

The Tale of the White Oriole

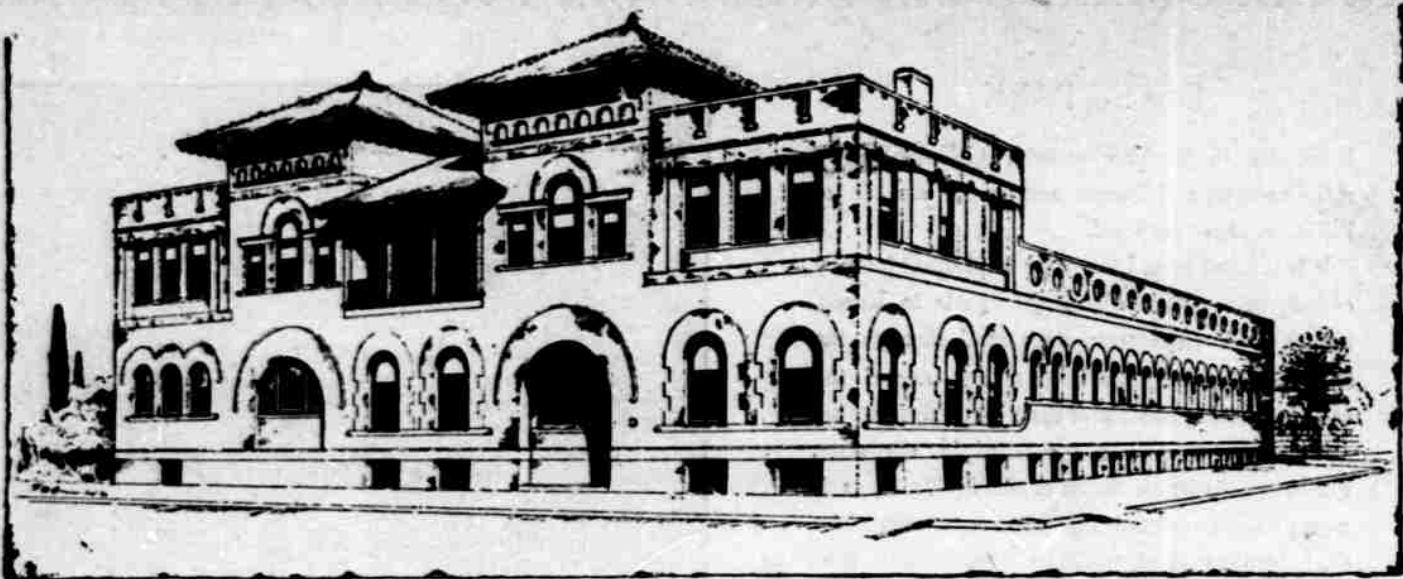
The street of the Black Cat runs past the money-changers and benders between the markets of the fruit-sellers, and bends again until it joins that of the Three-Crows; which latter is the street of the tea houses. Close by the tea houses are tied the flower boats, and here in the evening the towsmen come to drink their tea. I come to the little boat of Ing Tu. You may tell it by its yellow stripes. There are five.

Ing Tu picked a low note on her Tzee and sang me the Peacock's Love Song. Have you ever heard it? It is a wonderful song. But it is well if you do not know it. She opened and closed her eyes slowly and sang. Sighing softly the last words she watched the smoke from my cigarette floating up among the lotus blossoms and water lilies; and rubbed her elbow meditatively.

"Many tales have you heard, but never the tale of the white oriole," murmured Ing. Then sipping a water melon seed between her black-painted teeth, she began and thus she spoke: "When the rice buds burst and blossom, the sellers hung their curtains and the fishermen lowered their nets. All went to the temple to worship, for was not the flowering of the rice good? I went with Kung Uag, my father, he whom the governor cast into the well.

"The Mountain of Snow raised its head and hid the face of the sun; then the priests lit the lamp of life and burned the pure kernels in it. Later, when they sang the hymn to Mi, I sang with them. But lo! and the swan's voice rose above all. I was silent. See Ling was the swan, and his melody was like apple-blossoms falling.

"A day for every finger. I went to the temple and then he came to the flower boat of Ing Tu by the tea houses. While the shadows stole along the street and slipped among the bamboo porches, the tea cups clicked; as the fire flies glowed, See Ling sang his swan notes.



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And when he sang I listened to the water ripple, to the gold fish splashing on the surface; when he sang, I closed my eyes, and his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind in the reeds. Afterwards, he shook peach blossoms into my face. Turtle-dove he called me, and made a song of it.

"As I looked, the woman rode on me, Laughing, she rode on me. See, here is the scar on my breast. 'White Oriole' they called her, and her laugh was like its singing at day dawn. All thought me dead. Like theirs was my thought.

"When the Mountain of Snow turned bright and glittered, day had come. They were gone and none remained. The smoking houses smelled bad, and people cried to Buddha for vengeance.

"Before my flower boat saw me, many days had passed. In the tea houses, the towsmen clinked their teacups, for they had forgotten. One day the swan

came. He sat in my little boat and whispered to me. He could not talk. But I only laughed, I did not care for him any more. When I played on my Tzee I saw the tears on his cheeks, but I thought of the White Oriole and only laughed.

Soon he came no more." The boat was more beautiful in those days. The roof was roses, the bottom of moist lily leaves. Ah! Where is the swan—alas!—where floats the broken willow? The days of a month had passed from the bursting of the rice buds, and See Ling brought me a new song and sang it. Thus he sang:

"A loitering butterfly knew nothing of love Till on a chrysanthemum, he saw one day Such a bright colored one, so charming, so gay, That downward he floated— beside her he lay 'Be mine!' he cried."

"Folding slowly her wings, The maid butterfly Drew gently beside him, and whispered a word No person was near them, the word was unheard Except by a poor little hidden bird— 'I'm thine,' she sighed."

"Because it was the night before Yarool, I remember it. Yarool means Night of Dread, for Yarool was the time when Hong Lee Tzee, the Mogul, swept out of the west, crossing the great wall into the flowery lands of Sang Koo, the lands of our fathers.

"We knew it not though, and the nights flew by until they were five; but on the sixth, Hong-Lee-Tzee, with all his Tartars, rode down the Mountain of Snow through the fields of rice into the town streets, even up to the temple, where they tied the high priest of the sacred Black Cat to one of the right feet of Buddha, and left him screaming in his beard.

"I was secretly pleased at the tying of Tee zoo, the high priest. Once in the temple as I looked at the Swan he said I should be made the bride of Buddha— what that means, I will tell you another time.

"Then, the priest howled—Aya Oo! Aya Oo! and the Mogul spit in his face and pulled his beard, crying—Cat! Black Cat! And likewise his men cried with him—Cat! Cat! and spit on him. All of which things were sacrilegious.

"Hearing the hoof-sounds on the street, the people rushed to the temple, where still the priest screamed, for part of his beard was gone. When the town-people had gathered in the temple yard, the Tartars began to strike them down, and take the silver and gold from them; not alone from them but also from

the houses throughout the town. When money was not to be found, other things were taken, and many houses burned. In the Governor's house, they found Yeek and drank it till they were drunk; then they rode away and with them took money and women.

"On the night of the robbing, Swan sang his last notes; and for the reason listen—

Now, know you, with Hong-Lee-Tzee, the Mogul, there came a woman: whiter than your coat of linen, was her face. When all the people were in the temple-yard, the white woman sat beside him on a horse and watched it all. Seeing the Swan, she rode to us where we stood together and spoke some sweet honey-words to him.

"Because she was very beautiful, the Swan loosened my hand and turned to go with her. When she smiled, her smile was like Ka-pen-yen-see, the Black Smoke, which makes one drunk and dream of all heavens. But as the Swan turned, I sprang and threw my arms on his neck; yet he shook me down and started to follow on. Quicker than the light was my little almond pick, and it stuck in his throat.

GEORGE SHEDD.

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Mrs. Brooks—Does your husband's snoring still keep you awake nights? Mrs. Crooks—Not as it did before he joined the club.

"Now, girls," said Mrs. Teeters to her daughters, "we must stop talking, or we shall never get through this pile of darning."

"Does talking make any difference, ma?" asked the youngest. "Of course it does. Least said soonest mended, you know."

Lochinvar (from out of the west)—Will you be my wife?

Elaine (just from Vassar College)—Homo, hominis, homini, hominem—Lochinvar—Er—excuse me, but I don't quite understand.

Elaine (freezingly, as she turns her back upon him)—Indeed! I am sorry for you. I was just declining man. That is all.

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