

韓邦慶：海上花列傳

Sing-song Girls of Shanghai

By Han Pang-ch'ing

Translated by Eileen Chang

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

CHAPTER ONE begins with a short foreword followed by a prologue. The foreword describes the novel as an exposé of the wives of the prostitutes of the trading port Shanghai, and stresses that it is in no way pornographic. In the prologue the author under his pen-name *Hua Yeh Lien Nung* or Flowers Feel For Me Too, dreams that he is walking on a sea covered all over with flowers, a simple conceit, as Shanghai means On-the-Sea and a flower is a common euphemism for a prostitute. In his dream, he sees chrysanthemums, plum blossoms, lotus-flowers and orchids tossed by the waves and plagued by pests. These flowers that weather autumn chill or winter snows, rise above mud or withstand loneliness in empty hills, fare worse than the less highly regarded varieties and soon sink and drown; which so distresses our author that he totters and falls into the sea himself—dropping from a great height onto the Lu Stone Bridge that separates the Chinese district and foreign settlements in Shanghai. He wakes up to find himself on the bridge, an indication that he is still dreaming—a dreamer living in dreamland—and bumps into a young man rushing up the bridge, the prologue thus merging into the story proper.

The sentiment in the prologue shows where the author's sympathies lay, and is clearly at variance with the moralistic introduction, which is just the routine disclaimer of all traditional Chinese novels that touch on the subject of sex. Closely modelled on *Dream of the Red Chamber's* preface-cum-prologue, but without its charm and originality, this section of the book, so uncharacteristic, would bore foreign readers and put them off before they had even begun, and would only serve to mislead the student of Chinese literature looking for underlying myths and philosophies. Not a best-seller when first published in 1892, this little-known masterpiece went out of print a second time in the 1930's after its discovery by Hu Shih and others in the May Fourth Movement. Perhaps understandably concerned about its reception abroad, I finally took the liberty of cutting the opening pages.

The epilogue is omitted for similar reasons. Weakest in scenic description, where he was generally formalistic and used conventional literary expressions, the author here pictures at great length the joys of mountain-climbing without gaining

the top and its panoramic view, thus explaining why most of his sub-plots are left dangling, but with deducible and inevitable endings.

As Hu Shih pointed out, a poem and an erudite pornographic tale have been worked into the book just to show off the author's prowess in other realms of belles-entendres such as "Blood flowed, floating pestles away", a quote from the classics about the amount of blood shed in a battle. Unfortunately the other quotes with double meanings are not as translatable. Nor are the scholarly drinking games which often give quotations a clever twist. The poem would be unwieldy and laboured in translation, and would create an effect quite different from that intended. These are the only excisions I have made and patched over, I hope unnoticeably, to maintain continuity and pace.

I had long been familiar with the book, but until I translated it had never realized that on their first night together Green Phoenix Huang came to Rich Lo from another man's bed, which should be no surprise in a whorehouse, but was still a shock because of the domestic atmosphere of these sing-song houses, and especially after all her posturings. In this and a few other instances of extreme subtlety, my footnotes are more like commentary, at the risk of being intrusive.

—EILEEN CHANG

Chapter 1

*Simplicity Chow visits his uncle on Salt Melon Street;
Benevolence Hung makes a match at the Hall of Beauties.*

A YOUNG MAN wearing a glossy Nanking silk box-jacket of golden soy-paste brown over a cotton archery gown¹ of the palest turquoise, rushed over Lu Stone Bridge, that links the Chinese district and foreign settlements in Shanghai. Agape at the busy scene he bumped straight into a richshaw. He fell smack on the ground splashing mud all over himself, scrambled to his feet right away and seized the rickshaw puller, shouting and cursing wildly, deaf to remonstrances. A Chinese policeman in dark blue cotton came over to ask questions. "My name is Simplicity Chow, I'm going to Salt Melon Street," said the young man. "How was I to know this rash fellow would run me over! Look at the mud on my jacket. He'll have to pay for it."

"You could have been more careful yourself. I shouldn't press the matter," the policeman said.

Simplicity Chow went on mumbling for a couple of sentences, but loosened his grip and helplessly watched the rickshaw coolie pad away. Spectators filled the crossroads, some talking, some laughing. Simplicity Chow gave his clothes a shake and said in despair, "How am I to go and see my uncle now?"

¹Knee-length for freedom of movement, it was worn as an item of ordinary dress and had nothing to do with archery.



SIMPLICITY CHOW cleans his jacket at the Water Front Tea House.

Even the policeman laughed. "Why not go to the tea house and get a towel to wipe yourself off."

Following this simple piece of advice, Simplicity Chow went to the Water Front Tea House by the bridge, where he took a seat near the street and removed his jacket. The waiter brought a basin of hot water, and he wrung the towel dry and wiped carefully until not a trace of mud was left. Then he put it on again, took a sip of tea, paid the bill and got up, going straight to the central market on Salt Melon Street, where he found the signboard of the Ever Flourishing Ginseng Store and ambled into the high-walled little courtyard asking loudly for Mr. Benevolence Hung. A young sales clerk answered, asked him in, took his name and hurried in to announce him.

Soon Benevolence Hung bustled out. In spite of not having seen him for a long time Simplicity Chow could still recognize his hollow cheeks and protuberant eyes, strode up quickly saying "Uncle" and dropped to his knees. Benevolence Hung hastened to return the salutation and asked him to get up and sit in the place of honour, inquiring meanwhile, "How is your esteemed mother? Did she come with you? Where are you staying?"

"My humble quarters are at the Happy Arrival Inn on Treasured Virtue Street. Mother did not come, but told me to pay you her respects, sir," Simplicity said.

The young clerk had brought tobacco and tea during the conversation. Benevolence Hung asked his nephew why he had come.

"No particular reason," Simplicity said. "Just hoping to find some business to go into."

"Lately though, there hasn't been any business to go into in Shanghai," said Benevolence.

"Mother says I'm getting older by the year; and besides, what am I doing at home? Better to go out into the world and do some business."

"There's certainly something in that. How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"You have an esteemed sister too. I haven't seen her either for several years now. How much younger than you is she? Betrothed?"

"Not yet. She's fifteen this year."

"Who else do you have at home?"

"Just the three of us, and a maidservant."

"Not many expenses with so few people."

"We also have to pinch and save much more than before."

While talking they heard the clock strike twelve on the natural root table, so Benevolence asked Simplicity to stay for a casual meal and called the clerk in to tell him. In a moment four plates of cold cuts, two deep dishes and a kettle of wine were brought in, and Uncle and nephew sat facing each other drinking together and chatting over recent developments and how things were in the countryside.

"You live alone at the inn, nobody to look after you?" asked Benevolence.

"I have a friend from the rice hong called Hamlet² Chang who's also in Shanghai to look for work—he's staying with me."

"That's all right then."

After lunch they wiped their faces and rinsed their mouths. Benevolence handed Simplicity a miniature hookah.³ "Sit a while. When I've finished some little chores I'll go to the north end with you."

Simplicity assented politely and Benevolence again hurried in.

Simplicity sat by himself and smoked the hookah until he got good and tired of it. Not till the clock struck two did Benevolence come out, call the clerk again to leave some instructions, then go out with Simplicity to his room at the Happy Arrival Inn on Treasured Virtue Street. There was already a man in the room lying there smoking opium. After a brief greeting Benevolence asked, "Mr. Hamlet, I presume?"

"At your service," said Hamlet. "And you, Uncle, must be Mr. Benevolence?"

"You do me too great an honour."⁴

"I am most sorry not to have come over to wait on you."

After this exchange of civilities they sat down opposite one another. Simplicity Chow produced a miniature hookah and offered it to Benevolence.

"This is my nephew's first visit to Shanghai, and he is absolutely dependent on your great kindness," said Benevolence.

²Literally "Small village."

³The miniature hookah or water pipe, made of yellowish "white copper" alloy, is about the size and

shape of a man's hand, the "palm" being a rectangular stand with rounded ends.

⁴By calling me Uncle.

Hamlet said, "Alas, I am all too aware of my own inadequacy, but since we came to town together, it's only natural that we should look after each other."

After more courtesies Benevolence passed him the hookah. Taking it in one hand Hamlet gestured with the other hand toward the couch, inviting him to share a pipe of opium with him.

"I don't," said Benevolence and they sat down again.

Sitting to one side Simplicity listened to them and heard the talk drift slowly to courtesans. He was just about to slip in a question or two when Hamlet passed him the hookah, so he took the opportunity to whisper into the latter's ear.

"Ha ha!" Hamlet turned to Benevolence. "Brother Simplicity says he wants to take a look at the sing-song houses. Is that all right?"

"Where shall we go?" said Benevolence.

"Let's walk along Checkerboard Street," said Hamlet.

"I remember a courtesan called Jewel Lu at the Hall of Beauties on West Checkerboard Street. Not bad," said Benevolence.

"Then let's go," Simplicity broke in.

Hamlet just kept grinning. Even Benevolence could not help smiling.

Simplicity urged Hamlet to put away his opium tray, then waited while he changed into a brand-new outfit—a melon-ribbed cap, Peking-style trimmed slippers and a padded gown of silver grey Hangchow silk topped by a box jacket of glossy sapphire-blue Nanking silk; Hamlet then proceeded to fold up one by one all the clothes he had taken off, and was finally ready to walk out with Benevolence, each yielding precedence to the other.

In a fit of impatience Simplicity pulled the door to, locked it and followed them out of the inn. Two turns of the road and they were already on West Checkerboard Street and could see before one of the street doors an octagonal glass lantern supported on a length of iron piping with the words "The Hall of Beauties" inscribed in vermilion. Benevolence led the way in. The menservants knew him and shouted at once, "Mother Yang, a friend of Young Mr. Chuang's."⁵ They heard somebody answer upstairs and come stumping to the doorway at the head of the stairs to meet them.

The maidservant Mother Yang saw the three of them come up and said, "Oh, it's Young Mr. Hung. Please come in and sit down." A servant girl of thirteen or fourteen had propped up the bamboo curtain with a stick in anticipation. There was already a man in the room lying across the couch with his arms round a courtesan, cuddling up with her. Only when he saw Benevolence come in did he leave her and get up to greet him, raising his hands, palm over fist, to salute Hamlet Chang and Simplicity Chow, and asking for their last names. Benevolence Hung answered for them and turned toward Hamlet Chang saying, "This is Mr. Lichee Chuang."

"Honoured," Hamlet murmured.

The courtesan hid behind Lichee Chuang and waited till everybody had settled down before she came up to offer watermelon seeds. The servant girl also brought

⁵The second-class houses addressed all patrons as Young Mr. So-and-so. By early this century the custom had spread to the best houses, as everybody likes to be young.



BENEVOLENCE, HAMLET AND SIMPLICITY go visiting at the Hall of Beauties.

the miniature hookah and filled the pipe for them.

"I was just going to look for you," Lichee Chuang said to Benevolence Hung. "There are lots of things here; see if anybody can help dispose of them." He fished a folder out of his pocket and passed it to Benevolence. Opening it, Benevolence saw listed there jewelry, curios, paintings, calligraphy and clothes with prices and numbers attached.

"This sort of thing . . ." Benevolence said frowning. "Hard to sell. I heard Bird Belt⁶ Lee of Hangchow is here. Do you want to ask him?"

"I've told Little Cloud Chen to take it over to Bird Belt Lee's. No answer yet."

"Where are the things?"

"Right here over at the Longevity Bookstore, upstairs. Want to go and take a look?"

"What's the point? I don't know the first thing about this kind of stuff."

Simplicity Chow was becoming very impatient with their conversation and turned to give the courtesan a good looking-over: a snow-white round face, regular features exquisitely fashioned, the loveliest of all being the smiling lips so small they formed a vermilion dot, and the pair of dashing eyes, tender wherever they roamed. At home she only wore a silver filigree butterfly in her hair, a cotton blouse the colour of dawn's first light, a sleeveless jacket of satin-trimmed black

⁶Bird-patterned ornamental belt on ancient chariots or bells.

crinkled crepe and pastel pink crinkled crepe trousers trimmed with the palest turquoise satin and three bands of re-embroidered lace.

She felt Simplicity's gaze and with a smile walked to the big foreign mirror against the wall and studied herself from all angles, smoothing her side-locks. Forgetting himself he followed her with his eyes. Suddenly he heard Benevolence Hung call out, "Miss Woodsy, shall I make a match for your younger sister Jewel?" Only then did he realize that this courtesan was Woodsy Lu, not Jewel Lu.

He saw her look around and answer, "Why not? You'd be doing my sister a good turn." She shouted for Mother Yang, who happened to come in at that very moment to wring towels and re-fill teacups. She told her to call Jewel and "add more teacups".

"Which is the gentleman?" Mother Yang asked.

"Young Mr. Chow." Benevolence Hung pointed to Simplicity.

Mother Yang eyed him sidewise a couple of times. "Oh, so this is Young Mr. Chow? I'll go and call Jewel." She took the towels with her and ran out, stamp, stamp, stamp.

Not long afterwards came the sound of bound feet, creakety creak⁷ all the way. That must be Jewel Lu coming. Simplicity Chow had his eyes on the curtain and saw her come in, pick up the plate of watermelon seeds and pass it around starting with "Young Mr. Chuang" and "Young Mr. Hung". When she got to Hamlet Chang and Simplicity Chow she asked for their names and gave Simplicity a little smile. He saw that she too had a small round face, exactly like Woodsy's. She was younger and shorter, but if they were not seen together it would be practically impossible to tell them apart.

She replaced the plate and sat down shoulder to shoulder with him, which embarrassed him a little. He didn't know whether to carry on sitting there or walk away. Fortunately Mother Yang came hurrying in again. "Young Mr. Chow, please come inside."

"Everybody please come over together," said Jewel Lu.

At this they all stood up, giving each other precedence.

"I'll lead the way," Lichee Chuang said and was about to walk ahead when Woodsy Lu grabbed him by the sleeve. "Don't you go. Let them go."

Benevolence Hung looked over his shoulder with a smile and together with Hamlet Chang and Simplicity Chow followed Mother Yang into Jewel's room, which was right next door to Woodsy's and similarly furnished, with a dressing mirror, a clock, golden hanging scrolls, and colourfully painted silken lanterns. Everybody sat around casually, while Mother Yang bustled about "adding teacups", and called the servant girl to fill the hookah. Then the menservants brought in a dish of "dry and wet".⁸ Jewel Lu held it in her hand, offered it around and came back to sit with Simplicity Chow.

"Where is Young Mr. Chow's residence?" asked Mother Yang, who was standing next to Benevolence Hung.

"He is staying in the Happy Arrival Inn with Young Mr. Chang."

"Has Young Mr. Chang got a girl?" Mother Yang turned to Hamlet Chang who

⁷From the wooden platform soles.

⁸Nuts and sweetmeats.

smiled and shook his head. "He hasn't? Then we must fix him up with one too," she said.

"Fix me up with a girl? How about you?" said Hamlet, at which everybody roared with laughter.

Mother Yang laughed and continued, "Wouldn't it be more fun if you got yourself fixed up and came and visited together with Young Mr. Chow?"

With a sardonic laugh Hamlet went and lay down on the couch to smoke.

"Come, Young Mr. Chow, you be the matchmaker," Mother Yang turned to Simplicity Chow.

Simplicity was busy fooling around with Jewel Lu and pretended not to hear.

Jewel snatched her hand away. "You're to be matchmaker. Why don't you say something?"

He still did not speak.

"Go on say something," she urged.

Hard pressed, he glanced at Hamlet and was about to speak. Hamlet just ignored him and went on smoking.

Simplicity was saved by the entry through the curtain of Lichee Chuang, and took the opportunity to get up and ask him to sit down, while Mother Yang, seeing that there was nothing doing, finally went out with the servant girl.

Lichee Chuang sat down opposite Benevolence Hung and talked about things in the business world. Hamlet Chang was still lying down, smoking. Jewel Lu held Simplicity Chow's hands tightly in hers and forbade him to make a move. She would only chat with him, one minute saying she wanted to go to the theatre, another minute that she wanted a drinking party. Simplicity just grinned. She went so far as to put up her feet and roll into his arms. But when he got one hand free and stuck it into her sleeve, she held her bosom tight and cried desperately, "Don't!"

Hamlet Chang had just finished smoking a couple of pellets. "You pass up the dumplings, and go for the steamed buns!" he said smiling.

Simplicity did not understand. "What did you say?"

She set her feet down quickly and tugged at him. "Don't listen to him. He's making fun of you." She glared at Hamlet Chang and pulled the corners of her mouth down. "You won't get yourself a girl, but when it comes to talking you can really talk, eh?"

This dampened Hamlet Chang's spirits and he got up sheepishly to look at the clock.

Sensing that Hamlet wanted to go, Benevolence Hung also stood up. "Let's go and have dinner."

Upon hearing this Simplicity Chow hastily fished out a silver dollar and tossed it into the candy dish, seeing which Jewel said, "Sit a little longer," as she called out to Woodsy, "Elder Sister, they're leaving."

Woodsy rushed over and said something to Lichee Chuang in a low voice, then saw them out to the staircase doorway together with Jewel, both saying, "Come together again next time." The four of them made affirmative noises as they went downstairs.

Chapter 2

*The young fellow tries a pipe and is only good for a laugh;
The virgin courtesan has a party and is quite unscathed by the gibe.*

THE FOUR of them left the Hall of Beauties, went out the north end of West Checkerboard Street and into the House of Sure Satisfaction diagonally across the way, where they chose a little private room partitioned off behind the main parlour. After serving tobacco and tea the waiter asked them to order, and Benevolence Hung ordered a basic menu⁹ with one extra soup and dish. The waiter spread a tablecloth over the table, set out the *wei-ch'ien*,¹⁰ two large compartmented dishes of nuts and sweetmeats, and turned up the gaslight. Looking at the clock they saw it was already past six. Benevolence Hung called for warmed wine and asked Hamlet Chang to sit at the head of the table. Hamlet adamantly refused and begged and begged Lichee Chuang to take the seat. He himself sat in the second place, Simplicity Chow in the third and Benevolence Hung in the host's.

The waiter served two courses in small bowls, and Lichee Chuang started to talk business again with Benevolence Hung. Hamlet Chang managed to put in a word now and then, but Simplicity Chow did not understand, to begin with, and was not interested in listening. He could hear the lively sound of music and singing coming from the "study" beside the parlour, and unable to sit still any longer, slipped out on the excuse of going to the toilet and peeped through a pane in the window glass. He saw a round table with six diners surrounded by many courtesans and their maids and servant girls, a roomful of them. The fat man sitting facing towards him had a purplish dark complexion and black whiskers in three strands. He had called two girls: the one on the right was singing the Peking opera aria "Plucking Mulberry Leaves" and her face was hidden by her lute, so he could not tell what she looked like; the one on the left was older but quite dashing. Seeing that the fat man had lost at Guess Fingers, she wanted to drink for him but the fat man would not let her, pushed her hand away and bent down to take a sip himself. Just as he was doing so, the courtesan on his right stopped playing the lute and reaching out a hand under her sleeve, quietly took the cup of wine and gave it to her maid to drink. The fat man did not see and sipped empty air, making everybody laugh uproariously.

Simplicity Chow watched full of envy, but then a hateful kill-joy of a waiter came and asked him to go and eat and he had to return to the table. In the course of

⁹Just giving the number of stews and sautéed dishes, etc., leaving it to the restaurant to make up the menu.

¹⁰At the beginning of Chapter 29 there is a reference to "*kan shih*, the dry and the wet [nuts and sweetmeats] from the dinnertable". Evidently these were also eaten at dinner, served as always in two separate, large, compartmented covered dishes (called *kuo-p'an* or fruit plates nowadays). Visiting with a courtesan over green tea, nuts and sweetmeats is termed *ta ch'a wei* (*ta ch'a-huei* in this book, an under-

standable mistake as *huei* is pronounced *wei* in Soochow dialect)—*ta*, to strike, used in the general sense of doing, performing; *ch'a* being tea; *wei*, to surround, apparently designating the nuts and sweetmeats in their containers (perhaps so called because their compartments fan out around a centre one). Thus *wei-ch'ien* would seem to be an obsolete term for *kuo-p'an*. *Ch'ien*, a small pick, may refer to toothpicks stuck in the sweetmeats so they could be picked up without soiling the fingers. Wooden toothpicks were already manufactured. "A willow strip toothpick" was used in Chapter 10.

the feast the six small bowls were served one after the other and all the while Lichee Chuang went on gesticulating and talking endlessly. The waiter seeing that there was not much drinking being done, went to get the main dishes ready to go with rice. Benevolence Hung again offered a cup of wine all round, then they each ate some thick rice gruel, wiped their faces and sat around the room chatting. The waiter brought the bill. Benevolence Hung glanced at it briefly and told him to put it down to the account of Ever Flourishing Ginseng Store. The waiter said "Yes sir, yes sir" again and again.

The four of them walked out giving one another precedence. Just as they got to the main parlour the fat man from the study was coming back from relieving himself outdoors, his face flushed all over from drinking. The minute he saw Benevolence he asked him in, saying, "So you are here too, Mr. Benevolence! What a coincidence! Please come in and sit down." He grabbed him, brooking no protests, and also cornered the other three, "Come on in and have a chat."

Lichee Chuang excused himself and left first. Hamlet Chang signalled Simplicity Chow with his eyes, so the two also excused themselves, took their leave from Benevolence Hung and walked out of the House of Sure Satisfaction.

"Why did you want to leave? I know we just happened along but we might as well have gone in and made the most of it!" Simplicity Chow grumbled on the way and got a threatening cluck in his face.

"They've got the two top classes of courtesans there and you'd go and call some second-class ones—how humiliating it would be!" said Hamlet Chang.

Simplicity understood his reasoning. After a moment of reflection he said, "Lichee Chuang is probably at Woodsy Lu's. Let's go to Jewel's too for a cup of tea, shall we?"

Hamlet sniffed again. "He went on his own, so why go bothering him? You'd only be a nuisance!"

"Then where shall we go?"

Hamlet just laughed sardonically, then said slowly, "You can't be blamed, your first time in Shanghai, for not knowing the rules of the game. If you ask me, you'd be well advised not to frequent the second-class houses, let alone the best ones. They are all used to having big do's. You can spend thirty, forty dollars on one of them and it means nothing. Besides, Jewel Lu is a virgin courtesan. Can you afford several hundred dollars to deflower her? More than a hundred at least. It's not worth it. If you want to have some fun, you'd better stick to the straightforward places."

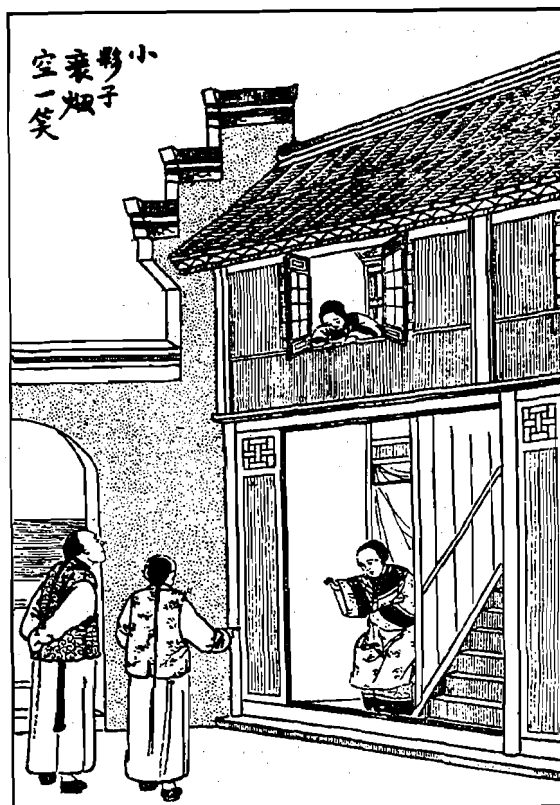
"Where are they?"

"If you want to go I'll go with you. Compared to the best houses, they may be smaller, but the girls are about the same."

"Then let's go."

Hamlet stopped to look, and saw that they were right in front of the Scenic Star Jewelry Store. "If you want to go, it's that way." He led on turning south again across the Beat Dogs Bridge to the very end of New Street in the French Concession, where the last house had a sooty glass lamp hanging over the door. Across the threshold was a staircase. Going up with Hamlet, Simplicity saw there was only half a room upstairs, very narrow, with a large Cantonese lacquered bed set crosswise on

HAMLET AND SIMPLICITY call on
Second Wong.



the left and on the right, boards set up on benches to make an opium divan facing out toward the staircase; a pine dressing-table stood by the window and on either side high chairs with three uprights on the back. But just these were enough to give an air of exquisite clutter, it being so crowded.

Seeing no one in the room Simplicity whispered to Hamlet, "Is this a second-class house?"

"Not second-class; just Second," Hamlet said smiling.

"Is Second cheaper than second-class?"

Hamlet just smiled and made no reply. Suddenly they heard a loud shout downstairs, "Come over here, Second Miss." It was called out twice. Only then did somebody answer in the distance and come laughing and joking towards them.

Simplicity still persisted in asking, and Hamlet told him hastily, "It's a flowered smoking room."¹¹

"Then why did you say Second?"

"Her name is Second Wong. Sit down, and don't talk so much."

The sound of his voice had hardly died away when Second Wong was already upstairs, so Simplicity kept quiet. The minute Second Wong saw Hamlet she leaped at him crying, "You're a fine one—lying like that! You said you were going home for two or three months, and you've only just come back now! Call that two or

¹¹A small opium den with girls.

three months? More like two or three years! I sent the maid to look for you several times at the inn, and they said you hadn't come but I still couldn't believe it. Old Mrs. Filial Kwok next door went to see you too, and was told you weren't coming any more. Fart-mouth! Do you ever stick to your word? But I don't forget. If you hadn't come, I would have found you myself and dealt with you and seen how you liked it!"

Hamlet hastened to smile and plead with her, "Don't be angry, let me tell you," and he whispered into her ear.

Before he had said three or four sentences she jumped up and pulled a long face. "Smart, aren't you! You want to put the wet shirt on somebody else and be well out of it, is that it?"

"No," Hamlet cried anxiously. "You won't even let me finish."

So Second Wong again crawled into his arms to listen to whatever it was he was murmuring. He signaled with a jerk of his mouth while talking and she looked around and glanced sideways at Simplicity Chow. Hamlet said a few more sentences.

"And what about you?" she said.

"Why, it's still the same with me."

Only then did she relent and get up to trim the lamp-wick, asking for Simplicity's last name and scrutinizing him from head to foot. Simplicity turned around pretending to look at the scroll on the wall.

A middle-aged maid came shuffling upstairs holding a kettle of water in one hand and two boxes of opium paste in the other hand. Seeing Hamlet she also said, "Ah-yo, it's Mr. Chang! We thought you were never coming. So you *do* have a conscience!"

"Pei!" Second Wong made a spitting noise. "If *he* has a conscience, dogs don't eat shit."

"I came and still I'm told I have no conscience," Hamlet said smiling. "Then starting from tomorrow I'll never come again!"

"You wouldn't dare!" Second Wong said smiling.

As they talked the middle-aged maid had already put the boxes of opium into the tray, lit the opium lamp, made tea in the cups and gone downstairs again with the kettle. Second Wong started to cook the opium, leaning against Hamlet. Seeing Simplicity sitting by himself she said, "Come and lie on the couch."

He accepted with alacrity and lay down on the humbler side of the divan watching her toast and roll a pellet, fix it on the pipe and hand it to Hamlet who soughed through it, smoking it all in one breath. She made another and he smoked that too. At the third pipe he said: "No more," and she turned the pipe around and offered it to Simplicity. Simplicity was not used to it, and the opening on the onion-domed clay pipe bowl got clogged less than halfway through. She took the pipe and poked a needle through. He tried again and got stuck again. She gave a giggle which fed the fire already kindled in him and made his heart itch more than ever. She cleared the hole in the pipe bowl and as she held it for him over the flame, he took the opportunity to squeeze her wrist. She snatched her hand away and pinched him on the thigh with all her strength, pinched so hard it ached and stung and tingled all at once. After he finished smoking he stole a glance at Hamlet who had his eyes closed and seemed half-asleep.

"Brother Hamlet," he whispered twice and Hamlet answered by just lifting a hand and waving it from side to side.

"He's stoned. Let him be," she said, so he did not call him again.

She went so far as to move over to Simplicity's side and took a long needle to toast opium with, leaning on him. It was as hot as burning charcoal in his heart but with Hamlet in the way he dared not make a move, merely stared at her snow-white face, pitch-black eyebrows, crystalline eyes and blood-red lips. The more he looked the more he loved and the more he loved the more he looked.

Seeing him thus she asked smiling, "What are you looking at?"

He was about to speak and could not, so he grinned back.

She knew he was a boy who had not yet tasted meat, but that bashful air of his exasperated her too. Having filled the pipe she pushed the mouthpiece to his lips saying, "Here, be my guest," then rose and took a cup of tea from the table. She took a sip, turned around and seeing that he was not smoking, handed him the half-filled cup with the words, "Do you want some tea?"

Flustered, he sat up in a hurry and reached for it with both hands. In so doing he bumped right against her, splashing tea all over himself and nearly breaking the cup. He made her burst out laughing so loudly that even Hamlet woke up, rubbed his eyes and asked, "What are you people laughing at?"

Seeing Hamlet's dazed look she bent down and clapped her hands, laughing all the more. Simplicity laughed too.

Hamlet sat up and yawned and said to him, "Let's go."

Simplicity knew Hamlet was in a hurry to get back because this opium wasn't doing anything for him, and had to say "All right". Second Wong whispered a lot more with Hamlet, after which he went straight downstairs. Simplicity was following him when she clutched his sleeve whispering: "Come by yourself tomorrow."

He nodded and made haste to catch up with Hamlet. They went back to the inn, opened the door and lit the lamp. Hamlet still needed another smoke. Simplicity went to bed first and lay there thinking over the truth of what Hamlet had said earlier. "Besides," his thoughts continued, "Second Wong seems to fancy me. That must be fate." But he could not put Jewel Lu out of his mind. When all was said and done, she was prettier than Second Wong. He certainly wouldn't have enough money for both of them. Thinking now of this one, now of that one, he tossed and turned and was unable to sleep.

Presently, when Hamlet had smoked his fill and cleaned out the ashes, he washed his hands and got ready for bed; Simplicity however draped his clothes over his shoulders and sat up again, took a few puffs on the hookah, then lay down once more and before he knew it fell asleep.

At six o'clock in the morning he was already up and called the hotel attendant for hot water to wash his face. He thought to go out for breakfast and take the opportunity to amuse himself a little. Hamlet was just asleep, snoring away, so he closed the door and walked alone out of Treasured Virtue Street, ate a bowl of stewed pork noodles for twenty-eight copper coins at the Fountainhead Restaurant on the corner of Pebble Road and from there turned into Fourth Avenue, peering right and left before setting off again with a long leisurely stride. He happened to meet the garbage carts coming down, several workers shoveling up garbage with long-

handled spades, tossing it up into the carts, some of it falling, flying and spraying afar. Afraid to soil his clothes he was about to turn back but then he saw it was Shang-jen Alley ahead. He had heard this alley was all sing-song houses of the two highest orders, so he went in to look around. He saw that every house in the alley had a slip of red paper pasted on the door with the courtesan's name on it. Among them was a stone-carved gate with a black lacquered signboard. The gilt characters read, "Sunset Wei, minstrel's residence".¹²

Simplicity stood at the door looking in and saw maids with uncombed hair washing and starching clothes in the courtyard and menservants sitting crosslegged in the parlour wiping all kinds of foreign glass lamps. A servant girl of fourteen or fifteen grunting something rushed straight out of the front door and ran into his arms head-on. Simplicity was just going to lose his temper when he heard the girl burst into curses, "You'd bump into your mother and kill her? Haven't you got eyes in your head?" The minute he heard the piping voice dripping with charm his anger melted away. Then he saw her handsome looks and dainty little figure and he grinned instead. The girl brushed him aside, turned around and ran on. And suddenly he saw an old woman also running to the door from inside shouting the name Clever and beckoning, saying, "Don't go." Hearing this the servant girl came back slowly, pouting and muttering to herself.

About to go in herself the old woman was a bit taken aback by Simplicity's presence and stood there, trying to make him out. He felt embarrassed and sheepishly retraced his steps northward out of the alley. The garbage carts had left long ago, so he went to the Splendid Gathering Place and ordered a cup of tea upstairs. He sat there drinking seven or eight refills and did not return to the inn until almost noon.

Hamlet was up. The hotel attendant brought lunch, they ate and washed their faces. Simplicity wanted to go to the Hall of Beauties for a cup of tea.

"At this hour all the courtesans are still in bed. What do you want to go there for?" Hamlet said smiling.

Simplicity could do nothing about it. Hamlet set out his opium tray and lay down to smoke. Simplicity lay down too, looking at the top of his bed curtains, his thoughts working up and down like creaking pulleys. He pushed his right hand against his front teeth and bit his nails. Soon he got up and started pacing up and down around the room, goodness knows how many hundred times. Hamlet had only had one pellet, and he could not very well hurry him just then. With a sigh he lay down once more. Secretly laughing, Hamlet ignored him.

By the time Hamlet had smoked his fill Simplicity had asked him to hurry about four or five times. He forced himself to go out with Simplicity, and they went straight to the Hall of Beauties. They found the two menservants playing mahjong with the maids in the parlour. One of them quickly left his tiles to shout up the

¹²*Nan-p'u chu-yün lu* 南浦駐雲錄 (1886), a journal by Wang T'ing-ting 王廷鼎, relates that *shuo-shu*, [story] telling [by the] book, a type of minstrelsy, flourished in Soochow, with both male and female performers. The latter caught on in Shanghai. Performances were given in tea houses called *shu-ch'ang*

or "book" theatre. Presumably the performer's house was called *shu-yü*, "book" residence, which means minstrel's residence. When the female performers in Shanghai turned into courtesans they retained the proud title of *shu-yü* and ranked above the original first-class courtesans.

stairs, "Guests coming up."

Simplicity had already gone up taking several steps in one. Hamlet followed him into the room and saw Jewel Lu sitting at the table by the window in front of a collapsible foreign mirror in a purple cedar box, getting her hair done. Mother Yang stood behind her combing it with a fine-toothed comb while the servant girl cleared away the fallen hairs. Hamlet and Simplicity sat down on the tall chairs on both sides of the table.

"Had lunch?" Jewel asked smiling.

"Some time ago," said Hamlet.

"Why so early?" she said.

"They're always like that at the inns," Mother Yang broke in. "They like to serve lunch at mid-day. Not like us here in the sing-song houses, no telling how late we'd be!"

As they talked the servant girl had lit the opium lamp, gave Simplicity the hookah and filled the pipe for him. Jewel asked Hamlet to smoke on the divan, and he lay down to smoke. A manservant brought a kettle to make tea and Mother Yang wrung the towels. Simplicity watched Jewel finish doing her hair, take off the blue cotton shawl, put on a black crinkled crepe sleeveless jacket and walk to the big foreign mirror on the wall to look herself over. Suddenly they heard somebody calling Mother Yang from next door. It was Woodsy Lu's voice. Mother Yang quickly folded up the mirror and went over to Woodsy's room.

"Is Young Mr. Chuang here?" Hamlet asked.

Jewel nodded. Hearing this Simplicity wanted to go over and greet him, but Hamlet emphatically forbade him to do so. Jewel also pulled him by the sleeve saying, "Sit still." He took the opportunity to sit down on the rattan chair in front of the big bed. Jewel sat on his knees and whispered something in his ears. He looked bewildered. She repeated herself, but he still could not make out what she was saying.

Desperate, she said between clenched teeth, "You!" After a moment's reflection she pulled him up to his feet and said, "Come over here, and I'll tell you."

The two of them lay down across the big bed with their backs to Hamlet and only then was communication gradually established between them. After a while Jewel suddenly giggled, "Ah-yo! Don't!" In another moment came a cry of distress, "Ai-yo! Come quick Mother Yang!" then continuous cries of "Ai-yo-yo". Mother Yang ran over from the next room laughing, and scolding, "Stop it, Young Mr. Chow." Simplicity had to let go, and Jewel got up to smooth her side-locks. Mother Yang picked up a silver filigree butterfly by the pillow and put it in Jewel's hair, saying, "How Young Mr. Chow can horse around! But our Miss Jewel is a virgin courtesan!"

Simplicity just grinned and went and lay down opposite Hamlet on the humbler side of the divan whispering, "Jewel asked me to give a drinking party for her."

"Are you going to?" Hamlet said.

"I've promised her."

After a couple of sardonic laughs and a long pause Hamlet said, "But don't you realize that Jewel is a virgin courtesan?"



HAMLET AND SIMPLICITY are entertained by Jewel.

Jewel broke in, "What about it? Don't virgin courtesans have drinking parties too?"

Hamlet laughed. "Virgin courtesans can have drinking parties but no horsing around. What viragoes!"

"Young Mr. Chang," said Jewel. "Don't take any notice of what Mother Yang says. You're Young Mr. Chow's friend and we hope you'll help us too. You don't want to go and make Young Mr. Chow pick on us, do you? It's not worth a young gentleman's while to do a thing like that."

"I didn't say anything wrong when I asked Young Mr. Chow to stop horsing around," said Mother Yang. "And if I had said the wrong thing and offended Young Mr. Chow, Young Mr. Chow is a pretty good talker himself; he doesn't need any prompting?"

"Lucky our Young Mr. Chow is understanding," said Jewel. "A fine state of affairs it would be if he listened to his friends."

She had scarcely finished speaking when they heard a shout from downstairs, "Mother Yang, Young Mr. Hung coming up."

Jewel quietened down and Mother Yang hurried out in welcome. Simplicity also got to his feet. But the sound of footsteps that followed went over to Lichee Chuang next door.