## V

### IN CHY FONG'S RESTAURANT

### *Where Miss Massey Meets a Missionary*

ALL sorts of queer, disconnected impressions kept coming to me as I sat there in utter silence.

The ear-splitting crash and clang of the Chinese orchestra in the front room, the gaudy, dragon-embroidered hangings to the rear of the restaurant, the gentle twanging of the slave girls' guitars, the teak-wood chairs and tables, the handleless cups, the bizarre, singsong conversation of the men at the banquet table in the next room—even my own satin blouse, upon which peacocks were embroidered in silver, and the absurd, wide trousers of salmon pink, whose bands of purple were embossed in flaming orange, my purple silk hose and crimson, gold-embroidered slippers—all this was unreal to me; as fanciful and impossible as a mad dream.

Reality stood behind it, apart from it, and the strength of its impressions persisted in replacing even the things that my senses recognized.

I could see the *News's* first page of yesterday, with its screaming headline and my story of the raid on the fan-tan games below it, more clearly, much more clearly than the expressionless ivory face, so near

to me, of Ah Oy, the most expensive slave girl in Chinatown, worth $3,000 in white man's money!

I could repeat, word for word, the printed statement of Sergeant Wyss, denying the implication of grafting, which was the atmosphere of my story as surely as the faint smell from the opium-smokers' pipes was penetrating every part of Chy Fong's restaurant.

Scraps and phrases of the *News's* big double-leaded editorial, openly charging Wyss with protecting gambling in Chinatown for a bribe, instead of wiping it out, came to me; and the whole of that last paragraph, accusing him of bad faith, of deliberately tipping off our projected raid, of warning the gamblers in advance, through their spies, who lurked about, when we met at the corner of the alley.

But back of all this there was a still stronger impression, as of a thing one has got by heart.

"No talk.

"No look see.

"No turn head.

"No move.

"No listen.

"No speak.

"No bite lips.

"No move fingers.

"No sit so stlaight. Neck down—so.

"No lift feet when walk—slide—slip—soft.

"All time wait—all time sit still—head down—eyes down—all time wait."

And here I was, "all time waiting," as old Gum Tai, the duenna of the slave girls, had taught me in

a long afternoon rehearsal; with my eyes on the floor and my sleek, black head, with its jeweled *bow tow* lowered, my senses dulled by the strong perfume of the narcissi in the *cloisonné* bowls, by the smell of opium, and the dream-like sensation of being apart —all time sitting still, all time waiting; waiting with an Oriental, stupefying patience for bribers and bribed to meet here, as was their custom, and pay the bribe before my very eyes.

What lifelong rehearsals must these pale, quiet girls' mothers have gone through for centuries and centuries to bring to its perfection that yellow flower of repose that Ah Oy is as she sits idly there with her guitar, ornamented with precious stones, in little hands, closely and compactly made as the sheath of a lily, with nary a twitch of limb nor turn of head, her soft, dull eyes looking straight ahead and down, seeing nothing; and hearing, smelling nothing, one would say, for her ears and delicate nostrils—the color of a softly yellowed magnolia before it falls, overripe, from the tree—seem less like organs of sense than bits of soft but perfect and exotic statuary.

"Look here, Rhoda Massey"—memory, the only faculty which seemed to survive in me the drowsy suspension of my wits, brought McCabe's voice and his words to me as I sat all time waiting—"go slow. Yellow Journalism, and the success you've made of it, are turning your steady little head. You're out-yellowing your master, and when I came on the *News* I held the record. The thing is impossible. You can't play the Chinawoman for a full hour's stretch.

You can't fool the Chinamen, much less the slave girls up at Chy Fong's. They're the——"

"But Gum Tai says I can," I had interrupted eagerly. "I'm just saturated with Chinatown, Mr. McCabe. I've taken tea at that restaurant every night this week. I know I can do it—I know I can. Listen to this. Shut your eyes and listen, and say I'm not Ah Oy up at Chy Fong's."

And in a sweet little nasal voice, more like the plaint of an insect than full-throated human utterance, I sang the Chinese of this:

*"Make me good, O great T'in Hau,*
*Make me gentle, chaste and witty.*
*Make me all of these or none—*
*But O, I pray thee, make me pretty!"*

"Bully!—encore!" cried McCabe, tapping his blue pencil enthusiastically on the desk.

But I wouldn't sing the other verses. I wanted too much to persuade him while his impression lasted.

"See, Mr. McCabe," I began hurriedly, "surely that old Chinawoman knows. I'm to be a Hakka woman, while all the other girls are from Canton. Of course, then, I couldn't understand a word of their dialect, nor they of mine. Gum Tai will tell them all that. So I'll not have to say a word or understand anything. Besides, it's etiquette for a new girl just bought, a novice, not to say anything. And the older girls in slavery ignore her rather contemptuously and critically, much as at our fortnightly dances the *débutante* runs up against the buds of a season or two, and——"

"I won't listen to your wheedling, Rhoda. You've a faculty, carefully and artfully cultivated, I suspect, my lady, of making the melodramatic sound simple and natural, and robbing sensation itself of its off-color. I won't let you try this scheme, I tell you. Am I the News Editor of this paper or am I merely the home secretary for your foreign—very foreign—affairs, you conceited and rampant little yellow journalist?"

I declined to enlighten him, but went on coaxing.

"Do you see a page story, Mr. McCabe," I begged, "with photos of the interior of Chy Fong's, Mr. McCabe? With Sergeant Wyss and Chin Bak You and Yet Kim Gai sketched from a description by Rhoda Massey? With a picture, Mr. McCabe—yes, I'll even let you run a picture of Miss Massey in the costume of a Chinese belle, if only——"

"Get thee behind me, Satan, and let me send for the Lunacy Commission!"

"Please!" I coaxed.

He threw down his pencil and jumped to his feet.

"I won't, I can't, Rhoda. The money's been paid there once and will be again, but I don't dare trust you to fool too much with these yellow devils. If you could have Forbes come along to take care of you; but to send you alone into a den like that—my God, girl, you're clean daft! You've lost your sense of proportion. You don't know the possible from the undoable, and you've forgotten the elementary rules of the game."

"I suppose I have," I said slowly.

"Give it up, Rhoda," he growled tenderly, as I

made sorrowfully for the door. (At the office they call me "McCabe's White-headed Boy" since that gambling raid, and it's pleasant to know he hates to refuse me anything.) "We'll think up something else. There's a crisis due in the Lowenthal *ménage à trois* before long. Young Lothal, the son, caught the two—Mrs. L. and Kirby—at the Humming-Bird last night, at supper after the theater. There'd have been a bully row then and there if Mrs. L. hadn't left the place with her stepson. Kirby came over to my table afterward, and I promised him to keep the incident out of the papers. . . . Charming fellow, Jerome Kirby; built for the villain in the play—gay and reckless, handsome and cruel and clever. Just fancy his getting me to——"

I made an impatient movement.

"You mean you're tired waiting for that scandal to ripen?" he asked. "So is the rest of the town. But here's something else that will really come off very soon. The Mission is going to make a star play: they're going to rescue Ah Oy. I'll find out from Miss McIntosh exactly when it is to be, and you can be in on that. It'll be a corking story. But you sha'n't do this other mad thing with my consent. We'll find some other way to trap Wyss . . . but not this. Never with my consent, Miss Rhoda Massey."

"Then without it!" I cried to myself as I shut the door behind me and started for Gum Tai's.

I went over it all again now as I sat "all time waiting" at Chy Fong's. The slave girls were playing pi-gow now—dominoes—gambling silently. It

was some comfort to me just to think of McCabe; to feel that outside this opium-scented, Oriental dream a man lived—a big-brained, big-hearted white man, with his fingers playing at the buttons that set the world a-moving, with a head full of knowledge of human nature in all its variety, with a sense of humor that kept him and the rest of us well balanced, and an irresistible strength and originality in his point of view.

And this same man—this far-famed, old McCabe of the *News*—was precisely the newspaper man whose commands I had disregarded, whose advice I had scorned. Oh, if he had only stood in! But to have to set oneself the hardest detail in one's whole newspaper life and to miss McCabe behind one!

I gave a gasp at my own audacity. I wasn't conscious of making any sound, but instantly every eye in the room was turned upon me.

I felt them—those black, ironical, impenetrable Chinese eyes. They made me glow and shiver, and involuntarily I made a motion to get to my feet. I believe I was terrified enough to have scuttled away then and there if at that minute a dominating, high voice, rolling out a chanting string of Chinese, hadn't broken in upon us all. It came from the stairway beyond, and bore—even before its owner followed it—so strong and imperious a suggestion of assertive activity that the whole establishment seemed to respond to it. Chy Fong himself came to the door a moment and sang out an order. Doors were hurriedly closed all over the place. A screen was swiftly stretched across, shutting in our corner that gave on

to the high little lacquered, lantern-hung balcony which overlooked the square. And in here a table, upon which chop suey, sweetmeats, tea, and rice wine were already set in fanciful porcelain, was brought and placed in the farther corner, while the waiters flew about like mad.

And Ah Oy daintily touched her long pearl earrings and bracelets of jade and silver filigree with a slender tan finger and a long, pointed nail, sniffing with nervousness just once or twice, as a deer might through distended, dry nostrils.

Yet Kim Gai—the first. I knew him. His walk was a bit more assured, more elegantly pompous, than it had been the other night when we raided the game. In his long mandarin's robe (the New Year must be near) he moved with the dignified roll of a sea-captain aboard his own ship—even though he was smokng a cigar!

I know the smell of a good cigar. McCabe smokes the best in town. (Our respected proprietor, who owns the *News* and Lord knows what besides, facetiously declared to me the other day that he couldn't afford cigars such as his News Editor smokes.) But McCabe's specially imported gold-banded darlings can't be any better than the one this big, young, fine-looking Chinaman removes from his lips to pour out an intoned roar of Chinese which awakens Celestial echoes from his companions.

One of them is Chin Bak You, the fearful old death's-head who presides over the See Yups, the highbinders. It is one of his men, Chow La, who accompanies him—a great, bulky beast of a China-

man, with a square face framed in the highbinders' locks, with a mouth that's a big, brutal gash, a nose that's obscene, and eyes of black bestiality. (We have his photo in the art room; we keep it to personify the Yellow Peril and that sort of thing.)

All Chinamen look alike, they say, to white men, but these three are strong types; once seen and their characteristics fitted to them, one isn't likely to forget them.

What I had forgotten in their coming was the panic terror that had seized me. So possessed was I by curiosity now that it was all I could do to remember the old duenna's words:

"No look see—no move—no listen—no turn head——"

No look see—when my eyes were irresistibly drawn, fascinated by the three.

No listen—when, by straining to the utmost, my ears could bring to me only the burden of sound without sense.

Listen? I listened as though all my senses were merged into one. Yet Kim Gai's was the voice that rolled out with a declamatory clearness of utterance; I could almost repeat the syllables after him. Old Chin's grunts and whining, nasal phrases seemed wrung from him as he sat smoking, his dull old eyes like pin points under their wrinkled lids, his everlasting pipe dragging at his misshapen mouth. The hatchet man bellowed out a guttural word now and then; but he ate—ate like a famished beast till, nauseated, I had to bite my painted lips to keep from crying out at him.

I missed my handkerchief then and was putting my sleeve to my lips, when it was twitched suddenly and, looking up, I saw Ah Oy gazing at me in mute astonishment.

I had forgotten—I had forgotten Gum Tai's first and last admonition: to do in Rome what the Romans did. And at just this minute the three other girls were standing about the table.

"Oh, thank—" I began.

But Ah Oy had already taken her place fortunately and, slip-slip, I slid after her.

I had been well trained for this part of it. I knew the slave girls' *rôle* at the banquet—to be mute, to be vacantly smiling and ornamental, like a figure on a fan; and only to accept wine when a guest has had more than is good for him.

I watched Ah Oy take the thimbleful of sam shu —thrice-fired rice wine—from the highbinder's unsteady fingers. I saw her affect to sip a bit and then with disdainful grace spill it upon the floor.

When Yet Kim Gai motioned toward his own cup (he hadn't eaten at all, but drank with a full-throated intemperance that was most un-Chinese), I was ready. I reached a trembling hand out in front of him, lifted the tiny glass cup to my lips, and——

And let it fall, shattered into bits, upon the floor!

Right opposite me, looking over the screen and straight into mine, was a pair of eyes—gray, American eyes—the eyes of Sergeant George Wyss.

I don't know what happened for a second. If the penalty for it had been his calling out my name and unmasking me upon the spot, I couldn't have done

anything other than I did: put my shaking hands up to my face and sob—sob in tearless terror and excitement and——

And satisfaction.

For he had come! He *had* come! It was true, then. The money was to be paid here. What did I care for anything else? The slave girls' horrified hush at my clumsiness and fracture of etiquette; the scolding of the head waiter (I knew the accent, as a dog might, but not the words); the amused laugh of the sergeant as he pushed the screen aside and entered; the goód-natured interference in my behalf of Yet Kim Gai, who came to a poor girl's rescue, like the man of the world and gallant he is—his pantomime was unmistakable—it was all nothing to me. My story was coming true—the impossible story, the story that McCabe himself had not dared to tackle!

"*Kung-héi, fát ts'oí!*" The sergeant cried out the New Year's greeting glibly, shaking his own hand cordially in the Chinese style, but refusing the chair a waiter offered.

Old Chin grunted a recognition without removing his pipe. Yet Kim Gai waved his hand in an airy American fashion. Chow La nodded, taking the briefest respite from the business of eating.

"Ah there, Ah Oy!" said the sergeant gayly, putting an arm about her and another impartially around the girl on the other side.

And they tittered, these Chinese belles, and wriggled, complimented by the queer American attention.

In great spirits was Sergeant Wyss, evidently. I watched with satisfaction the quick glances he threw

about the place and the flash of intelligence between him and Yet.

It was at a word from the gambler that Ah Oy had taken her queer little guitar and was singing a pale little nasal melody—the inevitable ditty (Wan Hoey translated it for me) whose second verse, put into English, goes:

*"Make me noble, dread T'in Hau,*
*Kind to all, no creature harming,*
*Make me patient, gen'rous, faithful—*
*But, I implore thee, make me charming!"*

Wyss crooned it with her. He did it better than I could, with a skill that bespoke practice and opportunity. He put out his hand at the end of the verse to pinch my arm, but I reached just then for a cup, and being a merry, easily pleased, gay gentleman of the police, he accepted the girl in the red, gold-embroidered blouse as a substitute.

But everybody was merry by this time—except old Chin. His death's mask never changed a line. His horn-toad's eyes had never a glimmer of light or life.

"Wait, Sachant, I sing for you," cried Yet, taking the guitar from Ah Oy's hand. "Ever hear this—bully song?"

And to my utter amazement he strummed a few familiar bars, and burst jovially into "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night!"

A hysterical desire to laugh came upon me. It was so maddeningly funny, so absurd, so crazy a caricature of ourselves in our silliest season! Yet every

stolid yellow face about me looked perplexed, or contemptuous, or bored, and only in Wyss's eyes could I read a reflection of that amazed and mocking applause that filled me.

"Great, old boy!" Wyss brought his hand down with a thump on Yet's shoulder. "Eat leisurely," he went on, guying the Chinese method of excusing oneself.

"*Ho hang*—a safe walk to you," answered Yet, entering into the spirit of the translation.

*Ho hang*—the Chinese good-by! I was still shaking with suppressed laughter, but that sobered me. For, with a parting squeeze to the girl he still held, the sergeant turned on his heel, pushed past the screen, and was gone.

Gone! And not a nickel, not an incriminating word, had passed between them. I couldn't believe my senses. I couldn't realize it. I was frantic with disappointment, and I might have stood there yet, like a gaping idiot, looking after him, if Ah Oy hadn't touched me again significantly, and I turned to see the other girls slipping away.

We were to withdraw, evidently. Gum Tai had told me that when anything of importance was to be discussed, the slave girls were dismissed without ceremony.

I followed Ah Oy dully. I was dazed. I couldn't readjust my mind to so unexpected a result. The sergeant, in the course of his rounds, had looked in a moment at Chy Fong's—not in the open part frequented by Americans, 'tis true. But there he had greeted his Chinese friends, listened to a song of Yet

Kim Gai's, and patronizingly hugged a slave girl—not as a man might a woman, but as though she were a child, a doll, or any pretty, non-human, soulless thing that couldn't speak or feel.

And that was all. Positively all!

A fury possessed me as I followed Ah Oy out into the other room. What did I care now for old Gum Tai's instructions and apprehensions and admonitions! Suppose I was discovered? The game was up. And I knew the way out—out this window to the veranda and down into the square. We had arranged that all right.

But fortunately Ah Oy was unsuspicious, or perhaps she was preoccupied and didn't notice the dropping of my *rôle;* for, though I forgot all caution, she seemed hardly conscious of me. She was behaving queerly herself. Even I could see that. If she had been a human being, instead of a passive Chinese doll, I should have said she had something on her mind; for when the other girls sank down into a corner and fell to eating greedily and drinking tea from a tray which had been put there, she gave me one swift, enigmatic glance—imploring, confiding, searching—and passed quickly out upon the veranda.

I, too, slipped out; there was nothing more for me inside. But the narrow little balcony was empty. Evidently Ah Oy's guardianship of me—which shrewd old Gum Tai must have arranged for—was at an end. Now she was looking after herself. What could she be up to, I asked myself.

In spite of my bitter disappointment—I had counted on bagging this story and throwing it tri-

umphantly at McCabe's feet—I stood a minute there, looking out. Evening had come, and the young moon was shining a silver veil down over the hilly town, idealizing its crude, irregular sky line. It poetized the untidy little square and touched a bit of nickel on a cab lamp that glowed in the dusk below. But it concentrated its soft luster upon the wide, wonderful shining bay beyond, where the ferry-boats became floating castles of light and Alcatraz, glorified into outlines only, stood out castellated like an Ehrenbreitstein anchored on the water.

In the reaction of the strain I had been living under, I stretched out my arms toward it all—it was beautiful; it was American; it was Western; it was mine—when clearly down in the street below I heard a whistled melody:

*"Make me shy and straight and still,*
*Docile, make me, too, and dutiful;*
*Make me perfect —if you will—*
*But O, sweet Dæmon, make me beautiful!"*

Mechanically I had repeated the words to myself of the last verse to *T'in Hau*, accompanying the whistle below. But I was thinking, thinking hard. A Chinaman might hum that melody, though it was unlikely. A white man might whistle the classic "Hot Time." But only one man I knew would be likely to whistle the slave girl's plaintive little nasal prayer to her goddess.

Down I slipped behind a great potted palm—out here, when Chinese guests have not monopolized the

restaurant, white women from the Eastern States come to stand for a moment beneath the huge swinging lanterns and look at Chinatown and the bay from on high.

My heart was thumping an accompaniment, and over and over in my head the words went singing. I could hear someone coming softly up the first flight of steps, and then the second. My finger nails—which had been growing untrimmed for a month, so seriously had I gone in for local color—were digging into my palms. I was trembling, so sure was I, so sure that——

A sergeant's cap!

It appeared above the top step. I was right—I was right, after all!

He passed me so close that I could see the three bars on his sleeve in the light from the window, and when he had gone on in I crouched there a full minute waiting, waiting till I could be calm again.

By the time I'd got to the window (I had taken off the crimson boxes of slippers that I might be noiseless) he was seated at the table with the three Chinamen and facing me—Sergeant George Wyss, head of the Chinatown squad, an American police officer bribed by dirty yellow money to betray his trust!

Perhaps you think I didn't make vows to the gods of Yellow Journalism as I stood there. Perhaps you think I didn't compose a dozen different openings for my triumphant entry upon McCabe before I should throw down the booty before him!

I couldn't hear a word, of course, from where I

stood, but Yet and the sergeant were having it hot and heavy, evidently. Some dispute as to terms—some reproach for the last raid in which one Rhoda Massey had taken part, perhaps. I could imagine how the clever gambler would score his paid servant for not delivering the goods. I could almost fancy I heard him use the very words. But I did see him at last lift a heavy inverted *cloisonné* bowl from the middle of the table and uncover a pile of twenties—they must have been there the whole evening! I saw both Chin Bak You and Chow La scowling in dispute, and I saw Wyss reach out his strong white hand among all those vile yellow ones, and . . .

And all at once I couldn't see! I couldn't breathe! I couldn't cry out nor hear, except dully. Something had been suddenly thrown over my head, and someone had seized me and was carrying me swiftly down the stairs.

I struggled. I gasped and tried desperately to scream. And somehow I got the idea that my struggles surprised my captor, for he kept murmuring under his breath to me in Chinese, in a tone that I fancied was reassuring. But I was so frantic with fear by now that I distrusted even my own instincts. I would have welcomed Yet Kim Gai himself if I could have brought him there by screaming—but I couldn't scream. And I was still struggling like a cat in a bag when the big Chinaman, reaching the alley below, almost dumped me down into something that quickly moved away.

It was a carriage. I knew that as soon as the door slammed and the horses started. But when I tore

at the cloth that covered my head (a woman's hands helping me all the time), and at last sat up, red and furious and terrified—I knew in a moment what had happened to me.

I had been rescued!

Shades of Confucius! I had been "rescued" at the moment when I would have given the earth for one minute more as a slave girl. Yes, rescued, alas! by the Mission—the good, stupid, angelic Mission, that helps Chinese girls to escape from slavery, and even permits them to pretend to fight against their rescuers, so that in case of failure the unhappy creatures may claim that the effort was an abduction, made against their will and not with their connivance.

I sat up and looked at Miss McIntosh opposite me. She was murmuring the few Chinese words she knew in the most reassuring way. I looked at the dear old respectable Scotchwoman, devoted, tender, brave soul, and I longed to beat her!

"Ah Oy—Ah Oy?" she asked then, doubtfully.

"Ah Oy!" I cried, the words escaping me after hours of silence with the pop of a released piston. "Great Gunnybags, how I wish it was!"

I can see her face yet . . . and it almost consoles me.

. . . . . .

McCabe? Oh! he doesn't know yet. I wonder if I'll ever dare to tell him.

Gum Tai? She's safe at sea—sailed on the *China* the next morning.

Sergeant Wyss? They say he's to be our next

chief of police. The graft went up higher. And so will he.

Miss McIntosh? She never can understand why I don't write up that story of the slave girls and the Mission, which I told her I was after that night. She thinks me lazy and neglectful of the paper's interests, and incapable, on the whole, of real serious work.

Rhoda Massey? Oh, she's living humble these days, and walking soft! They say at the office just now that the rumor about her getting the big head was all a false alarm. She's a model of amenability, is Rhoda, of conservative good sense and good judgment, and is actually in line for a desk position, I've heard.

But it's 'way down low, that part of it. No man (and only one woman) on the paper would believe it.