?"

She shook her head, afraid to speak.

"You don't often wear flowers, do you? Why?"

"They don't suit me."

The man considered that.

"Perhaps not," he decided, "not all kinds of flowers. I think they all suit Lois."

Betty Monroe smiled, and nodded again.

"They did her mother."

Miss Monroe dabbed a drop of water off the desk with her handkerchief hastily, not very deftly.

Edward Allingham touched her hand affectionately.

"There's a flower I'd dearly like to see you wear, Betty," he told her, holding her hand secure under his. "Orange blossoms! I wish I could see you wearing them, my dear."

The self-control of years snapped.

The woman dragged her hand away passionately.

Allingham rose in consternation; and his ivory paper knife fell to the floor.

"Don't hurt me about that again," she cried passionately.

Their eyes met, and her voice cracked with a smothered sob.

Edward Allingham felt that the room was going round.

He seized the top of the chair so hard that his knuckles strained the skin.

A dozen emotions clutched and shook him.

Dismay and despair were first.

He had injured Betty! Little merry, affectionate Betty, Lois' playmate and guardian at school! The child he had petted and loved!

Damnation!

What a fool he had been! Cruel!

Allingham seethed with self-contempt; he cringed with self-blame.

Then revulsion came, revulsion tinged with amusement. This was the most absurd thing he'd ever known. Betty, the child of his father-heart! It was abnormality. Abnormality always had revolted, offended Edward Allingham. He felt a little ill.

He found his handkerchief, and wiped his forehead.

How could Betty have been so—so—what? Preposterous, unnatural, bad taste—all that and more; other things that he would not let his thought name.

Why didn't she go?

She ought to go.

If she didn't, he must—turn on his heel and leave her standing there, a rejected, deserted guest.

To get to the door, he'd have to pass directly by her. He couldn't jump out of the window. If he did, half Shanghai would see him, and he'd break his neck. Allingham did not know which of the two he'd object to most. He really could not jump out of the window—not even for Betty.

Hang the girl! He couldn't look at her. He never again could look her in the face. Her! As long as he lived he'd never be able to look any woman in the face again. The girl deserved a beating. In his maddening dismay, Edward Allingham, for the first time, felt that he'd like to strike a woman—understood the brute men who did it, even had a fellow feeling for them.

Then a softer, less selfish emotion claimed its turn.

The pity of it!

The man knew that a sob was knotting in his throat.

Damnation, he'd almost sooner jump out of the window than cry!

Then he forgot himself again, and his heart was all pity.

The waste of it! The terrible, sorrowful, outrageous waste. Betty Monroe, the nicest girl he knew, who had all the essential fine qualities, and most of the glad ones! Betty with her beauty and her fascination! Betty who loved life! The best pal any man could have. Betty wasted; Betty hurt.

Allingham would have given his life to have been able to undo this.

He—knowing her as he did—believed that there was nothing he could do: nothing. He shivered.

Not for an instant did it occur to Allingham that he might have misunderstood. Conviction clutched and held him. A score of incidents, a score of signs, that had seemed nothing to him, rushed at him now; illumination flashlights. And he knew that

he saw the truth.

That old fan! Those paltry beads she wore so often! The poor child must be mad. All her sunny care of him since Lois went! He knew now that it had been for him—not for Lois. Care of him that had worn and boasted daughterly garments, but had not been daughterly: a comrade's care and tending, quiet partnership claimed and given, wife-like! Her dislike of China! Above all—that!

When had this damnable thing begun? How long had Betty known?

God! how could such things be!

Betty Monroe, the nicest woman he knew!

For he was thinking of her as a woman at last. That, at least, Betty Monroe had accomplished. Edward Allingham would not think of her as a girl again; never, never think of her as a child.

And he had urged her to marry! Had talked to her about a Mr. Right. If only he had spared her that!

Allingham felt a sudden dislike of Mr. Right.

What could he do to ease this hideous situation for Betty, spare her, save her shame?

Since he did not love her, had nothing to give her in return for her great munificence—only one return was any possible return for that matchless bounty—was there no small help he could contrive? Edward Allingham's face softened oddly, and his eyes wavered. He had nothing to give her, generous woman that she was; but he must find a way to spare her pride.

Pretend that he thought it all a joke—a preposterous farce—the apex of her inveterate teasing.

Could he make her believe that?

He would. He must.

He let go his grasp of the chair-back, gave his tie an unhappy twitch, and looked across at Betty Monroe with a grimace on his face that was intended for a smile of fun, an amused appreciation of the best joke she'd made yet.

Their eyes met.

And Allingham's face instantly was grave.

He could not mock her so.

He could not mock himself!

Only gravity could meet her gravity.

Only truth could honor the tranquil truth in those deep gray eyes of hers.

She held his glance; her eyes would not let him drop his again.

Very grave, she was beautifully tranquil. There was contentment on her quiet

face—a new contentment.

Then she smiled, a sunny friendly smile.

“Don’t let it trouble you. I should hate that. And I don’t want to hate anything about it. I want to keep it all unspoiled. Of course, I intended you never to know—partly because it would grind you. Stop feeling that way about it! I won’t have it. Cheer up, just to oblige me. And you are not to dare to be embarrassed. I am not!”

Edward Allingham never had thought that Betty Monroe was queen-like. He thought it then.

Suddenly her face dimpled, and she laughed at him. His room rang softly with the music.

“Oh—poor you! I am sorry that I let it slip—but, I wish you could have seen your own face! It was the funniest thing I ever saw.”

The room rang again with her clear, musical laughing.

Allingham’s face flamed. He took a step.

A moment ago—or was it—hours? Standing over there with the chair in his hand, it had seemed a purgatorial year. A moment ago—or however long it was—he had learned her secret, and it had played the very devil with him.

Now, the music of Betty’s laugh ringing in his ears, he had learned his own.

“Betty!”

The woman’s laugh broke off; the room was very still—only for an instant though. The paper-knife broke as Allingham stepped on it, went to her breathlessly, and caught her in his arms.

“Hush!” he commanded when she tried to speak. It was some time before she did.

Minutes not moments had passed.

For Allingham had slaked a long thirst of which he had not suspected until now. And she had stayed unprotesting in his arms, taking her lifelong joy; knowing, better than he did, how all this would end.

“Not yet!” he ordered. “I will not let you get far enough from me to speak—not yet. We do not need words, you and I. This instead!”

He pushed the old beads higher on her neck, and kissed her throat.

Betty did not try again to speak.

When at last Allingham pushed her a little from him, his hands tight on her arms, not releasing her, and cried to her, “Kiss me!” Betty Monroe obeyed him before she hid her face on his coat.

When the sudden Chinese night swooped down on Shanghai the man and the

woman in his arms did not know it, until Allingham realized that he could scarcely see the hand to which he was bending his still hungry lips.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was like Edward Allingham that he came to her early the next morning, and said at once the hard thing he had to say.

All his life he had made mistakes; one that had distorted all his after years, always must, and might, he knew, have marked out his only child for peculiar and lasting pain. But he never had shirked or procrastinated. He always—even as a child—faced his own iniquities and blunders fairly and squarely, and as soon as he realized them had done all he could to bear their consequences himself, sparing all others any share of the inevitable punishment—even those, especially those, who had had equal partnership, or even more, in his mistake or misdemeanor.

Paul Trench had not been far out when he told Lois that Allingham was vintage, and fine vintage at that.

It was like Betty Monroe that his coming did not surprise her, nor his drawn face, nor what he said.

She had expected him. She knew what he had come to say. She had known it for hours.

Even in last night's throbbing exultation and utter contentment—the rose-red culmination of a long sadness that always had been sweet, a culmination that she had believed never would be hers—she had known that this would be their love's aftermath.

Betty knew what the barriers were. One of those two was little to her—she disliked it, but it was little compared to her love. She was ready to ignore it. She knew that Edward Allingham never would break through either of those barriers, or allow her to do so.

But, sitting here in the sunlit room, waiting for the ordeal that she anticipated calmly, she was not unhappy.

She was proud.

And once while she was dressing she had hummed a little tune.

She looked up at him and smiled.

Allingham sat down without touching her—not even her hand.

He spoke at once.

“We must not go on with it, Betty.”

“I know,” she told him gently.

“You know!”

“Oh—yes. Of course I do. I knew even last night that it was just the once. The

only time. I know you so well. You needn't say what you came to say, I know every word of it. And I know that you are right. With part of what you came to say I quite agree. And the part is quite enough. I no more would override it than you would."

The man groaned.

"I ought to be kicked!" he muttered miserably.

"Cut that out!" The woman's voice was hard now. "Please don't regret—last night," she added softly. "It meant a lot to me. It does. It always will."

"Betty! Oh, my God! Don't tempt me, darling."

"I cannot tempt you," the woman told the man she loved. And she said it proudly.

For the first time since he had come Allingham looked away from her. He was afraid not to. In part, she was right, he believed. She could not tempt him to their marriage, he believed. And he knew very firmly that she would not attempt it.

Last night had caught them in an irresistible surprise, hurled them in each other's arms into an unforgettable abyss of love-delight, human happiness.

Last night they had been lovers.

Wedded lovers in the sacrament of mutual possession, holy longing.

It would not be again.

Last night he had been her lover, confessed and victorious.

He had made love to her last night.

He would not do that again.

Last night had been a sacrament.

Any repetition, even slight repetition, now would be cheap—unpardonable of him, degrading to her.

Not a caress of hands!

Not his hand on hers.

She could not tempt him to their marriage.

But there was lesser sweetness to which a man might be tempted beyond his strength. A man who had held her in his arms last night—nursed her face in his hands, crushed her lips with his!

Betty might tempt him to that, with the tempting of her nearness, the dear tempting of her eyes.

God! Last night!

Betty waited.

She knew that he would speak to her again when he was ready. She could not help him until then.

And she knew that he would speak; that she could not hold him back from that.

Perhaps it was best that he should; a relief to him, but she anticipated at least a little torture in it for her. She was sure that he would say nothing that she did not already know and had considered searchingly. But it would hurt her to hear it worded.

She waited.

When presently he squared his shoulders, and looked at her, the pain in the man's eyes hurt her.

She gave him a little friendly smile, lit a cigarette, and pushed the silver box to him across the desk.

"You are a wonderful woman!" he told her, with his hand on the silver box. He did not take a cigarette, and he had not offered to strike her match for her. But Allingham kept a covering hand on the box, as if he liked to feel it under his touch. Perhaps it helped him to have even that to hold on to; small things sometimes can be oddly helpful.

"I was a cur last night. You ought to hate and despise me!"

Betty Monroe gave him a little friendly nod—more affectionate than she knew, or intended—and her eyes were dancing.

"Despise? Possibly. But 'hate'! You don't know very much about women, do you!"

"You said you knew what I had come to say. I think not—certainly not all of it. And I've got to say it—for both our sakes; chiefly for mine, I'm afraid."

Edward Allingham, sitting quietly, facing her, the clear Kaingsu daylight full on his face, told his story slowly and carefully.

It was agony to Betty Monroe.

Well, she had known that it must be.

If it was a relief to Allingham, and it was, to tell at length what he never had told before, too, much of what he said pained him to say.

He arraigned himself, put his own soul on trial before a difficult tribunal of two: the Chinese woman he had loved and desired, married and possessed, and the English woman he loved and desired with an older man's stronger passion, the English woman who had been in his arms yesterday. She was not a memory. A spirit too—the spirit of love and bridal and infinite longing—but not merely a spirit. A woman of flesh and living breath. Quick. Alluring. Every tendril of her hair, every line of her, called him. That red mouth had quivered beneath his yesterday. He longed to feel it quiver again. God, how he longed!

He gave no sign of that. But probably she knew, and was glad to know it.

He told it all: his meeting with Shang Yon Yee, how instantly and hotly he had

loved her, their marriage, the aftermath. He slurred none of it. And here, after all his years of loneliness—the loneliness that eats and corrodes normal men—baring his soul, telling his folly to the living woman he loved with a love that ached and was eager, Allingham was tender of his wife. He made no pretense that it had been less than love that he had given Shang Yon Yee—infatuation merely. He was fair to Shang Yon Yee, honest of himself. Once when he spoke of the young Chinese wife's devotion and gay selflessness his eyes misted with tenderness.

And the listening woman did not show that she flinched.

He told that, dearly as he loved Lois, proud as he was of her—he stressed that!—in part his devotion to her had been a penance, a glad and delightful penance, but penance, and in lifelong keeping of a promise that was sacred and always would be.

The clock ticked relentlessly a score of aching moments away in the silent room. Edward Allingham had finished his story.

Betty Monroe made no comment.

There was none she could make.

Not once while he spoke had either of them looked away from the other, not once had either eyes faltered.

When he spoke again he said, "Because I am a very rich man, and Lois charming and so adaptable, we have been able to carry it, she and I. But the stigma is there. It will always be. I must pay the price now—and you." His voice broke a little, his face stiffened. "Presently Lois may have to pay it terribly; and when she does, I shall have to pay it again, and doubly."

Lois! Always Lois!

"Old things would be dragged up, and exploited brutally, if I married again. I will not have you pointed out as the wife of a Chinese woman's widower, the stepmother of a half-caste—even if you would consent."

Betty Monroe smiled.

"And there is Lois."

"Yes. And that's insuperable; I agree with you about that," the woman told him.

"Lois may not marry."

"I think she will."

"So do I. But she just might not. Anything may happen always. Sometimes I have wished that she would not. I have tried faithfully to make it up to Lois, the little that such things can be made up for; it would break me once and for all if she were to marry and then be unhappy."

"She will be unhappy if she does not marry," Betty said sadly.

"I'm afraid so. But the other unhappiness is worse, damnably worse."

The woman did not believe that. But she said nothing.

"My poor little Lois! She always must have me if she needs me—when she needs me. I must keep that oath."

"We'd both be terribly unhappy, terribly guilty, if she did not," the woman said emphatically. "Neither of us could be happy, or look each other in the eyes, if we failed Lois."

Edward Allingham knew that she meant it.

"I think that Lois would resent a stepmother, be jealous of her—no matter how much she had liked her before. Perhaps be all the more jealous, if she had liked her—before. I think it would make her very unhappy."

"I am sure of it—sure of all that," was the sturdy answer.

"I can't risk it. I can't give Lois a stepmother."

"Of course not. It would be despicably wrong."

"That is; not while Lois is unmarried. If she married, married an Englishman, and after a time I was convinced that she was happy, and that the happiness was going to last, then . . . possibly . . . well, it might seem different—perhaps."

"Why, 'if she married an Englishman'? Of course she will."

"Don't be sure of that, Betty. Chinese blood is very strong. It is the strongest and most characteristic of all bloods. It re-asserts itself after incredible numbers of years. Mix it with any other blood, and it hits back even in the fourth or fifth generation, or after. *Any* Chinese blood, pure Chinese, or Manchu—Lois has both those—blends of them. It seems the most wonderful alchemy, as if there were some potent quality in the country itself—or its traditions, history, habits; inexplicable, not to be understood. China is strong in Lois; stronger than any one but I suspect, stronger than I do, perhaps. It has caught me by the throat, and shaken me hard, more than once. So I said, 'if Lois married an Englishman.' I would not make you the stepmother of a half-caste girl, Betty. Even more, I would not make you the mother-in-law of a Chinese man."

"One would rather not, of course. But—"

"No! There is no but! I shall tread that winepress alone—if it comes to that. The debt is mine. I shall pay it with every ounce of grace that I can muster, if it comes to that."

"It won't."

"Now, I've said it all, I think. I'll go now. I won't ask you to forgive me. I'll not forgive myself! I won't try to thank you for your mercy and patience."

Edward Allingham took a cigarette and twisted it in his twitching fingers.

Suddenly, "My God, how I wish—"

The man crumpled then; laid his face down on the desk, and sobbed.

Out in the garden the birds and great velvet bees were busy and happy: mated and glad. And the great red flowers on the tall cotton-tree flamed their passionate discs.

On the bund ceaseless traffic of great industries, and of wealth parading to see and be seen, came and went.

In the harbor great liners rode at rest between their long luxurious voyages, company house-flags flew from dozens of ships, sampans jostled and squeezed their fat bulk in and out, tiny steam craft smoked and whistled, fortunes were growing and shrinking, thousands of naked Chinese coolies toiled and sweated.

Life, cheerful industry, business vigorously plied, in garden, bund and harbor.

Here; a man's agony.

China lashing Edward Allingham.

Betty Monroe shuddered to hear a strong man crying like a punished child.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Because she thought the terrible purge of a man's tears would give him relief, a little heal, the woman stood it while she could.

Then she got up, and went to him, drew a chair close to his, and sitting on it laid a hand on Allingham's bowed head.

Presently she caressed the just-touched-with-grizzle hair as his mother often had caressed it when it had been baby gold.

And when she bent nearer, and drew his head on to the pillow of her arm, he did not resist, but left it so.

"Edward!"

He turned his face, and looked at her.

"My darling, it hurts like hell."

"The hurt will go," she promised him. "The sweetness will stay. I am not unhappy. I have had my hour. Our hour. It will last me, no matter how long I live. It is enough."

Allingham sprang up, pushing from her roughly as he did.

"My God, it is not enough for me! I want more. I want all!"

"I do. We can't have it. But for me what I had is enough. I joy in it."

The man strode about the room.

This time she left him alone.

Nor did she chide herself that, even so, it was sweet to have him here—a pathetic happiness.

At last Allingham stopped at the open window, and stood still near it, as if he welcomed the air.

Betty fancied that he would go without speaking to her again. Before she let him do that she had one more thing to say; she did not intend to leave it unsaid: a point about the future which she would have settled before he left her.

But Allingham spoke.

"If—years from now," he began calmly, "Lois had married and was happy, quite contented, and we knew that she did not need me any longer, not in any way, I wonder, if you had not married—"

"I still should be single," the woman said cheerfully, almost lightly. "But there is to be no bond between us. We will leave the problematical future to the future. That is only right. It is wise, and will be happiest so—for both of us."

"Selfish as I am—as I proved myself last night—I would not bind you by any

hint of promise. I was not going to ask you to give me any promise. That would add crime to crime. But, I want you to know, and believe, that I'd come—come to see you—then, if you had not married. I'd have to! No matter how many years it was from now. And I'd be an old man, perhaps!"

Betty Monroe laughed at him tenderly.

"A man rarely remembers; a woman never forgets," she told him gently. But she said it earnestly.

"Rubbish!"

"No; history."

Allingham gestured dissent, scorning to discuss it.

But, "I shall not forget last night," he told her. "Nor your arm under my face just now. You'll never know, and you couldn't understand, how I longed to kiss the sleeve on that arm, when my hurricane had passed! But I did not kiss your sleeve."

"No," she said quickly. "And we never will spoil yesterday. That was—yesterday. This is to-day: the beginning of a new and great friendship."

The night before, when he had known that daylight had gone, he had kissed her almost abruptly, and taken her home at once. And when he had, he had left her almost without a word. And they scarcely had spoken as they went. But there had been no coldness between them.

"Yes," the man agreed. He said it sadly, a little bitterly. "When will you sail for England, Betty?" he added.

"Not now. Not for a long time."

"I don't think I can stand it, if you stay."

"But you can. We both can. After this we'll not speak of last night again. But I am going to stay here. You may need me. If you do, here I am. And one thing—you've had your say—now listen to mine. There is to be no difference. I will not be robbed of my friend. I need him. I need him more than ever now. Don't dare be late for tennis to-morrow like you were last Wednesday."

"Won't it be too hard? It will be rottenly hard. I don't believe I am brave enough."

"Oh! We'll be very comfortable. You'll be all right. Not as brave as a woman; nobody expects that. You are only a man. Well, now, cheerio! See you at tennis."

Allingham turned, taking his dismissal as she meant him to take it.

"Cheerio," he echoed, and went.

Betty Monroe played her usual moderately good game of tennis.

Allingham, who still always played well, played magnificently.

The members who were not playing watched him excitedly.

Several of the club-servants came and watched him too, proud of such tennis-playing.

Tennis was played expertly in China many centuries before Drake played at bowls. China never has been as sportsless as it has been reported.

After Edward Allingham's beautiful display of tennis, as pretty as it was masterly, no one was keen to watch the feebler players.

It was pleasant in the shade of the club-house.

Mrs. Temple, Miss Monroe, Allingham and Bradley shared a tea-pot, and before long were making merry and eating many ices.

"You must not have another," Bradley protested when Betty Monroe ordered her third. "Besides, who's paying?"

"I've known her to eat six; they never hurt her," Allingham told Bradley reassuringly.

"*You* are signing the chit," Betty Monroe told Bradley with a wicked grin. "For being rude and not minding your own 'pidgin,'!" she added.

Mabel Temple had a pretty wit and she told a story excellently.

She was telling them an exceedingly funny one when she broke off with a squeal of surprise.

Bradley followed her astonished eyes, and sprang up with an oath, drawing back a little as he did, and colliding with the softly approaching club-servant.

Miss Monroe's third ice-cream slithered to the ground. A glass plate shattered as it fell.

Lady Saunders walked in resplendent and panting.

Paul Trench, cool and immaculate, followed her leisurely.

She greeted no one, unless her, "Squash! Plenty of ice in it!" was a greeting to the club-servant.

"Lord. This heat is pestiferous!"

She plumped into a wide wicker chair, and flung the cushions out of it on to the veranda floor.

"Too hot to be padded with those! What a fool day for tennis. You'll all die of apoplexy. Serve you right. It was hot in Chang-sha, but nothing to this. I've had a great time there!"

"Dear Lady Saunders," Betty Monroe began with tears in her voice.

"What's the matter with you, girl?" Mary Saunders snapped indignantly.

The brave old thing! She wasn't going to let them pity her. Betty liked her enormously for it.

A number were gathering about her. The word had gone round that Lady Saunders was back.

How had the old blusterer managed it? Several days before she could have been expected! And looking just as she always had, only more so! The old warrior!

No doubt it was Trench who had managed it.

Mary Saunders never had been popular. But what she had suffered in Hunan moved them all. She was popular now—if only for an hour at a Shanghai tennis-club.

More than one of them glanced at her hands.

She was wearing her gloves.

That was nice of her, Miss Monroe thought.

But Mary Saunders always wore gloves, when she considered gloves called for. The year or two that smart women scarcely wore gloves at all, Lady Saunders had worn them persistently and with exaggeration.

“Hello!” she hailed Mr. Allingham. “You look very fit. What mischief have you been up to? Somebody left you another fortune? How’s Lois?”

“She’s having an excellent time.”

Mary Saunders sniffed.

“Well,” she told him truculently. “I pulled it off. I’ve shaken the pagoda-tree good and hard. Haven’t I, Paul?”

“You have,” Trench confirmed.

“Put it down.”

The “boy” put the lemon-squash down on the small table beside her.

Mary Saunders peeled off her gloves.

They all wished that she had not done that, not both of her gloves.

She took up the ice-misted glass.

Betty Monroe cried out.

“You have your finger!”

“My what? Finger? Well, it belongs to me, doesn’t it? You didn’t want it, did you? I’ve got all of my fingers, I’ve got all of me!”

Sir Martin sauntered away. He disliked coarseness.

There had been an amazing blunder. He would learn its details presently from some one who would tell it decently. Had some wonderful surgery grafted some poor soul’s finger on to her hand? No, not in a Hunan bandit camp. And even if it could have been done—surgery was marvelous since the War—it would not have healed so soon. He had seen her hand clearly.

To do her justice, Lady Saunders rarely was coarse. But she often was

disconcertingly unexpected.

“Where is your ring?” Betty Monroe demanded sharply.

“What ring?” when she had drained her glass.

Paul Trench and Allingham both saw a sudden alarm in the sharp old eyes.

“Your mosaic ring that you always wear.”

“Why do you want to know!”

Betty answered without preamble. She was explicit. But she wasn’t long—not one needless or irrelevant word.

And for once, Mary Saunders did not interrupt. She made no comment until Miss Monroe ceased speaking. She frowned several times, twice she smiled grimly. When Betty named the sum that had been paid in ransom Mary Saunders laughed—a short, vicious bark of a laugh.

Lady Saunders jerked her head round at Trench.

“And you have spent a lifetime, wasted it, proclaiming that no Chinese ever breaks his word, ramming it down our throats!”

Paul Trench smiled. He never had proclaimed anything, still less rammed it down any one’s throat, in his life.

“Where’s that finger they sent you?”

“Buried—reverently buried,” Bradley told her.

“My ring still on it?”

“Yes,” Bradley told her.

“Dig it up!”

“M’am?”

“Dig it up!”

“Dear lady,” Allingham expostulated gently, “the finger—whose ever it was—was—eh—interred—several days ago. I can’t be—”

“Oh, I don’t tell you to make exhibit A of it. And I don’t want it. I want my old ring. See that I get it.”

Then the belligerent woman writhed and chortled with wicked mirth.

“You have been had, haven’t you! All that money to ransom a missionary! As if any missionary ever born was worth a twentieth of that—or worth anything at all! And Mo Foy contributed! Mo Foy!” Lady Saunders’ laugh was contagious.

When Miss Monroe had mentioned the share of the ransom that Mo Foy had paid the older woman’s face had twitched oddly, and the fierce old eyes had unmistakably softened.

But that Mo Foy, whose venomous dislike of all missionaries, and more especially of the females of the much maligned species, was well known to his late

landlord, had given lavishly of his loved and hoarded wealth, in ransom of a missionary, seemed to Lady Saunders the most delightfully funny thing she ever had heard. And she laughed till she had to wipe her eyes.

“Curious about my ring, aren’t you?” she said, when she could speak.

“Very,” Miss Monroe replied.

“Tell that boy to bring me another squash then, and I’ll tell you. A dash of whiskey in it this time. It isn’t my ring. It never was. It’s Mary Wilson’s ring. We swopped rings years ago at school—the silly way girls do—just for the day. Mary was hustled off to Birmingham that same day. Telegraphed for. Father dying. She’d forgotten to give my ring back to me, and so did I. Mary didn’t come back to finish the term. She didn’t ever write. She’d taken her box. Nothing was owed for her. When—after a bit—I wrote, letter came back, ‘Gone. Address unknown.’”

“And you have worn her ring ever since because you were fond of her,” Jack Bradley said admiringly.

“I was nothing of the sort. I wore it for years because it was the only ring I had to wear. Always liked a bit of jewelry. Afterwards it tickled me to see that cheap mosaic ring with Tom Saunders’ diamonds and sapphires and rubies. When I came across Mary the other day in Chang-sha, the day before she started off for that place where they nabbed her, still Mary Wilson, and missionarying for all she’s worth, she wanted a contribution from me for her ‘Cause,’ and didn’t get it.”

“Did she give you back your ring?” Jack Bradley asked.

“She did not. Lost it years ago. I shan’t sue her. It was garnets—probably glass ones. I traded it from a hawker for an old silk petticoat and a pair of corsets that never fit me. I couldn’t take them back to the shop, because I’d busted them, trying to wear them.”

Lady Saunders shook her head at the sugar-basin that the Chinese servant proffered with her second, whiskey-laced squash.

“Take it away,” the boy was ordered when she had tasted. “Too strong. Put less whiskey in.”

The boy padded off stoically.

The next glass was sent back because it was too weak. Man Fan bore it away as stoically as he had before.

When he returned once more, the proffered mixture of lemon, ice and whiskey was accepted, though with no word or glance of approval. And imperturbably Man Fan withdrew.

Lady Saunders did not suspect that she was drinking the refreshment she had dismissed as “too strong.” But Jack Bradley wondered if it might not be. He had

known Man Fan to do such things. Man Fan was admirably frugal of club stores, though never of chits to be signed.

During the back-and-forth processional of her cold beverages Mary Saunders did not vouchsafe a word.

And they knew better than to prod her.

She tasted Man Fan's last and fourth proffering, and put the glass on the table with an ungracious throaty sound that might have meant anything, from weary contempt to despairing acceptance.

And she drank this one more slowly than she had the innocent first glassful; saying between leisurely sips the little more she troubled to say.

"But she got back her old ring after all these years. And I gave her a dress I could spare—I didn't have much with me—she looked such a fright. Not that she looked much else in my purple satin. One of the women that don't show clothes off, not the nicest clothes."

Betty Monroe checked back a giggle. Jack Bradley openly grinned.

"Ah, you see," Paul Trench said softly, "the bandits, or whatever they were, that kidnaped and held her, believed her to be you; believed that Miss—Wilson, you said, I think—was Lady Saunders, and demanded an appropriate ransom in perfectly honorable good faith."

"Believed Mary Wilson was me!" Lady Saunders spat out in fury. "Tom Saunders never would have looked at her twice. I'll say that for him; if he and I didn't always see women exactly eye to eye."

A few days later Miss Mary Wilson arrived in Shanghai, disheveled, one finger missing, and extremely indignant that she had not been allowed to be done to death in bandit Hunan, and wear a martyr's crown here and Hereafter.

Miss Wilson was entirely ungrateful to all who had contributed to her heavy ransom.

Lady Saunders received her kindly, gave her direct hospice, and offered to pay her fare back to England—first class.

Mary Wilson refused to go.

"And that's a pity," Bradley said. "Even one less missionary in China would have been something!"

The ransom of which her friends had been mulcted did not disturb Lady Saunders at all, but quite the contrary. "Serve you right for being had," she told them.

But she did try to reimburse Mo Foy.

Mo Foy would not have it.

“What he had the felicity to give in honor of you, most exalted lady, Mo Foy the worm will not accept back. And I believe that those poor bandit-ones may have had need of all they got. I gravely disapprove of all banditry. It injures all proper business. But the bandits lie on brushwood often, and many of them are poor, and poverty-driven. Among those special bandits, I may have kinsmen. My honorable mother was of Hunan.”

Once more one of her periodical lapses of peace laved bruised China—if only deceptively.

Lois wrote a little less often. But her letters were long and cheerful.

“I think that she may not stay quite the full year, though, there,” her father told Miss Monroe. “Indeed she says she thinks not, in her last letter. How glad I’ll be to see her!”

Few days passed that Allingham and Betty Monroe did not see each other.

Betty would have it so.

And a very beautiful friendship waxed between them. It was a sturdy, honest, faultless friendship. But under it and through it love throbbed and ached.

Lady Saunders had put her finger on a fact when she had said at the tennis clubhouse that Edward Allingham looked younger. Several saw that he did.

He was younger. He was younger because youth had sought and claimed him, and would have mated with him.

He grew younger in the youth of the woman who loved him.

He did not waver. He knew that he should not fail Lois.

But there were days when he knew himself less Lois’ father than Betty Monroe’s lover.

And Betty Monroe knew that he did; and she tried not to be glad.

She believed that her cup might brim—if Lois married.

It was inconceivable that Lois should not.

A very beautiful friendship waxed and strengthened.

Much of their talk was of Lois; Betty’s as cordial as Allingham’s.

They constantly met, though never now by pre-arrangement. It would have been odd if they had not.

He rarely went to see her.

Betty never went to him.

Allingham’s competent servants were left unmolested to do their efficient best without let or hindrance from Miss Monroe.

CHAPTER XXXV

When Chenn-yi No announced that she was having a house-party, with European as well as Chinese guests, Lo-ees was less amazed than Wên T'ien was, and very much more perturbed.

They both wondered why she was doing it. They talked it over, and concluded that it was a whim.

In that they were wrong. About small things Chenn-yi No constantly indulged in whims. In matters of importance no great and successful statesman ever was more cautious, self-controlled and consistent.

True, the idea of such a house-party—the term itself, as well as the thing it meant, new to her, and scarcely understood—amused the Chinese woman very much. And she hoped that the old hybrid function might entertain Chenn-yi Wang. He was very much better again, seemed to be gaining steadily now. Chenn-yi No believed that what interested and diverted him not only must alleviate but would help toward partial cure.

That was her dearest object.

But she had other objects; each to serve a purpose which more and more engrossed all of her thought that was not bound up in Chenn-yi Wang.

And Wên T'ien, shrewder than Lois Allingham ever would be, and far more psychic, rather suspected. But he was not sure. And he did not share with Lo-ees the half-suspicion that he could not quite define.

The reasons that Madam Chenn-yi frankly stated sounded quite sufficient.

Chenn-yi Wang wished it. She believed it would divert him. And indeed it was he who had suggested it.

All of that was true.

Chenn-yi No, seemingly so dominant and stubbornly self-sufficient, never did anything of importance except as her lord's henchman, and rarely except at his suggestion. His was the mind that directed; hers the heart that obeyed and executed.

Lord Chenn-yi liked to question the Chinese-English girl who was their guest, and to hear what she told him of her life with her father, of what she did, of what she had seen, in Europe, Hong Kong and Shanghai, of people she had known, what they were like.

He was curious about Western customs.

Lois loved to do anything she could to please Chenn-yi Wang. And there were days when she was glad to escape from Wên T'ien—days when his suit oppressed

her; troubled her mind, tore at her conscience. She sometimes made her a refuge beside Chenn-yi Wang. He always was glad to have her. And it left Chenn-yi No untroubled to leave him for an hour—an hour to harrow the servants, or to rest alone in another room, or alone in heaven's-well.

Describing a stay in Scotland, Lois told of a house-party at a great feudal home.

Chenn-yi Wang asked many questions. The girl, sitting at his knee, answered them well—vividly.

Wên T'ien, who had had some slight experience of British house-parties, was astonished at the skill with which Lo-ees *showed* a most un-Chinese thing to Chinese Chenn-yi Wang.

But she always was able to speak vividly to ill Chenn-yi Wang. He quickened her mind. And her tongue too grew quick and able—to serve him.

Wên T'ien was not always excluded from Lo-ees' hours with their host. Lois did not object. He very rarely interrupted or made any comment, and, whether they were alone or not, the hour was inviolably hers and Chenn-yi Wang's. And Wên T'ien could not press his suit by so much as a hungry glance in the presence of Chenn-yi Wang.

Lois Allingham, dressed in Chinese trousers and tunic, stick-pins aslant in her smooth hair, described the house-party in the home in Scotland particularly well. Chenn-yi Wang listened intently.

He harked back to it the next day.

That had not happened before.

That night, in the hour-of-the-Ox, there was birth in the great red bed—half-caste birth! A White and Yellow house-party was born.

"Oh, but it will be awful!" the girl cried when Wên T'ien showed her the list of invited guests, a few weeks later.

Wên T'ien laughed, and jangled his jeweled silver whistle at an encroaching frog.

"I think it will be great fun," he said in English.

"Well, I don't then," Lois Allingham snapped. "I think it will be—what nice girls don't say in English or in Chinese. I believe I'll run away."

"Not when Chenn-yi Wang has set his heart on it," Wên reminded her gently.

Lois made a gesture of despair.

Chenn-yi Wang's wish clinched it. He so rarely had a whim, or made a request!

"But I don't believe it!" Lois cried after a moment. "It was her idea."

"I am sure it was his," Wên insisted. "She said so. The venerable Chenn-yi No speaks joke-words when it is her mood, she exaggerates when it is her pleasure, but she never speaks an untruth."

"All women lie," Lois retorted.

"Not Chenn-yi No. It was Chenn-yi Wang who thought of this, I admit peculiar, house-party."

"I don't believe it," the girl repeated. "He has too much good sense and too much good taste. A perfectly mad idea. I'm going home—to my father. You may find it 'great fun'; I hope you do. But I decline to march in the monkey parade."

But Lois Allingham did.

And it was a monkey parade at first—unkind as the brief description sounds.

In all the world's social history, the preparations for that White and Yellow house-party were unique.

Chenn-yi No was determined to have everything impeccably right. Everything that Chinese usage and etiquette—which she thoroughly understood—prescribed should be done and provided and offered. Everything that English usage and etiquette—of which she knew nothing at all—prescribed should be punctiliously observed.

A dozen times a day Lois was questioned; and was not permitted to evade.

The girl could have played some rare practical jokes. But she was far too angry. And she was much too kind.

Disgusted and troubled, she did her best for Chenn-yi No.

It was difficult. A Chinese lady who never had heard of a table fork, let alone seen one, was not easy to tutor in the small ways of Mayfair.

"Entertain them all Chinese fashion," Lois entreated. "Your English guests will love it. And it won't be such an unholy mix-up, or a tenth so much trouble."

In her anxiety she spoke to Madam Chenn-yi on a parity that was shocking and rude, though unintentionally so. Lois was really distressed. No small part of her distress was for the older woman; she hated to think that Chenn-yi No was going to make herself ridiculous—give cattish English women cause to titter and jibe, and to talk of maliciously for years.

Madam Chenn-yi No would have none of the good advice.

Her English guests should do and eat as they chose, English fashion or Chinese fashion; the inferior foods and chairs and entertainment of their own land should be there for them to have or to leave. Chinese food, service, amusements—all—should be abundant. But no Chinese thing should be forced upon them.

A piano was ordered.

"It hasn't been tuned!"

"Never mind. No one will wish to play it." Wên meant to be consoling.

He failed.

“She’ll insist upon their all playing it. She’d think herself discourteous not to.”

And Wên T’ien had to admit that that was true.

A tuner was sent for. There was considerable doubt whether he could arrive, from so far, before the house-party began to gather. The time was getting near. And secretly Wên T’ien hoped that the tuner would be able to tune properly when he got there.

“Thank God, it hasn’t occurred to her to send to one of the Treaty Ports for a few dozen English servants!”

It was Lois Allingham’s only consolation.

The list of invited guests was her chief dismay.

Except Madam Wên’s, the Chinese names on that long social document meant little to Lois. But she had no doubt that they were all right—the names of sash-wearers personally well known to the Chenn-yis.

But the Europeans!

“Where did she dig them up from?” the girl said with angry tears in her eyes. “That’s what I want to know.”

Wên T’ien flushed a little.

“I do not know where she got it—perhaps from my mother, who, I know, had one a few years ago—but one day the honorable Chenn-yi No left a Kelly and Walsh Shanghai English Social List-book in the clematis arbor!”

“She couldn’t read it.”

“Li Bo the scribe could. He was in the arbor taking her orders. I saw them there an hour before I found the book. I much fear that it was my mother’s.”

“And she just fished names out of that old Kelly and Walsh ‘Who’s Who’!”

“The older the better in China,” Wên T’ien reminded her with a smile.

Lois ignored the interruption. She was not in a playful mind. She was genuinely troubled.

“An old Kelly and Walsh directory of the Settlement élite! That accounts for a scream of a list. Considering how she made it, I’m amazed that it’s as good a list as it is, Wên T’ien. But I do wish she had let me censor it for her before she sent off her invitations.”

“Do you think they’ll come—the English ladies and gentlemen?”

“Come! They’ll come running; the worst of them will. The best of them won’t. I hope not! But some of them may too. The English love a good circus.” Then tragedy gave way to mirth. Lois giggled.

“I haven’t told her—there was no use when the invitations had gone, several days before she told Li Bo to show us that terrible list! She has done appalling

things, Wên T'ien. Two of the men she's invited are dead. Two of the women don't speak. One woman is not received any longer. A man that never is quite sober! A red-hot Presbyterian stock-broker and a Catholic priest."

"The Catholic priest will behave," Wên said encouragingly.

"Yes; they always do. But he may not be behaved to. Lord! I wish I were mean enough to cut and run."

"I am glad that you are not, loveliest bud of all lotus buds!"

"Don't!" Lois cried. "If you are sentimental to-day, I shall shake you."

"Shall I read to you, or bring my flute?"

"Go stand on your head! Practise up for the monkey house-party. It will come in useful."

CHAPTER XXXVI

Quite aside from the joy it gave her to fall in with any suggestions of her lord's, most especially one of something that might entertain him, Chenn-yi No the matchmaker had two very feminine reasons for persisting in having her house-party, even when she saw, as she did, that Lo-ees disliked it.

Wên O-he had not refused to consent to the marriage that Chenn-yi No first had hinted, and then had directly urged. But Wên O-he had not consented. Madam Wên saw disqualifications and disadvantages that Madam Chenn-yi, in her partiality for Lo-ees, imperiously swept aside and ignored. Madam Wên had seen several mixed marriages in the working. Madam Chenn-yi had not. She had not seen Yon Yee Allingham after the Allinghams' marriage. Koo Wing had reported of it glowingly.

Chenn-yi No believed that if Wên O-he saw and knew Lo-ees, Wên O-he not only would permit the betrothal, but would welcome it.

Chenn-yi No wished Lo-ees to see Chinese and Europeans cheek-by-jowl, and Chinese and Western ways. For then Lo-ees could not fail to see how greatly saner, sweeter and more elegant the Chinese and the Chinese ways were.

She particularly wished Lo-ees to see at short range marriageable Chinese men—or rather one such Chinese—and marriageable Englishmen together; see, as Lo-ees could not fail to do, how superior the Chinese were to all others.

Chenn-yi No was a fierce fighter, but she was a fair fighter.

If she had known which Englishmen in Han-chow and in Shanghai Lo-ees had liked best, Chenn-yi No would have bidden them to the *chia*, bribed or beguiled them, if she could.

If she had known of Henry Cotterel, not old, good looking and very rich, and had known how far mutual feeling had been between him and Lo-ees, and how strong their mutual attraction, Chenn-yi No would have included Mr. Cotterel in her invitations, and urged his acceptance, with many honied words—hers assisted by useful bi-lingual Li Bo.

Lois suspected why Madam Chenn-yi questioned her so carefully for the names of the Englishmen she knew best and liked best. And Lois would not be drawn or trapped. She mentioned a man or two who were neither here nor there, whom she rather disliked, the little she considered them either way; but she did not mention Monroe, Fairfax or half a score of the others, and she was particularly careful not to let slip the name of Henry Cotterel.

Chenn-yi No believed that to show Lo-ees Wên T'ien contrasted with the

European eligibles of the Treaty Ports would be a trump card, and would certainly win for Wên T'ien the suit that she knew—though neither of them had confided in her—he was urging, and Lo-ees a little resisting.

That was why she had consulted—through the eyes of Li Bo—the Kelly and Walsh “Who’s Who,” and issued invitations to a number of Europeans whom she herself had no desire to know.

She did not realize that Edward Allingham’s daughter often had seen Chinese and English together, and in more than one country.

The invitations were sent.

The *chia* was greatly garnished and decked.

The servants were drilled and drilled until Ki Lee wept and Tin Sung lost five pounds of flesh.

Two new concubines were hurriedly purchased—extremely pretty concubines and beautifully dressed.

Many of the invitations (the Kelly and Walsh ones) were accepted.

Lois Allingham had bitten her lip at several of those English names. But she had been very glad not to find Henry Cotterel among them.

She often knew that she hoped to see Cotterel again. But she did not wish to see him here, or to have him see her here.

Not all who accepted came—a rudeness so unheard of in old China, that Madam Chenn-yi had no doubt the non-arrivals had met with bad accidents, perhaps with fatal ones. And she was greatly concerned for them.

Wên T'ien, Lo-ees, and when she came Wên O-he, assured her that that was not the only possible explanation. But Madam Chenn-yi was incredulous.

“But *I* invited them,” she said. “They must have been killed, or writhe in terrible illness, or be lost or prisoned and in grave peril. My heart bleeds for them.”

(To translate her more honestly, her stomach was the organ that Chenn-yi No mentioned. And she said that it clotted on her shoe.)

Wên O-he was the first guest that arrived. She and Chenn-yi No had planned it so—that Madam Wên and Lo-ees might have a few uninterrupted days for Wên T'ien’s mother’s inspection of Chenn-yi No’s young kinswoman and protégée.

Lois liked and disliked Wên O-he. She thought her hard and unrelenting, charming to be with, absurdly fond of Wên T'ien; ready to indulge and spoil him, most unapt to spoil or indulge any one else. Wên O-he had distinction and charm. She spoke English almost half as well as her son did. Lois enjoyed her, but did not believe that they two ever would greatly “make friends.”

On the whole, the arrival of his mother did not prosper his suit with Lois

Allingham.

Lady Saunders was an early arrival—well escorted by three Englishmen and the wife of one of them. And her Chenn-yi No had not “fished out of Kelly and Walsh,” as Lois pertly put it.

Wên O-he had asked that Lady Saunders might be invited.

She came in to the flower-decked *k'o-tang* like a purple and old-rose hurricane, invited Wên T'ien to kiss her, laughed at him when he did not do it, and she did kiss Wên O-he, who took it stoically before she pushed her away.

To Lois Allingham's amazement—youth still has something to learn, even in our youth-ruled day—Chenn-yi No liked Mary Saunders at once, and liked her very much.

The three dominant women—two Chinese deliberate and elegant, one English and crusted, abrupt—foregathered at once. Wên O-he could speak readily to both of the others and interpret between them. Before many days there was cordiality between Madam Chenn-yi and Lady Saunders. And presently they became firm friends—and proclaimed it.

The other Chinese guests all came four days after Wên O-he came, which was as they had been invited to come.

The dozen or more others from Shanghai and Han-chow came in twos and threes, and at intervals; no one that Lois was glad to see, no one whom she particularly minded.

Paul Trench had not been invited. Lady Saunders had offered to “bring him along,” but Trench had vetoed that.

Edward Allingham had been invited, but not urged. Chenn-yi No had felt obliged to ask him to come, but she did not want him. She preferred Wên O-he not to meet Lo-ees' English father yet. And when—after he and Lois had consulted hurriedly—he found it “impossible to have the great pleasure” Chenn-yi No was very glad.

William Evans the rich Presbyterian did not come.

Father Blatchford the Catholic priest did, and added invaluablely to the White and Yellow house-party's suavity and gaiety—helped it to blend, and to understand.

Father Blatchford spoke Manchu well, and he liked the Chinese. But it was more than that. It was personality—that great incalculable force—and also the breeding and wisdom of Rome.

Chenn-yi No's “monkey procession” of a house-party was a distinguished success.

Droll things happened, of course, but the beautiful ones and those that were interesting were the most.

The ease of her hospitality—her sureness that what she did was right, made being her guest delightful and comfortable, even though you and she could not understand each other—a word or a gesture.

Even Lois Allingham was surprised at Chenn-yi No's tact, her sudden adaptability, the quiet welcome she gave, the impartiality and sympathy of her entertaining.

And Chenn-yi Wang, watching, seeing it all, glowed with pride in his wife.

Chenn-yi Wang was wonderfully better now. At his best he could walk half the length of the dwarf-tree terrace on his wife's arm, or leaning on his ivory sticks. He shared in much of the good time, if often only as an onlooker.

To half tell of half that was offered their guests—water-polo (as the old Chinese played it), quail-fights, lantern-pictures, fortune-tellers, picnics, festivals, musicians, tumblers, wizards, and much, much more—would fill a ponderous volume.

When San Ko, the chief gate-keeper, sent a message-coolie to Madam Chenn-yi No asking for her command concerning an English born-before and a Chinese who was with him and called him "Sir," both of whom begged to be allowed to see the *chia* gardens, but neither of whom had been invited to the Eminent-one's gala, or knew that there was one, Chenn-yi No frowned.

But she glanced at Chenn-yi Wang, and he smiled.

Chenn-yi Wang was immensely proud of his gardens. He liked to have them seen and admired. He liked to believe that even the birds of the air, and the fleecy clouds afloat in the flax-blue sky admired, and envied him, his roses and narcissi and cactus-trees.

"Where is Li Bo?" Chenn-yi No demanded.

Chenn-yi Wang had sent Li Bo to a far part of the domain, to explain the Snake-god's amazing temple to Captain Foster and Mrs. Wilson-Adare.

Madam Chenn-yi turned to Wên T'ien.

"Go and see what they are. Admit them or forbid them, as you judge them."

Wên T'ien bowed and went.

It was a long way to the great gate, as long a way back.

Wên T'ien scrutinized and questioned. Then he bade them a courteous welcome, and went so far as to bring them to Chenn-yi Wang. He thought that Chenn-yi Wang would like to see and speak with them, and offer them wine, and stools to rest on, before they began their tour of the great gardens and flower-courtyards.

Wên T'ien and the Englishman walked side by side. The other Chinese followed

a few steps behind the Englishman.

Half-way to the house Lo-ees, all amber and jade, her stick-pins a fortune of glittering, quivering jewels, her face thickly painted, ran out from a maze of crab-apples, laughing, a battledore and three shuttle-cocks in her heavily ringed hands, and almost ran into them as they threaded their way through the floss-silk avenue.

She gave a soft cry of surprise, and stopped short.

She was even more vexed than surprised. She showed her surprise. She did not show that she was vexed. She would not for a great deal have shown that.

"You!"

"I am in luck!" Cotterel answered. "I had no idea you were here. How delightful!"

And Ao Chan, the garden-architect, jerked off his spectacles, bowed very low, and turned his back.

Lois Allingham doubted how delighted Henry Cotterel was. She was sure that he never would like her, or be at ease with her, in a Chinese setting, English and insular-minded that he was at core, after all his years of travel. And she knew how he hated her painted face. He never had seen that before. Lois hated it too, even when her Chinese blood seemed to her the only blood in her veins. The stark white and red of her face now was a reluctant obedience that she would not always pay to Chenn-yi No. But Chenn-yi No had begged it to-day, mistakenly believing that the girl's unplastered face discounted Lo-ees with Wên O-he—made her look immodest and brazen to Wên T'ien's wavering mother.

Secretly Wên O-he liked the girl's paintless face best. Wên O-he had come to that in London and Vienna. And she wore very little paint herself, explaining the delinquency to Madam Chenn-yi as a delicate compliment, almost a necessary courtesy, to the foreign ladies who were guests in a Chinese *chia*.

And Chenn-yi No believed her friend, and forgave. Chenn-yi No was astute, but guileless also. And Wên T'ien had not exaggerated when he had said that Madam Chenn-yi spoke always only the truth. Liars are quicker to detect lies than truth-tellers are.

Eager to scant nothing of sacred hospitality's fineness, Chenn-yi No lessened her own paint after that—to Wên O-he's secret delight. But Chenn-yi No was somewhat puzzled, for two of her English guests used considerable rouge on their powdered cheeks, and palpably reddened their lips.

And Madam Chenn-yi still importuned Lo-ees, "Wear your paint, girl. The foreign ladies are not your guests—neither those who paint themselves badly and without taste nor those who wear their face-skin naked. I paint more thinly, out of

hospitality. And I may do what I will, for I am Chenn-yi Erh No. But you are only a girl-one, and girl-ones must do as they must.”

At the floss-silks Lois chatted a friendly moment with Cotterel; then, waving her battledore at him in a parting gesture, ran off through the jungle of bamboos and giant ferns behind the great *jung-hua-shu* trees as quickly as she had come.

The English lord-one, Wên T'ien explained to the Chenn-yis, deeply interested in gardens, had heard of the fame of their wonderful garden, and had traveled far to beg the Lord Chenn-yi's permission to see it. Ao Chan was the English gentleman's garden-architect who had aided the greatly rich Englishman to make him a very beautiful garden in his own Chinese home, an entirely Chinese garden.

Chenn-yi Wang was interested, instantly cordial.

Madam Chenn-yi was not cordial. But, seeing her husband's pleasure, she was ungrudgingly polite. The seats and wine that Wên T'ien had foreseen were provided, and food as well, for the English intruder. A servant was sent, and bidden speed, to recall Li Bo from the Snake-god's altar, that the scribe might see Ao Chan the garden-architect suitably provided, and Tin Sung, the rapidly emaciating eunuch, was sent to the gate to see that the travelers' mules and horses and coolies, waiting outside the great gate, were fed and given appropriate rest places. And Tin Sung was commanded to “waddle more quickly” as he went indignantly off on his repugnant errand.

For some reason Chenn-yi No had instantly liked Henry Cotterel.

And when Mary Saunders, coming upon the group on the terrace, hailed him, evidently knowing him well, and in an aside vouched for him, Chenn-yi No at once invited Cotterel to join her house-party. And Cotterel, half willing, half unwillingly, accepted at once.

Lois avoided Cotterel as long as she could.

She divined that, once having been admitted, he would not be urged to go for some hours.

When Chenn-yi No sent for her at the-hour-of-the-Dog, of course Lois came; painted thickly, and she had put needless nail-protectors on four fingers. Lo-ees had no long nail, never had grown one.

Chenn-yi No saw in a flash that there had been more than ordinary acquaintance between Lo-ees and this new-come Englishman. And Chenn-yi Erh No was glad.

Here was her opportunity.

She caught hold of it in both wee, determined hands.

She liked Cotterel, and she would not dishonor the rice, salt and ginger she gave

him. But he should go down in the dust compared beside so infinitely superior Lord Wên T'ien. And all would be well. Lo-ees might have been foolish—many girl-ones were—but Lo-ees was far from a fool-one. Lo-ees would see how much more to be desired, and followed and served and obeyed, the honorable and beautiful and courtly Wên T'ien was.

Wên T'ien too had seen, when Lo-ees had dashed out from the crab-trees, that she and Cotterel were not indifferent acquaintances. And Wên T'ien had not been glad.

But it had not lessened his sincere cordiality to Cotterel. Nor did it in all the weeks that followed.

Lois grew used to Henry Cotterel's presence here, and no longer felt it *faux pas* or embarrassment. And she again left off her paint oftener than she wore it.

Cotterel grew accustomed to seeing Lois Allingham dressed as a Chinese, and sharing many Chinese ways.

Every day the odd house-party waxed in successfulness and in unaffected enjoyment.

One night, at Lady Saunders' instigation, backed up by Wên O-he, there was Western dancing in the great *k'o-tang* where the piano stood on a flower-pot-decked platform of strong woven bamboos.

But Lo-ees would not dance.

But Wên T'ien did.

Once he danced with Lady Saunders.

Like many fat people, Mary Saunders danced very well.

Lois saw that Wên T'ien danced beautifully—beautifully for any London ballroom.

Wên O-he had seen much such dancing in Europe. For she had not led a courtyard life in London, nor yet in Vienna.

What Chenn-yi Erh No thought of the fox-trot and of the "Beautiful Blue Danube" never will be known, for she never told or showed.

Lo-ees, greatly daring, point-blank asked her.

"The guests of Chenn-yi Erh No can do no wrong," the hostess answered. It was all she would say.

But Chenn-yi Wang laughed like a child at the syncopated walking of the fox-trot, and he hummed the lovely Strauss melody that night up in the great red bed.

Chenn-yi Wang's thought of a house-party had been a glad inspiration.

Kindly Chenn-yi Wang was enjoying it most of them all. Chenn-yi No delighted in it too, and her delight was infectious, pregnant, provocative of sincere pleasure.

Deliciously caustic to her Chinese intimates who could not misunderstand, and could retaliate—for her brilliance provoked brilliance as her kindness did kindness—to her Western guests she was all simpleness, quiet dignity and warm-hearted urbanity.

The gathering was for Chenn-yi Wang—and secondarily for an object dear to her—but the soul and the glow, the sheer joy of it all, was Chenn-yi No.

But host, hostess and guests, they all enjoyed it keenly—until the fester broke.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The fester burst.

The “safest place in China” was in flame and peril. To those who know her, the unexpected never happens in China—or should not. For there is nothing that may not happen there at any moment. Since the Manchu fell this is increasingly true.

They had no warning.

The bandits came—vast hordes of them. And they were armed, and had many fuels and implements of warfare. For these were not altogether starveling, ragged bandit bands, but the somewhat disciplined “armies” of two war-lords, desperate enemies now, who had been sworn allies a few moons ago.

Chenn-yi Wang’s estate chanced to be where they met and clashed—a few *li* north of the least frequented part of the vast domain.

Victory and defeat had been won and dealt before any living within the *chia*’s walls so much as knew that the two rival armies approached. Perhaps the Chenn-yis, lying in the state of satin longevity robes and the gleam of jade in their costly coffins, heard and trembled, for it was just beyond the clan burial-ground that the battle raged. But neither Chenn-yi Wang nor Chenn-yi No, neither their guests nor their retainers, heard or suspected until one “army” reeled drunk against the great wall—drunk with war’s red, heady wine, and what was left of the defeated army had slunk off as fast as it could.

There is one good thing true of most Chinese battles: they don’t last long. The vanquished army—a Northern war-lord’s this time—stands not upon the order of its going, but goes at once.

Maddened intoxicatedly by a victory that had surprised even more than it had elated them, the more predominantly bandit horde from the South truculently decided to take and rifle the *chia* they found themselves so near. It looked a place that would be fat with rich booty. And they hastily decided to force their way in, take everything worth having, or as much of it as they could carry, and to exact heavy payment for sparing the lives of those within.

A dozen were sent off, to report to the Kuomintang the great victory so valiantly achieved, and the rest of the soldiers prepared to breach the old wall of Chenn-yi Wang’s home estate.

Lo-ees and Pig-For-Honey sat in the grove of *kuei* trees. The girl, bunched comfortably on the ground, made a basket of her long turquoise tunic. Wên and

Cotterel were filling her lap with the tiny *kuei* blossoms that a high wind had strewn on the ground in the night.

There was no wind now; the delicious day was still. The tall *kuei* trees—stem-straight giants most of them—stood motionless, the sunshine slithering down through their far pointed heads, gilding their erect trunks, dappling the flower-dappled ground, gilding and dappling the girl who was trying to weave the delicate specks of yellow blossoms into chains, threading them on to stems of long grass.

Kuei-scented tea is one of China's most fragrant teas, peculiar and costly. Wherever they grow the little yellow flowers are gathered to perfume several brands of choice tea—and increase the price.

The tall thin trees were at their heaviest flowering now. They looked veiled in delicate yellow. The ground was all yellow too with many thousands of the very tiny flowers, which the thick veils shrouding the trees did not miss. Cotterel and Wên did not have to hunt; the difficulty of their task was to pick up and to handle such very small flowers.

Not every one likes the smell of *kuei* flowers. Pig-For-Honey disliked it. But where Lo-ees went he went, if he could. For the sake of being with her, he endured the thick smell of the *kuei* almost indifferently, perhaps forgot it. The little tame bear sat perfectly still beside the girl. He would not move until she told him he might. But his nose wrinkled gently every few moments, not because he knew that there were chocolates there under her scarf, but because Lo-ees had promised to dance with him by-and-by.

Pig-For-Honey had been wonderfully trained, even for an “educated” bear in China, the country of patience and persistence. But he never had liked his almost daily task of dancing, until Lo-ees came. But he always danced willingly for her, even when he was heavy with honey, and sleepy. And to dance *with* her was Pig-For-Honey's ecstasy. And she had been able to teach him more in a few moons than Mi Lug his keeper, who had trained him from birth, ever had taught him or had believed that he could be taught.

The little bear was Chenn-yi Wang's special property, Chenn-yi's favorite court-jester. And Pig-For-Honey had seemed to love his master before Lo-ees came.

When she came he fawned on her at once.

She spoke of him as “my bear” now, and no one contradicted her.

She could take a honey-comb away from him, he “died” for her, and turned elegant, if cumbrous, cart-wheels. When she whistled he ran to her with a cry of delight, if Mi Lug unfastened his chain.

His chain lay on the ground now. Lo-ees had taken it off his collar. And even Cotterel had learned that the strong-clawed, fierce-limbed creature was harmless in the beloved presence.

The girl wove on, sparing a pat and a word now and then to the infatuated animal. And Pig-For-Honey sat and watched her devotedly.

It was not a very good chain when it was finished. The grasses held, but the tiny yellow flowers did not stay fastened on very well.

"Dud!" Lois pronounced it, and flung it over the shaggy head. The keeper would not have dared do that.

"Come on, then," she said, springing up. "May I have the pleasure of the first waltz?"

Pig-For-Honey gave an affectionate squeal; and put his paws on her shoulders.

She put a hand on a rough fore-leg, her other hand on his back; and they "waltzed."

"Band!" the girl commanded.

And Wên and Cotterel whistled, and made castanets of their hands.

The sun streamed its gold refulgence through the *kuei* trees that perfumed them, clouds of snow and rose dappled the flax-blue sky.

A picture could not have been prettier or quainter. A function could not have been jollier.

The girl and the men were laughing, the tawny brown bear looked idiotically happy.

The performance was even more skilful than pretty—humanly pretty, in an exquisite background.

The girl tired first.

She pushed her partner away peremptorily, swept him a courtesy, to which he responded with a bow that was almost a *k'o-tow*, and she plumped down on the ground, rosy and laughing. And Pig-For-Honey sat down beside her.

"Good boy!" she praised him. "Very good boy, indeed!"

She offered Cotterel and Wên T'ien a sweetmeat, but Pig-For-Honey got the first one, and he got most of them.

"What a salary you two could earn for a music-hall turn!"

"Couldn't we! Perhaps we will some day. And you and Wên T'ien shall stand on either side, in Chinese mandarin court-robcs, and play Chinese temple flutes, and then lead the applause, and then go down through the orchestra, into the audience, and pass the hat—jewel-buttoned, peacock-feathered hats. It's a bargain! Will you come to London Town with me, my own Pig-For-Honey, and go on the halls?"

The bear laid a paw on her knee.

And then an arrow hurtled through the *kuei*-perfumed air. It fastened in Wên T'ien's shoe. Lo-ees looked up towards where it had come. The two men rushed on her, Cotterel caught her up in his arms, and ran.

Wên T'ien threw his long sleeve over her face, running beside them. He had not waited to pull the long heavy dart out of his shoe; it still stuck there as they ran, Cotterel with Lois in his arms, Wên T'ien with a burdened, weapon-encumbered shoe.

And Pig-For-Honey lumbered beside them.

"This way, Cotterel, quick!" Wên thrust a hand through the Englishman's arm, to guide him. "It is not far. You will be safe there while I creep to the wall and reconnoiter."

The girl had not cried out when the great arrow came. She did not stir now.

The old oak tree to which Wên guided Cotterel was hollow. It had been a mighty oak. Now in its ruin, it was thick with pink and white *fungi*, and red trumpet flowers tumbled and hung all over it, and the great hollow in its broken trunk was a small room.

Wên T'ien thrust them in.

"Come too," the girl begged him.

"I will come back. Cotterel will take care of you."

"But wouldn't we better make for the house, Wên?"

"No," Wên T'ien told him, "we must not do that, until I have made sure that the way is clear, *and* that the house is safe. Probably it is the house they will make for. They will loot, if they get in. It is loot they want. I think they will not expect to find anything of value so far as this from the buildings. She is safest here."

"Might it not have been just a stray arrow? Meddlesome boys?" Lo-ees asked. "Do you think that it was an attack?"

"It is an attack; perhaps not a serious one. A few bandits hungry and desperate, or wine-filled and truculent. The Chenn-yis have no enemies, not one in all China, except that hunger and misery make small men the foes of all who have. Their old conservatism—the Chenn-yis'—must be well known. But they do not make it a weapon. Possibly those who thrust at us from over the wall have mistaken this place for some other. Perhaps they are derelicts from some war-lord's moving ranks. It was a war arrow. I must go. I linger too long."

Wên T'ien turned to go.

"First pull the arrow from your shoe," Lo-ees urged.

"It amuses me to let it be. It will drop out as I run."

Turning his back to her, Wên bent down and smuggled something into the Englishman's coat.

"Boys?" he said. "No, Miss Allingham, a boy could not have thrown so heavy an arrow."

Again he moved away.

But while he was smuggling his only weapon to Henry Cotterel Lois had crept nearer him, looking intently at his foot.

"You are wounded!" she cried. "That was why you would not rid your shoe of the arrow, lest I saw that you bled."

"Ladies do not like blood," Wên said with a kindly indulgent smile. "Truly it is nothing, lily-one, scarcely a scratch."

"Take off your shoe, or I shall!"

Her hands were tight on Wên's ankle.

"You shall not go. Take off your shoe, Wên T'ien."

Wên T'ien bent over and took off his shoe. He must waste no more time, and he could not jerk his foot away from those fingers, perhaps hurting them a little as he did.

He drew the arrow-head out, and threw the dart far into a thicket of large ferns, and pulled his shoe on again quickly, contriving as he did to whisper to Cotterel, "Don't let her find it and touch it. It may be poisoned."

Cotterel nodded.

They both hoped that she had not heard.

If drawing out the arrow had pained, he gave no sign, but laughed unconcernedly.

But they saw the trickle of blood.

But before they could stay him, he had gone, running very fast.

But he wrenched the whistle from his girdle and tossed it behind him to Cotterel.

"No one will approach you here," he said. "But two precautions are better than one. If any one should, blow twice; and I will come. I am going to peep, not going to fight. I'll be back very quickly, if you need me."

And Wên T'ien had gone, laughing a little, running very swiftly, running noiselessly.

"That's a damned fine fellow!" Henry Cotterel said as the last flash of Wên T'ien's jade satin, jeweled garments disappeared.

"One of the best," Lois said huskily.

She began to cry softly.

"Dearest girl!" Cotterel's hand was on her arm. It was not very dark in the old

oak trunk. Even while her own eyes were misty, Lois saw the tenderness in Cotterel's eyes.

And she pulled herself together sharply.

"I'm a goose!" she said disgustedly. "What was it he gave you?"

"His whistle. I thought you saw. And you heard him tell me to blow it twice, if we wanted him."

"Before! Was it his knife? I don't think he was wearing it. Was it a pistol?"

"Yes, a pistol," Cotterel told her lightly. "Probably it's a good one."

"A very good one. You may be sure of that."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No sat with a number of their guests in the jasmine courtyard.

Chenn-yi Wang and Lady Saunders were playing chess. If she did not play as well as he did, she was giving him a game, and Chenn-yi Wang was amazed at how well the Englishwoman played. And her play improved. She had caught several points from Chenn-yi's play, and had mastered them and made them her own. Chenn-yi Wang was delighted with his pupil, and quite ridiculously proud of her.

Lady Saunders had played chess for years. It had been a favorite pastime of her husband's, and her father, who had taught her chess, had been a notable player. But this Chinese host of hers had not thought too highly of her game when they first had played together. For a non-Chinese she played magnificently now. And she loved playing with him. Her wicked old eyes—they were very wicked eyes—sparkled with pride and excitement whenever she had made a creditable move. And sometimes Chenn-yi No pouted and cried out that she was jealous, before she clapped her hands and lisped, "Well played, Sir"—not to her lord but to their guest.

Mr. Cotterel had taught her the English phrase with great pains. And Madam Chenn-yi, who was growing oddly cosmopolitan—on the surface—had no idea that "Sir" was not the elegant way of addressing a lady of social rank as well as of chess excellence.

Chenn-yi No was not watching the chess-players now. She was teaching two English girls how to make false-faces; all the fantastic materials and litter of that handicraft spread out on a lacquer table beside her.

Chenn-yi No was skilled in several handicrafts. Courtyard idleness never had appealed to her.

The Chenn-yi keep-clean cabinets and chests had a great store of valuable, beautifully made masks and false faces, grotesque, ingenious face-disguises and head-dresses used in the impersonations of festival times, loaned to strolling actors who came to the *chia* meagerly equipped. Some of them were very old; venerated for the hands, that had made them and for the reigns in which they had processioned.

Of all the collection, two that Chenn-yi No had made were among the best.

Chenn-yi No was not working swiftly. It is not so that Chinese art grew and thrived.

She worked very carefully and deftly, doing nothing that had to be undone or regretted. Edith Turnour and Helen Hamilton held their breath as they watched her.

"I never shall be able to do it!" Miss Turnour said plaintively.

Li Bo translated.

"I could not do it at first," Madam Chenn-yi said, giving the tip of the bird-mask a determined but careful tweak with her tweezers.

Mary Saunders whistled disgustedly.

Chenn-yi Wang smiled deferentially.

A play of his had baffled her. But he hadn't won the game yet by any means.

There is so much difference between Chinese chess and the chess played in the West that the English woman might well have been proud that she had learned as much as she had of the imperial game of Wu Wang. But nothing less than victory satisfied the pride of Chenn-yi Wang's adversary. And she pursed her lips and frowned down at the "river" running across the board, and at her unornamented pieces: the general, secretaries, soldiers, cannon, chariots, horses and elephants.

That sounds a picturesque "army," but it was not.

The beautifully carved, elaborate chessmen of ivory or coral, or jade that collectors and travelers bring out of China are made to tempt Western purses. The Chinese do not use them. The pieces they use are quite plain, and all look alike except that their names are cut on them; a similarity that makes the game harder to play, moves less easy to remember and to pre-plan.

Intent on her game—she could concentrate as well as any man—Lady Saunders paid no attention to an unusual noise on the terrace; possibly she did not hear it.

But every one else did.

A wild-eyed, painfully panting boy ran in, dragging an unfastened ankle-to-trouser binder (not unlike a British soldier's puttee) behind him. He did not hide his hands in his sleeves. He had forgotten to let down his queue before he entered his great lady's presence. Servants were lashed for less than that here. But Chenn-yi No did not even reprimand it now. She saw that the coolie was incapable with terror.

Wise at such times, she spoke to him not unkindly and in a voice to soothe as well as command.

"Take breath!" she bade him. "Then say why you are here."

Trembling piteously, the coolie staggered a little nearer his mistress, lurched in his panic against the table beside her, knocking it over, scattering glue, paints, oil, brushes, knives, putty, parchment, silks and gauze over the floor.

Chenn-yi No paid no attention to the havoc; Pak Soo should clean it up presently. But she dropped the hawk-mask softly, and waited.

Chenn-yi Wang put down a chessman, not moving it, and turned his attention to the shaking, stammering boy who seemed more inclined to blubber than to explain.

Chenn-yi No was very patient.

"Who is killed?" she asked quietly, in pursuit of the one word that she had caught.

"All killed!" the coolie boy wailed. "I killed. You killed. Everybody killed."

"Not yet," Chenn-yi No told him reassuringly. She suspicioned that some catastrophe had exploded somewhere. She wished that a less shattered messenger had brought the news.

"Not yet," she repeated. "You live. I certainly live. Your lord lives. And Kwan is in her temple."

"All killed soon," the coolie blubbered.

"What will kill us?"

"The bandits of hell!"

"Where are they?"

"Come over the wall. Many bandit-ones. Much knife. Much blood. Many guns. The moat is all blood and cut-off heads and cut-off arms."

"So!" Chenn-yi No said as she rose. "If bad-ones do, as you say, clamor at our gate, they shall be sent away; the moat shall be cleaned."

Li Bo always had admired his little old regal mistress, but never before so much as he admired her now.

Mary Saunders and the three or four other English guests who were here did not understand a word of real Chinese among them. But they saw that Chenn-yi No was meeting some crisis with quiet efficiency and unruffled breeding. And their English blood hailed her.

A fair-haired girl from Kent was frightened, but she did not show it.

Mary Saunders was curious—and vexed that their game was interrupted.

"I will send them away," Chenn-yi No said with a slight proud smile, and turned to leave the courtyard.

But Chenn-yi Wang halted her imperatively.

"Rose-of-my-heart!" The words were tender, but the tone was stern.

"My lord?"

"I forbid you! Send."

Chenn-yi No did not dispute her husband's command; the first he ever had given her—in their more than half a century of love and of sorrow.

"Will my lord permit me to go on to the terrace? I may get more news and less tears there,"—but the imperious woman said it with more commiseration than contempt. "No sound comes from the terrace. I hear no sound from any direction. But there I will find some not-fool-one to send. We must know. I feel that it is some

bad event that has made the silly-one as he is.”

Chenn-yi Wang sighed heavily. He believed that it might be so. He had not liked news that had reached him yesterday from a friend in Pao-ting.

“We will not strike the gong on the terrace—until we know where the trouble is, if there is trouble,” Chenn-yi Wang said decidedly.

“I will not strike the gong, my lord. But I will find those we can trust, to send in all directions to search. The slave said, ‘At the gate.’”

“Light-of-my-life, you were going to the great gate!”

“My lord, yes. Before you forbade me to go. I shall not disobey. But I believe that it is there I should be. I long to be there.”

Chenn-yi Wang motioned her, and she gave him his strong ivory sticks, and helped him to rise.

They went onto the terrace together, Chenn-yi Wang limping, leaning against her, leaning hard on his ivory canes.

As they turned to leave the courtyard Chenn-yi No smiled reassurance to their guests. And she bade Li Bo, when he would have followed his lord, to attend on her honorable guests, to assure them that no harm should befall them in the *chia* of Chenn-yi Wang.

“If bad men have come,” she repeated, “I will send them away.”

And Chenn-yi No did—after many days of peril and costly gruesome strife.

It was not done so quickly or so easily as her confident tone had promised.

The merry house-party more than once looked like ending in blood.

It was hideous.

And it was all so pitiful.

Wên T'ien had guessed correctly when he had said that the attack on the wall was accidental; that desperate men in quarrel with each other, half famished and in need, had come upon the great place, and without knowing or caring whose it was, were determined to break into it if they could, eat and drink, rest hurriedly, then loot all they could carry, and go as they had come, perhaps to rejoin some war-lord, or to sell their temporary allegiance to the war-lord who would pay them most, but more probably to disperse in the country jungle, each to some lair of his own or to one he might find and hold for a time.

They had nothing against Chenn-yi Wang, of whom they never had heard, except that he had abundance and they had nothing.

The hammering siege pushed and fought against the wall for several anxious days. And the chances seemed against the besieged.

There were hundreds inside for defense.

There were more than a thousand battering against the wall.

The attackers were armed, provisioned with ammunition, had a few—not too efficient—projectiles, two or three old battering-rams, ladders, three or four bombs that might explode when or before they were thrown.

Chenn-yi Wang's arsenal was a mock: old useless weapons, a few rather more serviceable, cartridges that fitted no gun, guns that had no suitable ammunition, powder grown harmless with age and mildew.

Chenn-yi No had no time to spare for possibilities. She did not go to the gods herself. But she sent Li Bo to the War-god's temple, to bribe Kuan Ti with the promise of a necklace of rare jewels if the bandit-soldiers were routed and did not return. And she bade Li Bo add that when victory was theirs, half of the citron hill and all of the meadows behind it should be made the site of the greatest private store of weapons, guns, bombs, shot and shell that China ever had held.

There was no lack of food in the great *chia*; and there would be none unless the enemy got in to take and destroy. There could be no lack of food here while the old wall held.

Every man, more than a child and less than infirm, was needed at the wall. Women did the men's usual work: tended the crops, fed the cattle. Lois Allingham watered the vegetables. Playful Tiger (well watched) and Bamboo Flower (important but docile) pulled up weeds.

But weeds grew and flourished where never a weed had flourished before in the great immaculate *chia* of the Chenn-yis.

The guests all worked. The men, as a matter of course, signed on in the belligerent ranks of Chenn-yi.

Both Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No protested—at first—that they did; both held it their duty and privilege to defend their guests, and to keep them in safety far from the fighting line.

But English men could not put up with that.

And soon the Chenn-yis saw and owned that they needed the help of every man there, servant or guest, Chinese or foreigner.

Chenn-yi No drove the eunuchs furiously.

Even the concubines worked—they never had worked before. But their sweetmeat-filled gilded cage was imperiled, and they sat on their tiny crippled feet and worked with a will, shelling peas, washing carrots, chopping meat and fish into palatable dice. And they swayed about the outer grounds on errands and tasks; not turning their unpainted faces away, but carrying on quite unperturbed, when they chanced on a man-one.

The *kuei* sanctity was lifted for a time, and often heaven's-well was empty but for its deserted roses and birds, lilies and butterflies.

Lois wore a small pistol under her tunic: an excellent weapon that, well aimed, would kill a man, easily kill a girl. It was loaded. She promised Cotterel and Wên T'ien to carry it very carefully. But they knew that she promised to shoot—if it came to that. And they satisfied themselves that she could shoot. But they could not look at each other when they thought what her target might be.

The English women all worked. Edith Turnour, who never had worked in her life, learned how to make beds, and did it eagerly and well. Mrs. Wilson-Adare dusted. Marion Grey sewed. They all made lint.

Mary Saunders was indefatigable and uncontrollable. She would not, and therefore could not, be kept from the gate. Many a basket of refreshing fruit and lettuce, and many a heavy bucket of piping-hot food, she carried to the defenders at the gate; trudging back and forth on feet that were proud to ache—and had every right to be.

There was fighting on the wall, fighting and flame at the gate. Two bombs were thrown. One did no human harm, but Chenn-yi No swore aloud when she saw that it had shattered the raised bed of geraniums that lay a thick, embossed carpet before the Frogs' Temple. The second bomb did human havoc. A wood-gatherer, half-blind, too old and infirm to much more than crawl, and the new-bought concubine, feeding the gold-fish she loved, at their lake farther from the house than she was allowed to venture, were killed.

And a coolie-woman died on her child-birth-mat while her hut flamed about her, and her children cried at the door they could not open.

And out in all China no one knew; and only one White man learned.

Chinese banditry's secret service is efficient and staunch.

Edward Allingham, still in Shanghai, just starting for another part of China, heard or suspected nothing.

Paul Trench, back in Mo-kan-shan, heard something; a breath. Perhaps Kwan Yin told him. Perhaps the ash-trees that waved their leafy arms against his study window whispered it to him. Perhaps Happiness-god, Fu Shên, in his robes of blue, on his red-wood pedestal, told him. Happiness-god and Kuan Ti the War-god are not very good friends. They like to thwart each other. And ungodlike as it sounds, several times in China's long twisted history Chinese god-ones have been known to sneak.

How or why, Paul heard.

Then Paul came.

He sent a line to Allingham, a longer letter to Sir Martin Keith.

He did nothing else but get ready to go, and go.

But he left a laid train behind him.

It would quicken and move soon.

Trench flew.

CHAPTER XXXIX

“Lois!”

She straightened up, with the gigantic cabbage she had just cut in her arms, the sharp long-bladed kitchen knife sheathed in the vegetable’s white and green head.

“I say, what a beauty!” Cotterel took it from her. “And it must weigh a ton. I’d not care to lug it more than a mile. You were not going to carry it all the way to the cook-house, were you?”

“Of course, I was.”

“Bet you, you couldn’t.”

“What will you bet?”

“All I’ve got.”

“Give it back to me then, and I’ll show you.”

“Tell me first what you will bet against that bet of mine.”

“A lucky threepenny bit, a nice new one, if I ever see English money again. And I’ve got four beautiful new threepenny bits at home in Mo-kan-shan.”

“You don’t risk particularly heavy stakes, do you? But, do you know, I’d rather like you to win our bet, Lois?” But he still held the great vegetable.

She made him a crisp Chinese bow, the sharp, jerked Chinese curtsy of formal politeness.

Then, “My name here is Lo-ees, Born-before,” she reminded him quietly.

“Not to me! You are just English to me, all English. And you always will be. I believe you are the most English girl I know.”

“I don’t look very English in these!”

She pointed down to the edge of her long tunic, with her scarlet trousers just showing below it, and jangled her stick-pins at him.

“Yes, you do! Adorably English. Just true English through and through! Nothing can ever disguise that. These Chinese things of yours are very pretty, and they suit this beautiful dear old place right down to the ground, but they don’t disguise you to me. You are just Lois Allingham—for the present. And you will be just Lois as long as you live—no matter where you are, no matter what you wear, no matter what you do. Why, I believe you are the most English thing I ever have known, Lois!”

Miss Allingham flushed with pleasure. She liked Cotterel’s saying that.

Stirred to her sensitive Chinese quick by the peril that Chenn-yi No and Chenn-yi Wang, Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower—the four here whom she loved—were in, angry and outraged in every fiber because the beautiful, beloved *chia* was in

danger, stung in every drop of her Chinese blood, yet she knew that this was one of her English days. She was proud of her Chinese blood, proud of her kinship with splendid Chenn-yi No. But it was her English blood that tingled to-day, her English muscles that refused to tire, her English heart that scorned to anticipate the horror that she knew might be nearing.

Lois dimpled softly at a memory: the memory of Henry Cotterel dismayed and revolted at seeing her wearing Chinese robes, not so very long ago, in her father's Mo-kan-shan bungalow. The man, who had been just a little gauche in that incident, although he had done his best not to be, was all comradeship and approval now. Henry Cotterel was singing a different tune now. All men were like that, Betty would probably say.

"I was looking for you," Cotterel told her as they went towards the kitchens. "Madam Chenn-yi wants you to send her, if you can, another tub of boiling tea and a bucket of rice-wine."

"Can do," Lois promised.

"Is the garden going to rack and ruin? I'd hate that!"

"We are doing our best," she said, not too confidently.

"I know that. I had no idea what a wonderful girl you were, Lois."

"Don't you let Chenn-yi No hear you call me that."

"Why not? You don't expect me to call you 'Miss Allingham' ever again, after all this, do you?"

He gestured across a neglected lily-patch, towards the great gate—and nearly dropped the giant cabbage. The cabbage needed both of Henry Cotterel's strong arms.

"I am 'Lo-ees' here!"

"Not to me, little girl!"

Lois Allingham shrugged.

"How is it going now?" she asked.

"Not too well. But we are putting up a damned good fight."

"Chenn-yi No has not been up on the wall?"

"Not yet."

"I don't think she'll go—not all the way up—unless he says that she may."

"Surely, he'll never do that!"

"I think he may—before the end. They both believe that she'd inspire our men up there, and might discourage the devils without. But I ought not to have said that! They are just hungry and misled."

"For famished men, some of them aim straight and throw hard. But we are

putting up a good fight. Down under the wall Mr. and Mrs. Chenn are a host in themselves. They keep the rest of us up to the mark, I can tell you—up to the mark, and willing. No one ever can tell me again that the Chinese are not born soldiers. I'm proud of Wên. He's the best of the lot."

Before the fester—of rival war-lords and of extraterritoriality's sore—broke, Henry Cotterel and Wên T'ien had walked together on either side of Lois Allingham: Wên T'ien courting her ardently if unobtrusively and with exquisite delicacy, Cotterel courting her too, perhaps without knowing that he did. But Wên T'ien had known it keenly, and Lois had known it, as she had once before in Mo-kan-shan, and believing here as she had there that his courting would end as she herself decreed.

Now that the fester had burst, throwing flame, devastation, and indescribable peril over the great wall, into the centuried home and on to the lives of the Chenn-yis, Cotterel and Wên had fought side-by-side day after day, using their pistols by day, patrolling the old threatened wall by night. And they had grown blood-brothers-in-arms.

When this broil was over, they might not meet again. Probably they would not. But they would remember each other as long as they lived. And not even the love of a woman ever would dis sever their respect and cordial liking from each other.

More often than not a bandit army can be bought off—especially one that is practically leaderless.

Why not?

Chinese soldiers of far more standing and discipline than these frequently change their war-lords. Such Chinese soldiers are mere tradesmen. "Cause" means little to them. "Stomach" means a great deal. They hire themselves now to one general, now to another, as simply and as entirely without shame or sense of guilt as the grocer in an English town or village swings his preferential window-display of rival teas and soaps in accordance with the profits alternately offered him by rival wholesale firms; not a matter of affection for certain customers, more than for others, but a detail of the grim daily problem of profit and loss.

The coffers of Chenn-yi Wang were crammed with gold. There was hidden treasure underground and in hillsides, of which only he himself and Chenn-yi No knew.

There was little doubt that he could buy this particular bandit-soldiery off.

But to what avail?

Would it be wise?

There had been canvass of it, for and against, more than once in the *k'o-tang*,

but the final agreement had been unanimous that it would be unwise, and probably quite futile. That though the bandits, bought-off, probably would go away and not molest here again, they might not. There was always that possibility in modernizing China. If they did keep faith, the story of it would spread, larger, better-armed hordes gather about the walls, and all would be to do again; to do with a lessened, wearied garrison.

There was little hope of getting word through to any strong and honest official. The *chia* had no telegraph equipment. It was as much Old China here as all China had been when the Ming ruled.

Two men whom Chenn-yi Wang trusted had tried to make their way to the nearest stronghold of law and order, where at least wires could be sent to Shanghai and Tientsin. They had crawled out at dead of night, far from the great-gate. But before they had wormed their way on noiseless bellies even half a rod, they had been defeated. One was captured. The other was shot down.

Chenn-yi Wang's blood boiled at the thought of buying off such unprovoked murderous *canaille*. But he would give all he had to save the lives of the guests imperiled through having come in response to Chenn-yi No's request; endangered in his *chia*.

Greatly as he loved this home of his, he would have given it to flames, rather than see an English guest injured. Rather than that a guest of theirs should perish here, he himself with an unshaking hand would have held the torch to the rafters of his house.

But they were all agreed that to satisfy the brawling besiegers would be useless and disastrous. They must fight it through. There was no other worth-while way. And the English men, whose blood was boiling too, advocated it the most insistently.

Chenn-yi Wang still protested that his guests, the men as much as the women, must stay in the safety of the house, and its nearer courtyards and grounds—while there was safety even there. It was for him to protect his guests. Less than that would shame him, make him unfit to join his ancestors, erase his name from the family birth-scroll.

Those of the men guests who were Chinese protested and claimed their race-right to avenge a host's dastard injury, and to honor his rice that they had eaten, his wine that they had drunk.

There was no appeal against that. Chinese Chenn-yi Wang could not deny them their Chinese right of gratitude or of friendship.

They went to the wall, and Chenn-yi Wang watched them sadly.

That the English gentlemen should go with them he would not consent. Their guestship was much more sacred, and should be more sacredly guarded.

The Englishmen protested hotly.

They thanked him, but they were for the wall.

And a man could not forbid men to play the man.

They all went.

Father Blatchford went well armed with borrowed weapons, his rosary tight-packed in a pocket crammed with bullets, but clinking a little against them as he hurried toward the wall, Mary Saunders trudging beside him.

And when they judged they must, and drove her back, she cursed them.

And the Englishmen grinned at her, took what she was carrying from her, put it beside the path, to get it when they could, and made her go.

Mary Saunders scowled, but she wasted no time sulking, or in any other way. There was not a coolie on the great place that worked harder than she did until the end. Not even Chenn-yi No herself did.

For it was all hands to the war-pump in the *chia* of Chenn-yi Wang now.

The coolie boy who had blubbered in with the news had exaggerated wildly, as poor panic always does. There was no blood in the silver moat, not a dis severed human head, not so much as a toe-nail.

But the trouble was serious.

A gate-coolie had been shot.

The old wall was suffering.

The great walls of Old China are frail barrier against the battering of modern war.

If the attackers were as ill-equipped as Wên T'ien, Cotterel and Blatchford hoped and suspected, they had some of the implements of modern warfare, implements more or less usable, and they were using them vigorously.

The wall would not stand long, unless the defenders could keep the bandits at bay, killing and wounding as many as they could.

And there were so few effectual weapons in the peaceful, happy *chia*! So little ammunition! And so much of what there was was not worth dragging to the wall.

The men on the wall, human targets that were desperately brave, and the men behind it, fighting through its loopholes, had a galling task.

If they, and not the bandits won, it would be because brains and breed directed the defense, and only peasant-rage and lust for spoil fed the attack.

It could not be said that the attack was directed.

That was its weakness; a valuable asset to the defenders of the wall.

A mob of struggling coolies, well spent many of them, ill-fed most of them,

against men who were well-fed, not foot-sore or leg-raw, but disciplined, well officered.

Chenn-yi Wang was there.

It was his right.

It did not occur to Chenn-yi No to protest. She would not leave him. But except for that, she obeyed him implicitly, and did not assert herself in any way.

And down under the wall—which he could not get up on to, Chenn-yi Wang directed his “soldiers.” He was the soul of the defense, and more than half its brains.

Possibly he might have been carried up on to the wall, but Cotterel and Wên T'ien would have prevented that at any cost, and Blatchford would have backed them up.

Had the attempt been made, even at that Chenn-yi No would not have protested. But he knew that she would have gone with him, knew that no command of his would have stayed her from that, no prayer of his have kept her in the comparative safety of the old wall's frail shelter while he was on the wall's unprotected top.

Chenn-yi Wang watched as best he could at one of the spaces in the wall's ornamental open-work, and sent his orders to the defenders.

The tatterdemalion insurgents still flew a war-lord's banner—which might, or might not, prove them still his soldiers, and obedient to his orders. Many such colors were stolen now—and they were made very easily. If these still were soldiers of the war-lord, whose flag they carried, or wished to return to his service, Chenn-yi Wang was confident that he could get them withdrawn, if only he could get a message through to that war-lord.

But how to get any message through?

That was the rub!

They must fight it out to the end—however bitter the end.

And they fought on grimly, because they must, for many grueling days.

There were roots, wild fruit, half-ripe grain here and there, now and then a bird or a “rabbit,” field-mice, for the famished horde beyond the wall.

There were hot food and drink in quick abundance for the defenders.

Sometimes the bandits seemed to waver.

Often they quarreled among themselves.

The men on the wall and behind it builded much on that.

The roots were moderately plentiful, but they had little succulence and not much nourishment, and a bandit had to get out of range before he bent to pull roots, or risk a well-aimed bullet. Henry Cotterel sniped well, and so did Wên T'ien and several

of the Chenn-yi retainers.

If roots were moderately plentiful, the wild game and vermin were not.

Often while two bandits fought desperately for a bird, or even for a mouse, a third bandit stole it, and sneaked away with it.

Chenn-yi Wang was not without hope that he might starve them out—if only the wall would hold!

The wall was very long and very old, and Chenn-yi Wang knew that it had many weak spots, where a few sturdy, determined urchins almost might break through, if the urchins knew where those weak places were.

He spared a sure marksman for each of them, bidding the man not show himself, but to watch alertly and with great caution at an inconspicuous place in the stone open-work. Above everything, the man must not draw attention to it by being sighted at the weak spot he was guard.

And the sad, pitiful, petty warfare—Chinese against Chinese—waged and wavered.

CHAPTER XL

Lois proved right.

One desperate day Chenn-yi Wang yielded his permission to Chenn-yi No, and she stood on the wall, all her white hair hanging loose about her, an unjeweled hand resting on a pile of throw-down-to-kill stones.

She had longed to stand there with her men who were fighting for her. And also she had felt it her duty.

At last she had convinced Chenn-yi Wang that it was. And he had let her go—for a moment—while he, down in his comparative shelter, trembled for her safety and prayed for her return to him.

His was the greater bravery.

The woman's flashing old eyes challenged the foes—though what their enmity, or why, few of them knew—and her veiling white hair moved them.

For a long moment every sound ceased, no one moved.

The maddened, desperate, almost famished Chinese bandits could not attack that venerable little figure; a woman, and grandmother-old.

A sighing sound, like autumn wind through ripening corn, swept the bandit ranks. Several slunk away.

A bandit laughed, and slouched off.

All might have been mended then; compromise arranged, a poultice of gold and hot rice laid on those craving-stomached poor coolie-ones; on terms that Chenn-yi Wang would not have felt a shame, or unsecured. Except for the damage already done, the lives already destroyed, all might have been mended now, had not Cee Kun, the half-wit, only the uncommunicative gods know how, made his way up on the wall.

Cee Kun objected to clothing, but what he was induced to wear, he liked gay. And he was indulged by all on the estate. His parents and theirs before them had served the Chenn-yis faithfully for generations.

Even in Winter it was difficult to keep Cee Kun clad.

He was not wearing much now. But his broad loincloth of brilliant silk was of several bright colors. And he wore a long, thick necklace of gay flowers. In one hand he carried a blue-and-white basin, in the other a splendid cluster of purple grapes.

Cee Kun paid no attention to those on the wall, but he looked over it and grinned apishly at the men down at the wall's outer side. Then he squatted on the top

of the wall's outer edge, and began to eat, alternately biting off a grape, and tilting the basin up at his lips. Then he put the fruit down beside him, and put the basin down at his other side, and fed himself from it, thrusting his hand in up to the wrist and pulling out fistfuls of gravy-dripping vermicelli.

The sight of the steaming vermicelli, and the great luscious grapes—a very present sign of the abundance within the wall—tantalized and maddened the half-starved bandits.

They renewed the attack with new fury. Though even now most of them were careful to aim nothing at the white-haired woman.

Poor Cee Kun was seized not ungentle and hustled down the wall and driven off towards his father's hut. But the mischief was done. And the mischief stayed.

To Chenn-yi Wang his wife's "moment" up on the wall seemed the longest moment in Chinese history. And less memorable moments have been recorded and blazoned.

Three of the bandits actually gained the wall by means of human ladders.

Two carried knives in their teeth as they climbed and clawed their way up, one had his pistol.

Three were up; others were coming.

Chenn-yi No fought now; a calm-eyed, white-haired fury.

"The throw-down-to-kill-balls!" she commanded.

"Too tight. The centuries have glued them," Wên T'ien told her. "We have tried. We cannot move them."

"We must."

And at last one of the great round stones gave way, and that loosened the pile. No longer welded together, it was not difficult to roll them slowly to the edge of the wall, although it took three men's full strength to move each stone.

Just before it fell, Chenn-yi No's own tiny, age-wrinkled hand was on the first stone that was pushed over. She was intensely quiet; the woman was praying for her home.

"Throw!" she commanded.

A bandit bullet just missed her.

The stone went.

A bandit skull cracked.

A human ladder toppled, never to rise, none of it able to run, or to crawl, all shattered at the foot of the wall.

Chenn-yi No fought now, calm, furious: defending her home.

And the men fighting beside her, seven Englishmen, hundreds of her own people,

knew that they were proud to fight with her, and would be proud to the death.

It was not long.

But it was slaughter.

A score or more of the bandit assailants hazarded the kill-stones.

But not a stone was wasted, none was mis-thrown. And when the granite ball was hurtling down it was too late to dodge it. It came and destroyed.

The marauders drew back, and aimed from there.

They did not have far to go—to escape the stones. The throw-to-kills could not be thrown. The push-rods lying near each pile were useless with decay. The stones, such as could be moved at all, had to be trundled, three or four men to each of them, to the edge of the wall, and shoved over while the bandits shot at the defenseless panting men painfully propelling the cumbrous kill-balls. The men, bent with streaming, straining backs over the unwieldy, globular “weapons,” made excellent targets, several of them were hit. And the kill-balls were useless unless a foe or foes stood close to the wall.

The bandits soon got out of that range.

They continued to snipe from the safer distance.

The men on the wall sniped too; and they were the better marksmen, and Cotterel, Wên and several of the others had the better guns.

And the advantage in position was the defenders’.

The stacks of round stones were useful shelters to crouch behind, to aim from, and crouch back behind again.

And even out of all possible range of the devastating stones, the bandits were getting the worst of it now—slightly the worst of it.

Before long the shots and arrows ceased.

Chenn-yi No had kept her boast.

She had sent the intruders away.

But they had not gone far; they would be at it again, probably at sunrise, unless—as Crawford hopefully suggested—they starved in the night.

The sun was going down.

Chenn-yi No had staved it off. There would be no more of it to-night, the *chia* party believed.

Chenn-yi Wang and Chenn-yi No went back to their guests in the *k’o-tang*, and then to rest and hope until day came again.

CHAPTER XLI

A bandit cried out.

The bandits who heard him looked up to where his startled gaze was riveted.

A great auk-like bird—or was it a smooth-scaled silver dragon, all belly, a pointed nose, queer small fins?—was swooping down from on high towards them.

Presently they heard it snort.

Two unsoldierly bandits dropped their heavy arms, and ran.

One threw himself face-down on the ground, and writhed in hysteria.

The Chenn-yis, sitting with their guests on the marble terrace, saw it too, heard it before they could see it, and looked up and listened in tense surprise.

But they did not cry out, not even a woman.

The strain of the last few days had numbed them.

It had been a blistering time that had tried them all. And the uncertainty had been the worst of it.

The actual strife at the wall was not much now.

But the bandits still were there. And Chenn-yi Wang's henchmen still patrolled the long wall, and kept watch at the carved open spaces.

But the men of the house-party came and went, husbanding their strength for the final struggle that might come any hour, and might be tremendous.

It might all fizzle out—the bandits go as suddenly as they had come—or a reenforced effort of theirs might be staggering and irresistible.

Chenn-yi Wang and Wên T'ien believed that the bandits had some sort of trump card up their sleeve, believed that they were sending and receiving messages.

The Englishmen all agreed with Chenn-yi and Wên.

"They must be getting food from somewhere," Wên T'ien had said. "And I see fresh faces among them."

"They mean to have another try, or they'd go," Blatchford added.

Inside the wall, they waited and rested.

Outside the wall, the bandit horde was waiting too—for something.

The day after poor Cee Kun had sat on the wall eating vermicelli and big purple grapes, it had rained.

Rain gives battle a day off in China.

The Chinese are said to fear rain and to dislike it absurdly.

Many Chinese do not like rain. Some of them like it, but the common people believe that it is unlucky to be out in the rain. Their superstition does not equal their

thrift. They will work out in the rain rather than neglect necessary toil or business. But they would prefer not. Nine Chinese out of ten stay indoors, if they at all conveniently can, when it rains.

To fight in the rain is to invite disaster.

The bandits huddled together under the trees, and gambled or slept, and left the old wall unmolested.

Chenn-yi Wang and his supporters were glad of the respite.

But it had rained only for a day.

The fight was on again—though with much less vigor.

The Chenn-yi servants and coolies were relieved and optimistic.

The sash-wearers and the Englishmen were doubly anxious. And again and again they discussed possible schemes for one or more of them creeping out in the night, and making a dash for it, in the hope of getting word through, asking for help.

No one cried out, but they all held their frightened breath.

All the Englishmen, and most of the Chinese gentlemen, knew what it was before they saw it. The sound was unmistakable if you often had heard it.

And Chenn-yi Wang knew as soon as he saw it. He had read of such things. He had seen a few pictures of them.

“Hell!” Henry Cotterel muttered. “That is what the devils have sent for. How the hell do you suppose they got hold of it?”

Wên T’ien shrugged.

“A pretty lot of anti-aircraft guns we’ve got!” Cotterel swore again.

“There seems to be only one,” Father Blatchford said musingly.

“More coming, probably,” Cotterel grumbled.

“Must know we haven’t a gun,” Wên T’ien said, a little desperately.

“No one would dream of anti-aircraft guns in a show like this,” Crawford snapped out contemptuously.

“It may not be an enemy,” the priest said softly.

“Why? We haven’t got a word through,” Cotterel reminded him.

“Miracles happen,” Blatchford told him with a gentle, whimsical smile.

“Drop a bomb or two any moment now!” Crawford exclaimed despairingly.

“Take cover!” Cotterel snapped. “The women *must*!”

But, “Look,” Wên O-he cried, springing from her seat. “The Son-of-Heaven has sent it to us! The Son-of-Heaven has come back to us!”

Wên O-he *k’o-towed*. Tears of joy and of adoration were wet on her face.

Chenn-yi No rose, and hid her hands in her sleeves. The old Imperial flag floated

out from the nearing plane.

The Emperor's flag!

The Imperial Manchu banner.

A great five-clawed black dragon half covered the long pennant of yellow.

"It is not an enemy," Chenn-yi Wang asserted firmly, and Li Bo translated it. "The sacred banner is a message, that we shall not mistake and attack. No ill thing can come to the house of Chenn-yi flying our Master the supreme and matchless Son-of-Heaven's flag."

He was standing beside his wife, not leaning on her, no cane in his hand.

He took a step, reached the gong, took up the heavy snake-twined mallet and struck twice—powerfully, resoundingly.

"Who'd have thought he had the strength!" Henry Cotterel murmured.

"It is the flag he loves," Wên T'ien said proudly.

"Yes," Lois Allingham agreed as proudly.

House servants came running.

"Great welcome!" Chenn-yi Wang commanded, commanding them in a tone they never had heard from him before, great authority, insistent, imperious.

They padded away to swiftly prepare his bidding.

The bandits too had seen the old Imperial flag. They began discarding their red brassards. They hid the war-lord's flag. And those who lacked them bemoaned their queues.

There on the terrace, Lois Allingham was the first who understood.

She caught the rose from her breast, kissed it, and threw it up into the air, threw it towards the descending aeroplane.

It was not very near yet.

"Small. Four in it," Cotterel said to Blatchford. "A Chinese is piloting it."

"They make beautiful pilots," the priest said.

"There's another Chinese. The other two are White."

"You've got good eyes, Cotterel. But, yes—I believe you are right."

Lois Allingham's rose had fallen on the ground. It had neither engine nor wings. Lois ran to where it had fallen, she had thrown it hard, if her aim had not been much—she picked it up, and threw it again, in joyous salutation.

"Paul!" she cried.

And again Lois was right.

Paul Trench had come.

CHAPTER XLII

And they gave him great welcome.

Lois got to him first.

She held out both her arms, as if to help him descend, or to catch him if he fell.

Trench did not fall.

He got out quite safely, and took Lois Allingham in his arms and kissed her.

And Lois kissed him in return.

She kissed him twice.

Chenn-yi No stiffened.

But Chenn-yi Wang laid his hand on her sleeve, and when she looked up at him, Chenn-yi Wang smiled down at her, and she gave him a friendly shrug.

Madam Chenn-yi No looked anxiously at Wên T'ien.

Wên T'ien too was smiling.

Chenn-yi No glanced hurriedly at Wên O-he.

Wên O-he smiled back at Chenn-yi No.

Chenn-yi No gave it up then. But her soul still stiffened, and it never fully unbent to Paul Trench. And Lois had hurt her, and the sting would stay.

Trench had not brought them much. Four men and a small store of arms and ammunition did not add a great deal to their strength.

The two Chinese for whom Trench vouched, and George Fairfax—the fourth in the plane—all could do their bit up on the wall and at the loopholes. Trench, old now, and frail for years, never had been a first-class shot, and Chenn-yi Wang insisted that they had not a bullet to spare for indifferent marksmanship.

Naturally a Chinese gentleman did not put it like that. But that was what he meant. And the others, including Trench himself, agreed with him.

But Trench retorted that he could patrol, and too could “look-see” through the wall.

He had brought them little, and yet he had brought them everything.

He had brought them reenforced hope.

Overwhelming help was on its way to them. He had not waited long in Mo-kan-shan when he learned their peril. But he had sent word to Edward Allingham and more detailed information and advice to Sir Martin Keith.

“Your father may not get my note for some days,” he told Lois. “He had gone up country to direct some of the firm’s business there. I was not too sure of where he was. But my messenger will find him. And then we know what he will do. Sir

Martin alone will be fully equal to the situation. He will have acted at once, in the best way, in the right direction. He will have got in touch with the right quarters without a moment's delay."

No Englishman here doubted that. Nor did Wên T'ien.

He—Trench—had flown. The effective succor would have to march, ride, boat and train. But it would push through sturdily.

"All we have to do is to hold out, and to wait," he concluded.

"We'll hold out until Hell freezes over!" Cotterel said.

"That we will!" Father Blatchford agreed cordially.

Trench's confidence was justified.

The bandits still menaced outside the wall, but they too were merely waiting. And there were signs of panic among them. Cotterel and Crawford were sure that they were fewer; Wên T'ien and Li Bo agreed. Probably the "great bird" had thinned their wavering ranks.

But many of them still were there, snarling and menacing at the very gate.

Yet no shots were fired. Scarcely a stray arrow came into the *chia*.

Chenn-yi Wang relaxed no iota of vigilance. But he too was resting on his arms.

Chenn-yi Wang himself, the Chinese men who were his guests, Cotterel and all the rest went, two or three at a time, to the gate constantly, to supervise and make sure.

But it was quiet in the *chia*. And if the calm that it showed might, as they all realized, be but the hush before renewed storm, it was grateful to tired bodies and over-taut nerves.

Their common peril and the tension had bred a certain human intimacy between them all; even those who could not exchange words except through Li Bo or Wên T'ien or Wên O-he.

Even the gardens and courtyards seemed to feel and respond to a welcome change. They were better tended now—more were free to tend them.

The flat peaches, a glorious crop, were at their luscious best. Many panniers of them went to the great gate, and hundreds of melons. But Chenn-yi Wang's orders were strict that no one at the wall should eat or drink in sight of the bandits. And Cee Kun the half-wit was closely guarded. He went about the *chia* as he would. Affliction has great license in heathen China. But he went nowhere alone. And he was well shepherded from the wall.

In the long star-lit evenings there was recreation, even something of ease, in the great *k'o-tang*; pleasant talk, music. There was cordial friendliness; inter-racial sympathy—accord—that in several instances might have warmed into friendship in

time, under less harassed circumstances. Ships of Europe and of Asia halted together for a time in a gale. Unless they sank together, ships to pass on presently, when the storm had gone, each on its course. But East and West *had* met in the *k'o-tang* of Chenn-yi Wang.

One night Lo-ees—in her prettiest tunic, her costliest hair-pins flashing and twinkling, just a touch of unneeded rouge on her face—and Pig-For-Honey danced for them. A concubine accompanied them on her lute, a slave-boy on his flute.

The girl and the bear were gaily applauded. And Pig-For-Honey was appropriately rewarded.

If most of her English guests naturally wished that they had not accepted Chenn-yi No's invitation, and passionately resolved never to accept any such other, they gave no sign that they did, not even the women.

Perhaps they whispered it to each other now and then, but not in the *k'o-tang*, not where they could be overheard.

Chenn-yi No and Chenn-yi Wang wished passionately that those invitations never had been sent.

But here they all were.

And they all played the game.

Talk of their peril was taboo in their *k'o-tang* hours. But, of course, they harked back to it, as most do to any subject they have resolved to avoid.

Peril still was at the gate. None of them doubted that the aid Paul Trench had bespoken would come.

But would it come soon enough?

Would it come before the wall broke?

Father Blatchford was the most sanguine of them all.

"One miracle has been given us; we should not doubt that the much more conclusive miracle will reach us, and in time."

Lois looked at the priest curiously, but did not speak.

"Yes, my child?"

But she would not ask him here. Perhaps she would some day when they were alone.

She questioned Paul Trench instead—so softly that no one else heard.

"Do you believe in miracles, Uncle Paul?"

"No; except as everything is miracle, life itself the greatest miracle. But I'd like to be able to perform them."

"Perform what, Mr. Trench?" Mrs. Wilson-Adare had caught Paul's last sentence.

“Miracles,” he told her.

“If you could perform just one miracle, what would it be?” Lois Allingham asked him, the next day.

They were alone in the garden, gathering flowers for Kwan Yin’s votive-table.

“International justice,” Paul told her instantly.

“You mean, for China!”

“For every race and place. China first, I own. But my miracle would give justice between all peoples.”

“Will it ever come?”

“Not in my time, not in yours. Not for eons of time, I think. Equity for China! Not until China makes it and *wrests* it! There is a good deal of international sentimentality for China now, here and there. Some of it’s downright maudlin. There are not too many just men, Lois. Nor are there many—if any—unselfishly just races. Americans are flattered, because China has modeled her Republic on theirs. But what will the United States sacrifice for China? And why should she? Of us all, she has wronged China least. If China—true China, the great stumbling Chinese people—ever gets justice, it will be because the other nations are not strong enough to withhold it from her.”

“Are Europeans to be subjected to this?” Lois gestured towards the distant wall.

“China did not ask us to come! China does not directly ask us to stay—though probably our leaving *en masse* (which we won’t) would be the greatest ill that could befall China *just now*. And, Lois, do keep this in mind always—a fact that nine out of ten foreigners, especially in their home papers, ignore. Most Chinese outrages are directed against Chinese. Very few of them are directed against Chinese *and* foreigners. Still fewer solely against foreigners. This, for instance, is a Chinese attack upon a Chinese home. I’d wager heavily that not one of those poor fellows out there, until they saw a few of us on the wall, had any idea that there was a white man here. I’ll wager that not half of them ever had seen a white man. And I’d wager that a good fourth of them never heard of the West or of Westerns. To millions of Chinese, living to-day, Japanese are the *only* foreigners, if they have heard of even them. We subjected to this! We subject ourselves to it. What about the Chinese sash-wearers, and other orderly Chinese, who are subjected to it, against whom it is directed? Do you realize what all of it is about—this banditry that is so much of China’s internal scourge? Food! Nothing but food. The bandits don’t enjoy themselves. They are desperate with hunger. I doubt if one of them out there would not be a decent citizen, a kind and amiable man, to-morrow, if he and his had

enough to eat. Destroy famine in China, and you will have destroyed banditry and piracy!”

“You are a splendid partizan, Nunky!” Lois looked at him with laughing eyes. “But you admit—I’ve heard you—that there *are* inferior Chinese!”

“Many. There are grades everywhere. If all Chinese were of one quality, the Chinese would be an uninteresting people. But you take my word for it, Monkey, there’ll be grades in Heaven, and probably cliques!”

“I wonder what Father Blatchford would say to that?”

“Probably, ‘Hear! Hear!’ Blatchford is a thoroughly reasonable man. And Rome itself is logical, Lois.”

Lois gathered a great tawny lily, careful to take a few of its leaves too, because she had a sense of fitness, and because she had been well drilled by Trench himself and by many Chinese gardeners, in the proverb “Though the peony be beautiful it must be supported by green leaves.” Then she gathered another flower. And still made no reply. Paul was getting a little beyond her depth.

But Trench went on: saying what he wished to say, as old people rather selfishly do, irrespective of what others wish to hear.

That was oddly unlike Paul Trench.

“As for extraterritoriality, Lois, it wasn’t the first wrong we did China, it won’t be the last! An intolerable humiliation forced upon China, and somewhat forced upon us, by circumstances. It is a great human fester that won’t be cured by a sprinkle of *eau de Cologne*, or yet by a plaster of words. The most difficult question going to-day! Its ramifications and complexities are bemazing. You can’t get hold of it. I know nothing else as impossible thoroughly to understand except an English Income Tax form.”

The girl cut a rose before she spoke.

“Uncle Paul,” she asked him, “do you think that I am more English or more Chinese?”

Trench wished that she had not asked it. He had evaded it more than once.

After a moment he said, “On the whole, more Chinese.”

His answer disappointed Lois Allingham. Trench saw that it did.

“A daughter is of her father’s ancestry,” Lois said. “Chinese law teaches that.”

“Chinese law, yes. But law cannot alter fact. Nature stands. And this,” he added more lightly, “is woman’s day—even in China. Mothers have equal rights, even of bequeathal, with fathers.”

“Do they? In spite of Nature?”

“Perhaps because of Nature.”

"Come! We'll take her flowers to Kwan now," Lois said.

At night in the *k'o-tang* there were no sub-divisions. Talk and interest were general. They all shared the quiet and respite, as they had all shared the hot brunt and anxious strife.

The cares that infested their day did not steal away, but they took a breath. It was conspiracy of relaxation and gathering-up of new strength and added patience: tired nerves braced, torn nerves a little healed, tension comforted, blistering weariness and cracking suspense wisely medicined by music, laved by friendship.

But at day Lois was selfish, claiming Paul for her own. No one grudged it either of them. The unusual bond between them was so unmistakable and so beautiful. They spent hour after hour together, out in the garden, the girl tending the flowers, Trench helping her when he could.

But they were not together when it happened.

Trench was alone.

As most of his life he had lived!

Rescue came.

English men and Chinese soldiers far too many for the rabble horde outside the wall to attempt to resist.

The bandits got away as fast and as far as they could, cursing each other, pushing the weaker out of the way, venting anger, disappointment and defeat on one another.

A handful of them, braver or more foolish than their fellows, made one last desperate attempt, on a far part of the wall.

They had been smoking poppy. An infatuated coolie woman had procured it for them. The poppy glow was still on them, and its after-imbecility.

They lurched against the wall, lurched at random at its weakest spot.

The wall gave.

The man who had been on guard there had gone, called to the gate by Chenn-yi Wang's whistle.

He had seen the bandits go.

The patrols on the wall had reported all clear.

Chenn-yi Wang threw the great-gate open, to welcome those who came marching orderly, carrying the Republic's five-colored flag, and carrying the Union Jack; the British flag older in China than the Kuomintang flag was; the British flag that had marched on Peking in troubled 1900, and had come to the beleaguered Legations only just in time.

Chenn-yi Wang summoned all his people to attend him and Chenn-yi No at his welcoming of the help that tramped to him, nearer and nearer along the obscure gnarled path, swinging along in soldierly order through the ever green bamboos and the autumn-crimsoned maple trees, through the autumn-painted oak trees.

Even the eunuchs came in response to the master's twice-blown whistle, came more willingly than they had neared the great-gate for many days.

And no one watched on the wall.

The opium-soaked and -strengthened bandits—half a score—rushed violently against the wall, and fell through it.

Thrown by their own violent impact, they fell in the moat—all but one—and swam and spluttered and swore: those that could swim. Not all of them could. Those who could not fared ill.

The bandit who had not tumbled into the water—he was only a lad—crouched back against the wall, and looked about him with dazed, vacant eyes.

There was nothing to see but a field of rape and a wood of tulip-trees; no sign of booty or of food, no vines heavy with purple grapes.

Disappointed and baffled, he watched his friends struggling in the water, and laughed at them.

The first to sink was another lad from his own village, and of his kin. But the boy on the moat's narrow edge made no effort to help the boy who was sinking and screaming for help. It is unlucky to save one who is drowning. It enrages the water-devils waiting for human prey. The water-demons are determined cannibals. And if you deprive them of a human feast about to be theirs, sooner or later they will contrive to suck you down to their water fastness, and banquet on you instead of on him you weakly rescued.

The boy, crouched against the wall, felt that his luck was sufficiently out already. He was sorry to see his comrade drown, but he thought that the poor terror-writhed, agonized wretch looked delightfully funny, and he shrieked and gurgled with mirth.

Some of the bandits got out of the moat, some did not.

Those that managed to clamber out, thought better—if they thought at all—of taking the great *chia* unarmed, almost single-handed, or of even exploring it farther than they already had. They lurched back through the hole in the wall, and crawled away as inconspicuously as they could.

The boy at the wall did not follow them. He saw the rough flight of sheer, shallow steps a few feet away, and went to it, and climbed up on to the wall.

The spirit of adventure was with him still—and the courage of fumes of poppy.

He fingered the pistol in his belt.

It was loaded.

Trench had not gone with the others to the gate.

He disliked fuss.

He had seen the allies come to Legation Street in that sore August of 1900. He winced to remember what he had lost there before they came. He shrank from a visual reminder of what he never forgot for an hour.

He rejoiced that the rescue party had come—in time.

He had had little doubt that it would.

He would shake hands with some of them presently, when things had quieted down.

Now he would stroll about the grounds, help himself to fruit, and taste the flowers.

The bandit saw the English man walking nonchalantly from the tulip-trees.

Trench saw only a kingfisher flash its exquisite turquoise across the yellow rape.

The bandit aimed well—then pelted down where he had climbed up, pushed through the hole, and made for his vanished companions.

Paul Trench fell at the foot of a tulip-tree.

His death was merciful.

He felt nothing.

But he spoke as he died.

“Alice! Yes; I am coming!”

Then he slept.

Trench slept as placidly as a child; a tulip flower in his hand. But the smile on his happy face was the smile of a bridegroom.

CHAPTER XLIII

He was found by accident.

No one had missed him yet.

The women who loved him found Paul Trench: she who loved him with the daughter-devotion he richly had earned, another who had given the unsolicited, terribly pathetic autumnal love of lonely old age.

Mary Saunders, tired of the *chia*'s excitement, wandered away from it aimlessly.

She found Paul first.

The woman knelt down, and practical—as the women of her caliber always are—she made sure that he was dead.

Quite dead!

Lois Allingham went out to gather flowers, and to give Pig-For-Honey a good-night pat. There would be no dancing in the *k'o-tang* to-night.

The garden lured her. It was quiet and lovely. The smell of it was delicious.

She was humming a lilt she loved as she came through the tulip-trees.

She never will hum "The Blue Danube" again, never will waltz again to her favorite music.

"The Danube" froze on her trembling lips.

But she did not cry out.

Mary Saunders was nursing the dead man, caressing his silver hair, crooning to him brokenly.

The woman was convulsed and shattered. Her streaming eyes were wild.

The girl who longed to go to him turned away, and went slowly toward the great house.

Mary Saunders should have her hour.

And she never would make fun of Lady Saunders again, or forgive any one who did.

She went very slowly—to give the more time.

But she had to tell.

A sobbing, wailing woman, no longer young, could not be left through the night out by the tulip-trees. The nights were cool now.

It was no matter to Paul how long he lay out by the tulip-trees!

She told it quietly.

She found Wên T'ien, and sent him to find Cotterel and bring him to her.

When they came she told them.

She did not tell them all.

But she told them where to go; and told them to go alone.

Paul Trench had not weighed much.

They buried the frail old English man, who had loved China, in the burial-garden of the Chenn-yis.

The leaders of the rescue party wished to take the dead man's body back to Shanghai, or to his home in Mo-kan-shan.

Lois Allingham forbade it. And they obeyed her.

"Chenn-yi Wang offers a grave here. He, I know, would rather have it so. He was English to the core. But he gave China a great love."

In the most honorable part of the old clan's scrupulously cared for graveyard they laid him down to rest until Gabriel's trump called him to come from An-hwei.

The great gong on the carved white marble terrace bleated his requiem; tolled his passing.

The grave was lined with porphyry and white Ningpo wood, with lacings of amber and sandalwood.

No honor that Chenn-yi Wang could pay was withheld from Paul Trench.

He still held a tulip-tree blossom in one beautiful hand.

Father Blatchford had slipped a sacred relic—a possession the priest greatly prized—in the other, and had laid a cross on the dead man's quiet breast.

A princely, beautiful smile still rested on the fine lips that Lois had kissed in their coldness.

She and another woman had laid the flowers about him, and had cushioned his wearied feet on roses.

Chenn-yi No had given him a jewel.

They wrapped the Imperial flag about him, folding it across his coffin; the five-clawed dragon guarding him.

A golden trumpet sounded an English Last Post.

Mary Saunders dropped the first flowers into his grave, Lois let the last ones fall.

English hands filled the grave with Chinese bamboos and willows and with sprays of tulip-tree.

And when the gravestone was lifted and placed the women slipped sadly away—all but two.

At a whisper from Cotterel and from Wên T'ien the men saluted Paul Trench, and followed them from the burial place of the Chenn-yis.

Lois Allingham and Lady Saunders lingered a little longer—side by side, quiet in

suffering.

After a few quiet moments the girl turned and went slowly towards the stone animals—facing them, waiting so—and left the older woman standing there alone.

Then they too left him—a great English gentleman alone in China.

Chenn-yi No's house-party broke up gently, very sadly.

The English guests took a solemn leave of her. They knew they should not come again.

The Chinese guests too went at once, all but Wên T'ien and Wên O-he and a man who was close of Chenn'-yi No's birth kin.

For added sorrow had come to the house of Chenn-yi Wang.

Cotterel had noticed at the grave-side that Chenn-yi Wang's face had stiffened oddly, had seen his leg suddenly jerk, and the arm above it twitch convulsively.

Chenn-yi Wang left the grave with the others, leaning heavily on his sticks, dragging a foot ominously.

A few steps past the first stone giant that sentineled the graves of the Chenn-yis—a gigantic two-headed elephant with a bejeweled, enameled, spread-tailed peacock on his back—they lifted him, and carried him to the great red bed.

Chenn-yi Wang will not walk again. His ivory sticks are useless. His sight is dimming. But his wife gives him her eyes. His speech is thick and difficult. But she always can hear him. His hearing and his touch are unimpaired—better than ever, he sometimes tells her. Her voice is his music. And the sounds of wind and rain, the birds outside, Tiger and Flower romping at play, companion him.

And when the man's hand and his woman's lie close in each other there is nothing but happiness in the chamber of the great red bed.

An old Chinese woman, ignorant, who can neither read nor write, full of prejudice, absurd with fantastic whims, sometimes salt with tantrums, moving slowly on crippled feet, praying to heathen gods—when she is not angry with them—locked in her father's wall until they gave her in marriage to a stranger, locked in her husband-and-master's *chia*, never to leave it, not even when she goes to lie in her husband's coffin over there where the great stone animals, snakes and birds guard the avenue that leads to the Chenn-yi Cyprus-walled garden of tombs! Ignorant! Curtailed! Undeveloped! Unemancipated! A human chattel! She never has belonged to a club. She never has heard of a Vote, still less had one.

And yet—and yet—

CHAPTER XLIV

At the Sussex boarding-school there had been a romantic girl named Lilian Smith, rather simpering, quite pretty, who “loved poetry,” thought highly of her own dramatic ability, and imagined many boys and several men in love with her.

Her pleasant, self-flattering beliefs were absurdly exaggerated, but they had more truth than such schoolgirl fancies usually had.

At least two boys looked upon her with sheepish favor; the older admirers of her imagination were entirely fictitious. She had a clear, not unmusical voice, and she enunciated. You could hear what she said. There was not the making of an actress in her, but she “recited” inoffensively. If she drawled, she didn’t shout. She loved to recite. Her recitations were quiet and sentimental; most of the other girls tolerated them, some of them liked them.

Her favorite lines were lines of Mrs. Browning’s.

She liked them above all other poetry—from Sappho to Tennyson—the little she’d read—because she considered them so “weirdly applicable” to her lureful self.

She repeated them so often, that she cheapened them, as the pigmies can and constantly do cheapen the giants. Every other girl there grew sick of them, came to dislike them—even the next most sentimental girl in the school.

Lois Allingham never had liked Lilian Smith. And had not thought of her for years.

Betty Monroe had disliked Lilian violently, and more than once had threatened to shake her.

As they went from the *chia*, Cotterel walking beside her litter, his hand on its side, Lois suddenly thought of Lilian Smith, and of the lilting verse of which Lilian had so wearied them all.

“Sweet, thou hast trod on a heart.
Pass! there’s a worldful of men,
And women as fair as thou art
Must do such things now and then.”

Lois Allingham winced.

Her heart ached for Wên T’ien.

Their parting had been hard; and all the harder to her, because Wên T’ien had taken it so quietly, had been so kind.

Yesterday she had convinced him that she had only a kindly friendliness for him

—the other had been a mistake—and that she never could give him more than friendliness.

She had been able to do it, because she now had learned it herself.

She knew now that Henry Cotterel was more to her than any Chinese man ever could be.

And she knew that she was English.

When the relieving party had come, English and Chinese side by side to the rescue, carrying the Union Jack and the Chinese flag, her heart had leapt to the English flag; the men who carried it were hers. It was to them, and to the flag they carried, that her soul quickened and was grateful. She was all English, solely the child of her father's race; and she was homesick. She was Lois Allingham now; she never would be Lo-ees again.

It had grieved her to leave Chenn-yi No and Chenn-yi Wang. She had not liked saying good-by to Playful Tiger and Bamboo Flower, or to Li Bo, Lao Ten, Min Ming, Ki Lee and Pig-For-Honey. But she was going home! She was going joyously—home to England; England-in-China: her father's home in Mo-kan-shan.

They had let her go readily enough—all but Pig-For-Honey and Wên T'ien.

Chenn-yi No was engrossed with her lord. He scarcely knew that Lo-ees went. Flower and Tiger had each other, a sackful of new toys and Wên T'ien. Li Bo and Lao Ten had the servitude that they loved. In the service of the Chenn-yis they needed nothing else.

Because Wên T'ien had shown so little that he suffered, had said good-by with such sunny cordiality, she sensed that he suffered greatly. She feared that his suffering might be irreparable. (Betty was not there to tell her that no man's suffering is that. For once Betty Monroe would have been wrong.) It had knifed Lois Allingham to say good-by—and the else she had had to say—to Wên T'ien.

It all was over now!

She was going home.

Henry Cotterel's hand was on the edge of her palanquin.

"Trod on a heart!"

She was afraid so.

She wished that she had not.

She never would do that again.

For all the rest of her life she would be very careful.

And presently—when the *chia* was long out of sight—she "put up her proud underlip," and chatted softly with the man walking beside her.

They got to Mo-kan-shan a few hours before Edward Allingham did.

Neither he nor his girl could speak when they met.

For several days they did not *say* much to each other.

There was no need.

For several days Mo-kan-shan had the grace to leave Allingham and Lois alone. Sin Fong saw to that. Sin Fong accepted cards and flowers, but no one got past him.

The Monroes were in Shanghai. Charles Monroe had gone to his sister.

Cotterel did not call, nor did George Fairfax. They believed that they would be invited when they were wanted.

They were.

When they got there Lady Saunders was there before them.

To Cotterel's relief, she was not wearing mourning.

And he soon found that Lady Saunders was as brusque, assertive and ruthless as ever.

But affection between her and Lois Allingham was patent.

An-hwei was not mentioned at dinner or after.

The Allinghams were sailing for England in a few weeks.

Cotterel threw Lois a smile that told her that he made a mental note.

No, indeed, Lady Saunders was not going to England. She was still for the pagoda trees. She was going to take precautions. But she was staying. She was going to buy and sell, going to do both profitably: the finest game in the world. But she was going to enjoy herself in other ways too. For one thing, she was going down to Fuh-kien by-and-by to visit her friend Mrs. Wên—a charming creature.

And that was the nearest they went towards speaking of the Chenn-yis or of the bad time in their *chia*.

Lois and her father never spoke at any length or detail of the disastrous end of her moon-year with Chenn-yi No.

Most of what Allingham learned of that, he heard from Henry Cotterel.

After all, it was no unusual story in China now.

Famine and banditry stalked hand-in-hand. Soviet Russia did what mischief it could. Extraterritoriality still festered: China's sore. Western vacillation and thickheaded misunderstanding still tangled and damaged in China, as they were tangling and damaging in India.

The hungry bandits thrusting at the gate of Chenn-yi Wang were but one small incident: a tug-of-war between stomachs well-clad inside and out, stomachs filled with warm rice, and stomachs miserably filled with uncooked twigs and sour wind,

itching outside, aching and rumbling and cold within.

Cotterel told Allingham all he could of Paul Trench's death. One thing about it, naturally he did not tell.

Lois and her father spoke of Trench often—when they were alone; but always of Paul in years that were gone, never of his death.

Allingham was rejoiced to see how little her ordeal at the *chia* had marked Lois.

She seemed radiantly happy.

Henry Cotterel haunted their bungalow.

Allingham was content that Cotterel did.

"I am going home on your boat—if you don't mind," Cotterel said at once when Allingham first mentioned the date and the boat of their sailing.

The three were together—the two men with their after-tiffin cigarettes—out on the Allinghams' shady veranda.

Lois looked surprised. It was beautifully done.

"Do!" Allingham replied promptly.

Cotterel looked at Lois. He could not catch her eye.

"What about Red Bridges?" Miss Allingham asked carelessly, without looking up, tinkling the tiny spoon idly against the side of her empty coffee cup.

"It will be taken care of. I shall not part with Red Bridges."

"Several would give you a good price for it," Edward Allingham said.

"Who'll you trust to look after it properly?" Lois demanded. "The jewel of a place will want a lot of being taken care of, and the right sort of it."

"It isn't for sale," Cotterel answered Mr. Allingham.

"Yes; it will indeed," Cotterel agreed with Lois Allingham heartily. "Who? I'll give the job to Ao Chan. He'll do it all right—and for as long as he has it to do."

Lois Allingham looked up at him then. Her eyes danced at him.

"My! You have come to think rather well of the Chinese people, haven't you!" she told him mockingly.

"It has some very fine specimens. I'll swear to that," Henry Cotterel said emphatically.

"Yes," Mr. Allingham commented, "I believe that you can trust Ao Chan."

"I am sure of it," Cotterel said confidently.

"Do you realize what a lot of things, big and small, you've got at Red Bridges?" the girl asked. "It will be a job—the inventory," she added.

"There will be no inventory," Cotterel told her lazily. "I trust Ao Chan absolutely."

"Oh—of course! To be sure, you do; he is Chinese."

Cotterel laughed back at her, and went to her to strike a match for her, and smiled into her eyes as he bent over her.

The girl frowned a little at her cigarette as she smoked it; and she smoked silently, and left the rest of the chat to the two men. And when she had finished the one cigarette she slipped quietly away.

Had Henry Cotterel's fingers trembled just a suspicion as they held the match to her? When men grew even a little humble—the dominant, self-sufficient ones—the flag was down.

Did he care *enough*, at last?

Did she care enough?

Not for anything would she ever tread on a heart again.

Wên T'ien's heart under her shoe had felt—Even remembering it was sickening.

Or, if he did not care enough, and she did—enough and too much! That would hurt and would humiliate her too. She'd flinch from both: "a stone that tripped her, a thorn that rent!"

Did she want him to come on their boat?

She thought so, but she wasn't sure.

But Henry Cotterel was sure.

He didn't know that his fingers had trembled a little. It would have angered him, if he had. But he knew that his heart jerked, and he was neither angry nor ashamed that it did.

All his life, when a woman had attracted him, and he had wondered if he might be going to care for a woman at last, and seriously, he always had asked himself, "Would she be an asset or a liability?" He no longer asked it of Lois Allingham; or thought of it. She was the woman he wanted, the one thing in life that he wanted tenderly; that was all.

CHAPTER XLV

Paul Trench's bungalow was Lois' now, and everything in it. He had left her all that he had.

"I am going to take Fu Shên home with me, and his chess, his pipes and jades, a book or two and a few other things. He loved them, and he often touched them. I shall like to touch them sometimes," she told Henry Cotterel.

They were alone in Trench's garden.

The tulip-tree was in bloom.

Lois broke a bud off gently, and put it at her breast.

"I hate to sell his home that he loved. But I think I'd better—and his bungalow at Shanghai. I don't think we'll be back in China for a long time—perhaps never. And I believe he'd rather the bungalows were lived in."

"You might give them," Cotterel suggested.

"For little hospitals, or rest homes, something of that sort?"

Cotterel nodded.

"Father suggested that. But I won't do that. I can't. I don't want pain, illness, all that sort of thing to come into his homes. I want them to be homes—living homes—not patch-up places. Perhaps I ought to do it; but I am not going to."

"But how can you tell that the people you sell to won't be unhappy, fall ill, quarrel?"

"No; I can't, can I? But there'll be a chance that they won't. Just a chance; and that's about as near security of happiness as most people ever come!"

"No; it is not!" Cotterel swung round on her, moving in front of her, barring the path. "Only fools let happiness escape them. See it! Then snatch it! And hold it!" he said firmly. "We are not going to let it escape us—now or ever!"

He caught her to him.

He smothered her face with his. He covered it with imperative kisses.

There was more fierceness than tenderness in this English wooing, which did not ask but took: an over-mastering that defied refusal.

His mouth and his hands found her throat and stamped it his, branding love's triumph and red on its delicate softness.

Her throat! The last favor a Chinese woman ever yields—if ever.

Wên T'ien for moons would not have dared look at his wife's throat.

Henry Cotterel gathered her hair in his defiant fingers, and kissed it *his*. He closed her eyes with peremptory fingers, and kissed the lids. He kissed the dimpled

arms.

Then back to her mouth!

Neither spoke.

Lois did not move.

Cotterel lifted her, and carried her—crushing her face with the warmth of his cheek upon it—to the dragon-carved stone bench under the ash trees.

Still they did not speak.

Life's ultimate moment throbbed away mating's first betrothal sweetness.

Lois trembled—almost too much happiness; shaken with the sweetness of utter content. Sweeter than the heliotrope and the tuber-roses growing beside the old stone seat, sweeter than the flowers that bridaled the gracious old orange tree, with a few globes of gold and of pale green among its deep emerald leaves. The orange tree was in flower and in fruit. But its blossoms were most.

"Dearest of all created things!" The man trembled too as he spoke. His voice was husky: broken by the turbulence of pounding emotion.

He was tender now.

Her lover's fingers were slow and gentle over her face, across her palms, on the soft throat.

Again possessing and anticipation surged.

"Kiss me!" the man commanded.

"Not for years and years," the girl in his arms whispered against his shoulder.

The man, with one hand on her chin, twisted her face about to his.

"You will!" he told her. "I'll make you kiss me—in less than a week!"

Lois Allingham believed him.

No one in Mo-kan-shan was surprised.

"A shame," a penniless girl told the penniless man to whom she was engaged, "that two such fortunes should marry!"

But no one was really displeased.

George Fairfax tried to be glad—and went to Tokio.

Mary Saunders cried a little.

Edward Allingham's eyes glowed deeply.

In Shanghai Betty Monroe sat at home more than she ever had before, more quiet than she ever had been, and sang softly as she sewed.

Edward Allingham had written her of the engagement several days before Lois did. All the world might have read Allingham's short letter—little more than a note. But with it he had sent Betty a gift; a costly white fan fit for a royal bride on the

wedding day.

Betty never thanked him for it.

But she caressed it with lingering fingers.

She sat alone as much as Char would let her—she liked best to be alone—and sang as she sewed.

“I thought you hated to sew,” her brother protested.

“Time I learned!” she told him severely.

In Mo-kan-shan, for a moon, a man and a woman were entirely happy; superbly happy, selfishly happy, undoubtingly happy.

Cotterel had not loved before.

He was making up for it now.

Lois filled his life—heart, body and soul. He was entirely hers.

He filled hers.

Even her father paled a little in her happiness that engrossed her.

And Allingham knew that he did; and was glad.

One odd new thing had come to her: sometimes now she was both Lois and Lo-ees at once. But it did not trouble her. There was no room in her heart for trouble. And Lois and Lo-ees, who were one, both loved Henry Cotterel.

Their cup brimmed.

They drank and drank.

But the nectar did not diminish by even one golden drop.

They were wholly conscious of little but each other.

They were quickly conscious of each other.

The almond flowers were nuts.

The flame flowers were ripe, very red.

The asters were in bud.

Their cup was full. Neither had a doubt or a care.

They were going home together—with Edward Allingham a happy but insignificant third: loved but forgotten; grateful to be loved, glad to be forgotten.

They were going home to England together; to be married in England.

Always to love China; Lois for several reasons, Cotterel because he had found her there—as that he had come to her there was her chief and overwhelming reason always to love China.

But China only a hazy, if tender, dream.

“Let us be married here—now!” Henry Cotterel had asked; almost as a matter of course.

But he had not urged it.

For he scarcely had regretted, if he had regretted, when Lois had said, No; that she would be married only in England.

His wish matched hers in that.

The delay would be short.

And he knew enough of human life to know that these love-days of theirs held and gave a peculiar sweetness that the happiest marriage must lack. He knew that possession, the fullest and happiest, would be robbed of something of the exquisite sweetness of longing.

Chenn-yi Wang a husband and Chenn-yi No his wife could have told him better than that. They could have told Henry Cotterel that there is marriage whose every day is a bridal.

But such marriage is rare.

What Cotterel believed, holds, as a rule.

Cotterel was willing to wait—the little longer.

Edward Allingham wondered if Lois' mixed blood ever had been mentioned between them.

It was.

Allingham himself had spoken of it to Cotterel—of it and of its possible consequences. And Henry Cotterel had answered as Allingham, almost guiltily, had hoped that he would.

Though they had spoken with reserve, as Englishmen do, they did not mince matters. They did not exaggerate or extenuate.

As to the Chinese strain in Lois—not only clear on the face, but strong in her ways and tastes—Cotterel laughed away her father's suggestion that it might be an inconvenience, cause uncongeniality. Lois was perfect! The "difference" was exquisite—an added fascination in a girl that needed none, God knew! If she got homesick for China—well, what of it? Nothing! He'd bring her, whenever she wished and as often. Luckily they could afford to come first-class! No; it would not bore or bother him. He liked China. Ripping place. It was right that Lois should cling to her mother's country. And he was not marrying Lois to cramp her life or to thwart her. He loved her too much to do that. And he was too proud of her. Mr. Allingham could trust him.

Edward Allingham did. But he was trying to play the game—man to man.

Yes; Cotterel admitted, when Allingham spoke of children that might be born, he would regret it if a child of his were more Chinese than English, much more Chinese

than English. That wasn't likely, of course, but he knew that it did occur—even after several generations. He hoped it wouldn't, that was all. He took the risk, knowing that there was the risk. And he wouldn't shirk, or resent it meanly, if it happened.

There might not be children.

"It is the modern tendency," the older man said.

"A good deal to be said for it when there isn't enough money or health, or decent character to be inherited from both sides," Cotterel said. "But I don't like it. Do you, sir?"

"I'm not very sure."

"I am. Life's too good to be missed—without a strong reason. We can afford a whole quiverful. And ought to give health as well as welcome, if the youngsters came to us. And selfishly, I'll be sorry if none does—and more sorry on my wife's account than on my own."

"Lois is fond of children," her father owned.

"I don't mean that, sir. I mean when we both are old—and one of us dead some day. For myself I want nothing but her. I believe that I never shall. But it's a bad business when a man and woman, who have grown old together, cared a great deal for each other, cared more and more all the time, and one of them dies and the other poor old thing is left all alone. No one who belongs to them to be near them. No child, no grandchild. Bad enough for an old boy! Nearly intolerable for an old woman!"

Allingham nodded.

But he added, "Children are disappointing sometimes, and so are grandchildren—rather apt to leave you in the lurch."

"Ours would not be!"

Edward Allingham laughed.

"As long as we both live, I'll look after Lois," Henry Cotterel said earnestly.

"I believe you, Cotterel. If I did not, I'd want to cut my throat on her wedding day!"

"And cut mine first, I hope!"

"Especially yours!"

They left it at that.

Other intimacies than those of touch and glance grew between the lovers: the sound intimacies of confidence given and accepted, thoughts shared.

Lois Allingham told Cotterel the truth about Wên T'ien.

Cotterel did not like it.

But he loved Lois.

And he loved her for trusting him with it.

Then he brushed it aside; first with her hand close in his, then with his lips on hers.

"Girls all have such fancies. They only mean they're growing up. Most boys do too; puppy love, you know. I don't remember that I had, but I may."

"It was only yesterday," she reminded him sadly—very bravely.

For Lois Allingham loved this man dearly. She knew that it would hurt her intolerably to lose him. And it would hurt her almost more to have his estimate of her lessened or cheapened.

Cotterel kissed her hand gently.

"It was the place, and all that, darling. No one else there. The whole wonderful old place picture and magic—and Wên such a splendid fellow. I won't have you blame yourself. And I won't have you tormented by it, or by anything else—now or ever."

He kissed her again, gently—but not her hand.

She had made her only confession.

And her man absolved her.

(Would Chinese Wên T'ien, traveled though he was, have done that? If his rôle and Cotterel's had been reversed?)

Some days after that she spoke of her half-caste blood.

And Cotterel had the wisdom and tact to let her say all that she would.

"You shrank from it at first," she reminded him.

"Yes, dear."

Lois loved him that he did not deny it.

Cotterel could not deny it; for he was an honest man. And he did not mean to introduce dishonesty between them.

"Now would you rather it were not so?"

"Yes," he answered. It was his turn to make confession. And English Cotterel did not shirk.

He wished that all this had not occurred to Lois. But it had, and he met it fairly and quite squarely.

"Why?"

Cotterel hesitated; embarrassed by a question that was hard to answer because the answer he finally gave her was true.

"I don't quite know. Perhaps," he added slowly, thinking it out aloud, as well as he could think it out at all, "perhaps because it seems to divide us a little. *Seems* to,

mind you; nothing ever can divide us, but even the seeming's a bore. Hang it all! It isn't! It's a delicious piquancy, like the tobasco on oysters, an added thrill. And it isn't anything! We are each other's. Going to be tremendously happy. That's that. And it's all there is about it. You are my world. And if I am not yours, I shall smack you, Mrs. Cotterel. You are my whole world—'round like an orange and flat at both ends.' Learn that at your first school? I did."

Cotterel took his world in his arms and hugged it tenderly.

"Flat at both ends!" he told her, patting the top of her little head.

"It is a barrier!" Lois said gravely when he had released her. "Harry, barriers—between husband and wife—are bad, hard things. Shall we call it off? Because of our barrier?"

"Lois!"

"Would you feel the same if I were French or German or Spanish—half I mean?"

"Of course I should!"

"But less!"

Henry Cotterel did not answer.

"Look here, my own one, there is no 'feel' about it. I don't *feel* it—and there's nothing to feel! *This* is what I *feel*: the only fact in my life."

He took her again, and held her close, put his lips at her ear, and whispered his passionate *credo* to her so.

Lois flushed, and clung to him.

"There is one thing," she told him some minutes after that, "that I never realized until the other day. It seems incredible that I haven't; but I haven't. I don't think I'm very intelligent, Harry."

Her lover laughed.

"Not a very bad fool perhaps—for a girl—but I certainly am not intellectual."

"Do you consider *me* intellectual?"

"Oh, no," she answered promptly.

"That's all right then. We fit. For one, I thank God that we are not intellectual. All right for folk who like it. Not my fancy!"

"There are people—a great many—who think there's something disgraceful in being a half-caste. I overheard something the other day that Mary Hill said to Mrs. Anderson. It made me think. It made me understand more than I ever had before. Father has sheltered me so!"

Cotterel laid his face on her hair.

"Will you be ashamed, *ever ashamed*, of having a half-caste wife?"

Cotterel put her a little away, drew back from her far enough to look squarely into her eyes. He folded his hands together on his knee.

“Never!”

The gravity of his face was an oath.

Then he smiled: a smile that a girl well might be proud to have won from the man she loved. Lois was proud, grateful, glad.

“But at first, when you first realized that I was half Chinese, you believed that you’d be ashamed of a half-caste wife, if you were weak enough to have one; which you had no intention of being; no fear of it.”

Cotterel did not assent to that. But he did not deny it.

“Might that feeling not come back, Harry? Perhaps after years—perhaps very soon, when you saw people looking at me, and whispering?”

“No!”

“Why? How do you know? We can’t tell how we’ll feel a year from now, let alone a lifetime from now. No one can. I can’t tell how I’ll feel next week!”

“Why do I know that I’ll never be such a putrid ass? I can’t tell you that, because I don’t know. But I know: know that next to my love for you and my happiness in our being together, indissolvably together, always the biggest thing in my life will be my pride in you. Look and whisper! Probably. Folk look with sudden surprise at the Sistine, and at the Taj—and whisper. I’ve known men to speak in whispers when they watched the sun rise over Kanchinjinga or seen it set behind the Acropolis. Look here, Lois, are you trying to get me to jilt you or to let you jilt me? Cut it out. It can’t be done, Lois Cotterel!”

“There is something else—try to understand. It *might* be a barrier between us, no matter how much we love each other: my mixed blood. It has been a barrier to me. A hard cold thing between my self and my self! And it has been *different*—and worse—lately. I used to have a sort of dual personality, I believe. I felt all English, and then I felt all Chinese—back and forth, over and over again. Liked only English people and things, even food; then liked only Chinese things and people. I just changed over; that was all. It was a tiny inconvenience sometimes, but not much. Father was so wonderful. And I didn’t really mind it; never realized that it was uncanny. I suppose that I was too happy ever to think much. But these last few weeks it’s been different. I have been both Chinese and English at the same time. It has clashed and quarreled in me. That is what I mean by it’s being a barrier in me, a barrier between me and me. It is horrid! Do you want to marry that? Ought I to let you?”

Cotterel was troubled, badly perplexed.

He answered her in an old, old way. Perhaps it was the manliest answer he could make—under all the circumstances.

“I am going to marry that!” he told her with a laugh that was a caress. “You are not to worry. We have nothing to worry about. We are going to be supremely happy. It will pass—I’m sure it will—but if it shouldn’t, why, then; when my wife is her father’s daughter we’ll have boiled mutton and caper sauce for dinner, when she is her mother’s child we’ll have *chop suey*. I’m very fond of *chop suey*.”

He drew her into his arms again. And held there, Lois believed him.

And Cotterel hugged to him the old, unaccountable belief—perhaps a masculine vanity too—that marriage is a wizard potent to bring chemical and biological changes; brings them inevitably—stronger than ancestry, stronger than nature, stronger than life itself.

She had told him all now.

And with her confessing of it, the thing itself seemed to have passed. In putting it into words she had put it far more clearly than until then it had been in her mind. Lois Allingham never had been thoughtful. Her mind was not profound, not her most vital belonging. And she had said truly enough that all her life she had been too happy to think much. Edward Allingham had paid that!

Telling it had purged it—as telling so often does; at least with youth.

Her own words, not easy to speak, seemed to have sponged it all from her moderate mind.

Happiness had healed a sick fancy. It troubled her no more.

Halcyon day followed halcyon day.

She believed that Harry never would fail her. She believed that she never would fail him.

Fear was dead; a foolish fear! Lois Cotterel never would have cause for fear or for regret.

It was music and roses all the way with her now.

They were together.

She could hear her wedding bells.

English wedding bells!

Cotterel did not forget quite as completely. But he was very much in love.

Henry Cotterel was joyously content.

They were going to be together while they lived.

Together!

In England or in China, didn’t matter a rap to either of them—now.

Life and love pulsed and throbbed.

CHAPTER XLVI

Lois woke slowly, still smiling in the half remembering of a happy dream.

It was very early. Nothing human stirred.

The lemon trees and climbing rose-leaved geraniums out in the garden flung their perfume to her. And Lois slipped up, a little lazily, and went to the wide open window, to greet the day and thank it.

The sun's shining was more silver than gold yet.

All the day glistened shyly with the sunrise dew that filmed it.

Two love-birds were see-sawing on a purpled wisteria's leaf-lacy branch.

The girl at her window loved her garden. She would have regretted, as she stood there, that she was leaving it next week, if she had not been leaving it to cross the ocean with Henry, going home with him to their wedding day.

She blew the garden a kiss: the great umbrella of yellow roses and the stone lantern guarding the tiny white lilies, the soapstone stork guarding the green chrysanthemums beyond the tiny fish pool, the little love-birds on the swaying wisteria, the finch preening its feathers, clearing its delicate throat daintily on a great peony; turned from the window, and sat down happily at her dressing-table, to say good-morning to Henry Cotterel: her every day's first rite. Lois never failed of it.

Cotterel's portrait stood on the dressing-table, Cotterel's pleasant eyes smiling up at her from his silver frame.

It was a very special smile, strictly hers. He never gave that smile to any one else. Henry Cotterel did not smile easily. He did not strew smiles about or squander them.

Lois loved the smile he kept for her: a little whimsical, masterful, loving. The photograph told her that he had been thinking of her as he had it taken.

"Good morning!" she told him.

The picture did not answer.

But it smiled at her. The girl was satisfied. Yes; Henry was quite good-looking—not too good-looking. She loathed beauty-men. He was moderately good-looking; just right.

Lois knew that her lover thought her lovely. She was glad.

So many men had thought so—even Paul Trench one day had grudgingly owned that she was—and her own mirror said so; it must be true.

How long would she be beautiful?

What would Henry feel when she grew old and plain—perhaps ugly? Most old

women were hideous.

Even now was she half as pretty as he thought her?

Would he discover before long that she was not? If he did, how much would it disappoint him? How would it affect him?

Lois went to the long mirror, full in the light of the other window; and stood and studied herself searchingly.

Yes; she was rather lovely.

Her hands were perfect. She must not cover them with rings again. She had been so fond of rings that she had over worn them. Since their engagement she had worn but one: the great diamond flashing a dozen colors as the light flicked it.

Her eyes were nice, and her tiny, tinted ears. All her points were good. The hair he liked to upset, the happy mouth that he had kissed—How often had he?

Suddenly Lois Allingham stiffened.

With a half-cry of shame she covered her throat with her hands.

Her arms were bare, almost to the shoulder. Her costly wisp of a night-gown, trimmed with a profusion of filmy lace, cunning insets of hand-embroidery, perfumed, beribboned, was low-cut back and front.

It revealed all her dimpled slimness that it “covered” from mid-bosom to ankle. And the sheer material emphasized her every line as actual nakedness would not have done.

The girl looked at her nightdress, and at her bare arms and shoulders, with stark shocked eyes.

It was indecent.

She was indecent, improper.

(In China impropriety is even a graver misdemeanor than indecency.)

Lois did not weep, as Lo-ees had not in the *chia*.

She caught up a wrap, swathed herself in it, and sat down to think it out, fight it out.

Betty Monroe wore just such nightgowns. Half the women in the Settlement did—when they did not sleep in pyjamas. For all she knew, Lady Saunders did—unless she wore pyjamas.

But Lois Allingham was ashamed.

Why?

What was the matter with her this morning!

The girl's face twisted a little before it hardened.

She was homesick!

She was homesick for a Chinese *chia* where the musical pigeons were whirling

above the *jung-hua-shu* trees, and the peacocks strutted pompous and resplendent across the courtyards, where the incense burned in Kwan Yin's temple, and the belly-god wore a necklace of marigolds and arbutus about his neck and naked far-reaching belly; the *chia* where wild flowers grew in the crevices of the rambling great-wall, grapes plucked a year ago were fresh and sweet deep in the ground, last winter's ice, hard and cold, too in the ground. Lilies tangled in the lake. Harp-flowers quivered by the pathside. The slithering sands sang! There were *kuei* flowers in the scalding tea. Persimmons were toasting for breakfast, rice swelling in the boiling pot, and turtles roasting, peanuts and crab apples cooking, wine being warmed, and pigeon eggs clear and transparent in the aubergine broth—for breakfast!

She longed to be there.

To see Chenn-yi No and Chenn-yi Wang.

She'd like to dance with Pig-For-Honey! Would he remember her? Yes; Pig-For-Honey would remember her, and welcome her.

Wên T'ien!

To hear his voice again; she wanted that most of all.

Wên T'ien would not have forgotten—or turned his coat!

None of them, nothing there would have forgotten her.

It was she who had forgotten.

She who was half-caste!

And she sickened for it now: the *chia* and all that she had had, and had been, there!

There are no bad debts.

Sooner or later all is paid.

Lois Allingham paid.

Edward Allingham had been paying for years—would go on paying while he lived.

Yon Yee Allingham had paid years ago—paid against a debt that she had not known that she incurred.

The debt was theirs; the English man and his Chinese wife.

But even so, the payment they made was not adequate.

Lois must pay now.

Lois must pay as long as she lived.

She did not see it all now. She began to see it, seeing it dimly. Her untrained, inexperienced young mind was quick rather than acute, but she understood what she

had not understood before. And, if she saw it dimly, she felt it acutely.

Was all her life to go empty, then?

The girl shivered a little as she rose, the evening wrap still huddled close about her.

She stepped back to the dressing-table, and stood looking down gravely at Henry Cotterel's photograph.

Only last night—no, this morning; it had been past midnight—he had held her in his arms and kissed her. Her father had been with them down in the drawing-room.

So few hours ago!

She had been so happy! So confident!

She had belonged in those strong arms of his.

She had loved him!

She loved him now.

There was no revulsion from him in the girl who in self-shame still huddled the embroidered brocade about her pretty nightgown. But she longed to see Wên T'ien!

Lois Allingham was facing a situation—an experience—that many a man has faced; not a few of them good and decent men.

She loved two men.

A rare experience, perhaps, among women—though perhaps not as exceptional as one would suppose.

Many women have dual strains—though not of blood—dual needs.

Lois Allingham flushed painfully. Her English blood rebelled. Her Chinese blood was ashamed.

CHAPTER XLVII

If Paul Trench had been alive and in Mo-kan-shan, Lois would have carried it to him.

There was no one else to whom she could take it yet.

Could she go on with it—her English marriage? She believed she could. Could she be happy so married—Cotterel's wife? She thought so; felt almost sure that she'd not be unhappy. Would not this other odd thing, Chinese fever in her blood, dwindle and go in the fulfilment of marriage? She was not sure.

A few days passed.

Neither her father nor her English lover saw that she was tortured. Very girlish, sweetly shy; marriage was so near, marriage was a strangeness.

A few days passed.

And then she knew.

Lois shrank from telling Cotterel that they must undo their engagement more than she shrank from marrying him.

She was not even sure that she did shrink from the marriage.

She knew that she did shrink violently from living out her life unmarried.

Chinese blood spoke there!

The traditions and usage of long generations of Chinese gentlewomen.

And the sound primal instinct of every woman who is honest with herself.

Had she any right to let Henry marry her without telling him again, telling him of *this*—making him understand the thunderbolt that might fall? Making him understand it, if she could, the little that she understood it herself.

At least he had a right to hear, and to choose.

But her father!

Could she grieve him as she knew now that she should if she drew back from what he so cordially and tenderly approved? And she realized now *why* he had been so satisfied—pathetically glad—when they had told him! She realized that to him such a marriage would rehabilitate her socially, remove the scar he himself had given her.

Could she strike him?

Could she make him *believe* that she had changed her mind? Lots of girls did that. Could she make him think that presently Mr. Right—Mr. English Right—hers not Betty's—would really come?

Lois thought not.

She believed that her father would read it all. Her wonderful, devoted, unselfish father!

Could she give Henry Cotterel up? Let him go? Live without him! Years and years!

But she *was* homesick for the *chia*; for twenty of the small things of Chinese daily life.

And she *did* care for Wên T'ien as a wife had no right to care for any man but the man whose ring she wore, whose home she shared, whose name she bore.

Lois Allingham told Cotterel as exactly as she could.

He was distressed, a little repelled—God knows he had a right to be repelled!

He was hurt, incredulous, angry.

He showed her his pain and his incredulity. He did not show her his anger. If he did not take it quite as well as Wên T'ien had taken it at the Chenn-yi *chia*, Cotterel took it like an Englishman; and he was unfalteringly kind to the girl he loved.

Cotterel put up a good fight.

He lost.

For Lois Allingham did not leave it for him to decide.

The nights had counseled her.

She knew now that they must not go on with it. Because she loved two men, she did not love either of them enough or quite cleanly.

And she was glad to believe that, sharply as Cotterel was hurt, the hurt would not last too long. And she was bravely, loyally glad to believe that he would live to thank her, feel that he was better out of it, think of her cordially always, even with kindly tenderness; think of an escape, with relief.

Betty Monroe put away her sewing.

Edward's letter was very brief. Again, any one might have read it.

Betty made Char take her to England at once. Lois would not want her now. Presently, in England, they both would be glad to have her near them sometimes. She would be ready when they did—and waiting.

When Lois told him Allingham made no protest.

He understood.

But he never let her know that he did—he never will.

Their years will pass gaily, and in unbroken sweetness.

Edward Allingham pays.

Betty helps him.

Lois helps him exquisitely.

They are a great deal to each other; happy pals.

East and West the sun shines and tempests beat across many human vineyards.

Ancestry planted the tiny grape-seeds. Time grew many vines. Years ripened the down-hanging grapes. Sorrow and joy crush and refine. At last the wines are ready. Sweet and sour. Great wines and small. Some are thin and toneless, cheap as a woman's kiss of a woman. Some are coarse and rough but tasty, thick with flavor; peasant drink for peasant throats. Most are fairly drinkable and wholesome stuff for every day use—ordinary, a little tart perhaps but not unsound or upsetting.

And there is Vintage! Golden, and imperial purple. Joy. Sacramental. Worth its great cost.

Earth could do with more great vintages—human individuals and human races.

Earth and life are parched—they thirst.

There is a little insect that balks the vintager's harvest, threatens the cellars of the future—may yet make dull (but because we must, blameless) prohibitionists of us all. There is no phylloxera of human character, need be none of nations. But the peoples need cure. Extraterritoriality is an oidium, war is mildew.

The vintage characters are happy, because they *will not* be unhappy: great physicians of self, conquerors of pain.

Let us drink to them!

Chenn-yi No, tending, guarding her stricken husband, making his health, giving him unfailing happiness and content; Paul Trench in his faithful grave; Wên T'ien, obeying his mother, teaching his children a great commandment, a racial Shall-Not; Edward Allingham, Betty and Lois *alone*, each of them always to be alone, paying young Edward Allingham's rash debt, paying it blithely and with untarnished love!

Shanghai gossiped and shrugged—for a day.

But Kwan Yin knew, and so did English Saint George and his dragon, that they were vintage: crushed, refined, matured and perfumed by suffering, even enriched by a terrible initial blunder, a wilful self-indulgence that had disregarded and punished unborn posterity; serene now, secure, armored completely for the great pathetic fight which—not knowing what it is or why—since we must call it something, we call Life.

London.

October 27, 1930.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

On Page 175, a line from the previous paragraph is duplicated between these two lines.

The concubines knew that they were free to go or to miss them.

It is not obvious whether that sentence makes sense, or if there is a line missing.

On Page 312, the last line is:

tion to it by being sighted at the weak spot he was guard-

The next page starts with a new paragraph. The word guard has been changed to guarding; but it isn't obvious whether there is more text missing.

Page 162, the word not was duplicated in
that it reminded you not not to snooze by the wayside

Page 211, the word on was duplicated in
the children went gaily on on their happy journey.

Ts'ai Shen is spelt both as Ts'ai and T'sai and has not been changed.

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been fixed.

[The end of *The Vintage of Yon Yee* by Louise Jordan Miln]