

**JOHN
MACGOWAN**

CHINESE
FOLK-LORE
TALES

John Macgowan
Chinese Folk-Lore Tales

«Public Domain»

Macgowan J.

Chinese Folk-Lore Tales / J. Macgowan — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

I	5
II	10
III	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

J. Macgowan

Chinese Folk-Lore Tales

I

THE WIDOW HO

One day in the early dawn, a distinguished mandarin was leaving the temple of the City God. It was his duty to visit this temple on the first and fifteenth of the moon, whilst the city was still asleep, to offer incense and adoration to the stern-looking figure enshrined within.

This mandarin was Shih-Kung, and a juster or more upright official did not exist in all the fair provinces of the Empire. Wherever his name was mentioned it was received with the profoundest reverence and respect; for the Chinese people have never lost their ideal of Tien-Li, or Divine Righteousness. This ideal is still deeply embedded in the hearts of high and low, rich and poor; and the homage of all classes, even of the most depraved is gladly offered to any man who conspicuously displays this heavenly virtue.

As Shih-Kung was being carried along in his sedan chair, with his numerous retinue following closely behind him, he happened to notice a young woman walking in the road in front of him, and began to wonder what it was that had brought her out at such an unusually early hour. She was dressed in the very deepest mourning, and so after a little more thought he concluded that she was a widow who was on her way to the grave of her late husband to make the usual offerings to his spirit.

All at once a sudden, furious whirlwind screamed about the woman and seemed determined to spend its force upon her; but beyond her nothing was touched by it. Not a leaf on the trees near by was moved, and not a particle of dust on the road, except just where she stood, was in the least agitated by the fierce tempest that for the moment raged around her.

As Shih-Kung gazed at this strange occurrence, the woman's outer skirt was blown up in the air, and he saw that underneath was another garment of a rich crimson hue. He then knew at once that there was something radically wrong, for no woman of ordinary virtuous character would ever dare to wear such a glaring colour, while she pretended to be in deep mourning. There was something suspicious, too, in the sudden tornado that blew with such terrific violence round the woman only. It was not an accident that brought it there. It was clearly the angry protest of some spirit who had been foully misused, and who was determined that the wrong-doer should not escape the penalty for the evil she had committed.

Calling two of his runners to him, Shih-Kung ordered them to follow the woman and to see where she was going and what she did there, and then to report to him immediately.

the coffin of the dead, and was to be solved there and there only. His course now seemed easy, and it was with a mind full of relief that he entered his home.

He at once issued a warrant for the arrest of the widow, and at the same time sent officers to bring the coffin that contained the body of her husband from its burying-place.

When the widow appeared before the mandarin, she denied that she knew anything of the cause of her husband's death. He had come home drunk one night, she declared, and had fallen senseless on the ground. After a great deal of difficulty, she had managed to lift him up on to the bed, where he lay in a drunken slumber, just as men under the influence of liquor often do, so that she was not in the least anxious or disturbed about him. During the night she fell asleep as she watched by his side, and when she woke up she found to her horror that he was dead.

"That is all that can be said about the case," she concluded, "and if you now order an examination of the body, it simply means that you have suspicions about me, for no other person was

with him but myself when he died. I protest therefore against the body being examined. If, however, you are determined to do so, I warn you that if you find no signs of violence on it, you expose yourself according to the laws of China to the punishment of death."

"I am quite prepared to take the responsibility," replied the mandarin, "and I have already ordered the Coroner to open the coffin and to make a careful examination of the body."

This was accordingly done, but no trace of injury, not even the slightest bruise, could be discovered on any part of the dead man's body.

The county magistrate was greatly distressed at this result of the enquiry, and hastened to Shih-Kung in order to obtain his advice as to what steps he should now take to escape the punishment of death which he had incurred by his action. The Viceroy agreed that the matter had indeed assumed a most serious aspect. "But you need not be anxious," he added, "about what you have done. You have only acted by my orders, and therefore I assume all responsibility for the proceedings which you have adopted to discover the murderer."

Late in the afternoon, as the sun began to disappear behind the mountains of the west, Shih-Kung slipped out by a side door of his yamen, dressed as a peddler of cloth, and with pieces of various kinds of material resting on his shoulders. His disguise was so perfect that no one, as he passed down the street, dreamed of suspecting that instead of being a wandering draper, he was in reality the Governor-General of the Province, who was trying to obtain evidence of a murder that had recently been committed in his own capital.

Travelling on down one street after another, Shih-Kung came at last to the outskirts of the town, where the dwellings were more scattered and the population was less dense. By this time it was growing dark, so when he came to a house that stood quite apart by itself, he knocked at the door. An elderly woman with a pleasant face and a motherly look about her asked him in a kind and gentle voice what he wanted.

"I have taken the liberty," he replied, "of coming to your house to see whether you would not kindly allow me to lodge with you for the night. I am a stranger in this region," he continued, "and have travelled far from my home to sell my cloth. The night is fast falling, and I know not where to spend it, and so I beg of you to take me in. I do not want charity, for I am quite able to pay you liberally for any trouble I may cause you; and to-morrow morning, as early as you may desire, I shall proceed on my wanderings, and you will be relieved of me."

"My good man," she replied, "I am perfectly willing that you should lodge here for the night, only I am afraid you may have to endure some annoyance from the conduct of my son when he returns home later in the evening."

"My business leads me into all kinds of company," he assured her, "and I meet people with a great variety of dispositions, but I generally manage to get on with them all. It may be so with your son."

With a good-natured smile, the old lady then showed him into a little room just off the one which was used as a sitting room. Shih-Kung was very tired, so he threw himself down, just as he was, on a trestle bed that stood in the corner, and began to think over his plans for solving the mystery of the murder. By-and-by he fell fast asleep.

About midnight he woke up at the sound of voices in the next room, and heard the mother saying:—"I want you to be very careful how you treat the peddler, and not to use any of your coarse language to him. Although he looks only a common man, I am sure he is a gentleman, for he has a refined way with him that shows he must have come from no mean family. I did not really want to take him in, as I knew you might object; but the poor man was very tired, and it was getting dark, and he declared he had no place to go to, so that at last I consented to let him stay. It is only for the night, and to-morrow at break of day he says he must be on his travels again."

"I do most strongly dislike having a strange man in the house," replied a voice which Shih-Kung concluded was the son's; "and I shall go and have a look at him in order to satisfy myself about him."

Taking a lantern in his hand, he came close up to where Shih-Kung was lying, and flashing the light upon his face, looked down anxiously at him for a few moments. Apparently he was satisfied, for he cried out in a voice that could easily be heard in the other room: "All right, mother, I am content. The man has a good face, and I do not think I have anything to fear from him. Let him remain."

Shih-Kung now considered that it was time for him to act. He stretched himself and yawned as though he were just waking out of sleep, and then, sitting up on the edge of the bed, he looked into the young man's face and asked him who he was.

"Oh!" he replied in a friendly way, "I am the son of the old lady who gave you permission to stay here for the night. For certain reasons, I am not at all anxious to have strangers about the house, and at first I very much objected to have you here. But now that I have had a good look at you, my objections have all vanished. I pride myself upon being a good judge of character, and I may tell you that I have taken a fancy to you. But come away with me into the next room, for I am going to have a little supper, and as my mother tells me that you fell asleep without having had anything to eat, I have no doubt you will be glad to join me."

As they sat talking over the meal, they became very friendly and confidential with each other, and the sam-shu that the son kept drinking from a tiny cup, into which it was poured from a steaming kettle, had the effect of loosening his tongue and causing him to speak more freely than he would otherwise have done.

From his long experience of the shady classes of society, Shih-Kung very soon discovered what kind of a man his companion was, and felt that here was a mine from which he might draw valuable information to help him in reaching the facts he wished to discover.

Looking across the table at the son, whose face was by this time flushed with the spirit he had been drinking, and with a hasty glance around the room, as though he were afraid that some one might overhear him, he said in a low voice, "I want to tell you a great secret. You have opened your heart a good deal to me, and now I am going to do the same with you. I am not really a peddler of cloth, as I have pretended to be. I have been simply using that business to disguise my real occupation, which I do not want anyone to know."

"And what, may I ask, may be the trade in which you are engaged, and of which you seem to be so ashamed that you dare not openly confess it?" asked the son.

"Well, I am what I call a benevolent thief," replied Shih-Kung.

"A benevolent thief!" exclaimed the other in astonishment. "I have never heard of such a thing before, and I should very much like to know what is meant by it."

"I must tell you," explained the guest, "that I am not a common thief who takes the property of others for his own benefit. I never steal for myself. My practice is to find out where men have made money unjustly, and then by certain means at my command I deprive them of some of their unlawful gains and distribute them amongst the people they have wronged. In this way I have been the means of bringing suitable punishment on the heads of the guilty, and at the same time of relieving the necessities of those who have suffered at their hands."

"I am astonished at what you tell me," replied the son, "though I do not believe all you say about not taking a share in the plunder you get. But now that you have opened your heart to me, I shall repay your confidence by telling you what I am. I am a real thief, and I support my mother, who does not suspect the truth, and keep the home together, simply by what I steal from others."

He then proceeded to give an account of some of the adventures he had met with in the course of his expeditions by night to rooms and houses which, as he always found out beforehand by careful spying, contained valuables that could be easily carried away.

While he was relating these stories, Shih-Kung's eyes gleamed with delight, for he saw that the man had fallen into the trap which had been laid for him, and felt confident that before the night was over he would be in possession of some clue to the mystery he was endeavouring to solve. He was disgusted with the sordid details of the criminal life of which the man before him seemed to be

proud; yet with wonderful patience this mandarin, with his large powers of mind, and with a genius for statesmanship which had made him famous throughout the Empire, sat for hours enduring the wretched talk of this common thief. But his reward came in due time.

"By the way," exclaimed this man whose business it was to break into homes when the small hours of the morning found their inmates wrapped in slumber, "some time ago I had a most remarkable experience, and as you have shown yourself such a good fellow, I will tell you about it, if you do not think it too late to do so."

"I shall be most delighted to hear you relate it," said his guest. "I have been greatly entertained by your vivid way of describing the adventures through which you have passed. You deserve to be classed amongst the great heroes of old, who have made their names famous by their deeds of daring. Go on, I pray you, and tell me the particulars of this unusual experience."

"Well," proceeded the man, "I had very carefully planned to pay a visit to a certain house just outside the walls of the city. It was an easy one to get in to without any danger of being observed, for it was in a quiet street, where passers-by are very few after dark. It was a gloomy place after sunset, for the high walls that looked down upon it threw deep and heavy shadows, which faint-hearted people declare are really unhappy and restless ghosts prowling about to harass and distress the unwary.

"It was a little after midnight, when with stealthy footsteps I crept along the narrow streets, keeping as much as I could under cover of the houses, where the darkness lay deepest. Every home was hushed in slumber. The only things that really troubled me were the dogs, which, with an intelligence far greater than that of their masters, suspected me of some evil purpose, and barked at me and made wild snaps at my legs. I managed, however, to evade them and finally to arrive at the house I intended to rob.

"When I got close up to it, I was surprised to find a light burning inside. There was another thing, too, that I could not understand, and this was that a little side door by which I had planned to enter had not been bolted, but had been left ajar so that any prowling robber could easily gain admittance through it. Taking off my shoes, I walked on tiptoe along the stone-paved courtyard in the direction of the room where the light was burning, and have had his heart lightened of the load that was weighing it down if I could only have had the opportunity of whispering a single sentence into his ear."

"It is your duty," interposed his guest, "to proceed to-morrow morning to the mandarin's yamen, and tell your story to the county magistrate, so that a great wrong may not go unpunished."

"That I can never do," promptly replied the man. "What do you think would happen were I to do what you suggest? I am a thief. I get my living by thieving. I was in the house on the night of the murder for the purpose of robbery. That would all come out when I give my evidence. After I had proved the murder, what would become of me? I should be cast into prison, and I might have to lie there for years, for who would ever bail out a thief? And then my poor mother would starve, for she has to depend on me entirely for her living, and she would be compelled to go on the streets and beg for charity from door to door. No, it is impossible for me ever to interfere in this case."

Shih-Kung recognized the difficulty in which the man was placed, and yet without his evidence it would be impossible to convict the woman of the crime she had committed. He accordingly thought out a plan which he felt would remove the obstacles that stood in the way of securing him as a witness.

Turning to the man, he said, "I have had a very pleasant evening with you, and I thank you for your courtesy and hospitality. I feel my heart moved with a desire for a deeper friendship than mere words can ever express, and so I propose that you and I become sworn brothers, so that whatever may befall us in the future we shall stand by each other to the very death."

The young man looked up with astonishment at this unexpected proposal, but the sudden flash in his eyes and the smile that overspread his countenance showed that it was very pleasing to him.

"I shall be delighted to agree," he quickly replied, "but when shall we have an opportunity of appearing in the temple, and of registering our vow in the presence of the god?"

"There is no need to go to any temple," Shih-Kung replied. "Your family idol, which sits over there enshrined before us, will be quite sufficient for our purpose. Give me a pen and paper, and I will write out the articles of our brotherhood and present them to the god."

In a few minutes the document was written out according to the minute rules laid down by the law which binds two men in a sworn brotherhood. By the most solemn oaths Shih-Kung and this thief agreed to assist each other in any extremity in which either might be placed in the future. Any call from one to the other must be instantly responded to. No danger and no peril to life or limb must be allowed to deter either of them when the cry for help or deliverance was heard. Each was to regard the interests of the other as identical with his own, and as long as life lasted, the obligation to succour in every time of need could never be relaxed or annulled.

To prove that this solemn engagement was no mere passing whim of the moment, it had to be read in the hearing of the household god, who happened to be the Goddess of Mercy. She would then be an everlasting witness of the transaction, and with the invisible forces at her command would visit pains and penalties on the one who broke his oath. Standing in front of her shrine, Shih-Kung read out the articles of agreement, word by word, in a slow and measured tone suited to the solemnity of the occasion. He then lighted the paper at the lamp, and both men gazed at it until nothing was left but ashes, when each of them knew that the Goddess had received the document and had placed it in her archives in the far-off Western Heaven as a record of the vows made in her presence in those early hours of the morning.

When they sat down again, Shih-Kung looked with a strong and masterful gaze at his newly-created brother and said to him:—"You and I are now sworn brothers, and of course we must be frank with each other. I do not wish to deceive you any longer, so I must tell you that I am neither a peddler of cloth, nor a benevolent thief in the sense in which you understood the term. I am in fact Shih-Kung, the Viceroy of this Province."

No sooner did the man hear the name of this great mandarin, who was a profound source of terror to the criminals and evil-doers within his jurisdiction, than he fell on his knees before him in the most abject fright, and repeatedly knocking his head on the ground, besought him to have mercy on him.

Raising him up gently with his hand, Shih-Kung told him to lay aside all his fears. "You are my brother now," he said, "and we have just sworn in the presence of the Goddess to defend each other with our lives. I shall certainly perform my part of the oath. From this moment your fortune is made; and as for your mother, who received me with such gracious courtesy, it shall be my privilege to provide for her as long as she lives."

Emboldened by these words of the great statesman, the young man appeared at the second inquest, which Shih-Kung ordered to be held, and gave such testimony that the guilt of the wretched wife was clearly established, and due punishment meted out to her.

II

KWANG-JUI AND THE GOD OF THE RIVER

China is a land where the great masses of the people have to toil and struggle incessantly in order to obtain even the bare necessities of daily existence. Unnumbered multitudes never enjoy a sufficiency of food, but have to be contented with whatever Heaven may send them; and profoundly thankful they are when they can be sure of two meals a day to stave off the pangs of hunger from themselves and their children.

How many there are who cannot by the severest toil obtain even these two meals is evident from the organized beggar communities, which are to be found in connection with every great city in the Empire, and from the vast numbers of tramps, who wander over the country on the highways and byways with pale and sodden faces and with garments nearly falling to pieces, picking up a scanty livelihood from the benevolent as they pass from village to village.

Whatever may be their inmost thoughts, the Chinese bear their terrible hardships and privations with a splendid heroism, with little complaining, with no widespread outbreaks of robbery, and with no pillaging of rice-shops and public granaries by organized mobs driven mad by hunger.

There is one beautiful feature about the Chinese that has been an important factor in steadying the nation. They are imbued with at least one great ideal, which touches their common life in every direction. Every man in the Empire, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, has a profound respect for what he calls Tien-Li, or Divine Righteousness. By this the Chinese judge all actions. It is the standard by which Kings and Princes and common people direct their conduct, whether in the highest affairs of state, or in the ordinary engagements of common every-day life.

In addition to this, the minds of the Chinese are filled with romance and poetry, so that to them the invisible world is peopled with fairies and all kinds of spirits, both good and bad, the former relieving in mysterious ways the dull greyness that sorrow and disaster often shed upon the lives of men.

The story of Kwang-Jui is a remarkable evidence of the unbounded faith which the Chinese have in the intervention of these mysterious beings to deliver men from calamities which would otherwise prove fatal to them.

When we first meet with Kwang-Jui, he is living with his widowed mother in a retired part of the country. His father had been dead for some time, and Kwang-Jui was now the only one upon whom the fortunes of the home could be built. He was a very studious lad, and was possessed of remarkable abilities, the result being that he successfully passed the various Imperial Examinations, even the final one in the capital, where the Sovereign himself presided as examiner.

After this last examination, as the men were waiting outside the Hall for the names of those who had satisfied the Emperor to be read out a considerable crowd had collected. Most of these people had come from mere curiosity to see the Imperial Edict, and to discover who the scholar was that stood first on the list. The excitement was intense, and speculation ran rife as to which of the candidates, who had come from almost every province in the Empire, was going to obtain the place of honour which was the dream and the ambition of every scholar in the land.

At last every breath was hushed, and every voice stilled in silence, as one of the high officials of the Palace, attended by an imposing retinue, came out of the great central doors, which had been flung wide open at his approach. In a clear voice he began to read the list. It was headed by the name of Kwang-Jui.

At this precise moment occurred an incident which was destined to change the whole current of Kwang-Jui's career. As he was standing overcome with emotion in consequence of the supreme honour which had been conferred upon him by the Emperor's Edict, a small round ball, beautifully

embroidered, was thrown from an upper window of a house across the way, and struck him on the shoulder.

It may here be explained that it was a custom in the early days of the history of China to allow any young maiden who was reluctant to have her husband chosen for her by her parents, to make use of what was called "The throwing of the embroidered ball" in order to discover the man whom the gods intended her to marry. This ball was made of some soft material, wrapped round with a piece of red silk which was covered with variegated figures, worked by the damsel's own hands and emblematic of the love by which the hearts of husband and wife are bound indissolubly to each other. It was firmly believed by every maiden of this romantic type that the man who was struck by the ball from her fair hands was the one whom Heaven had selected as her husband; and no parent would ever dream of refusing to accept a choice made in this way.

Whilst Kwang-Jui was gazing in amused wonder at the symbol which he understood so well, a messenger from the house from which it had been thrown requested him in respectful tones to accompany him to his master, who desired to discuss with him a most important subject.

As Kwang-Jui entered the house, he discovered to his astonishment that it belonged to the Prime Minister, who received him with the utmost cordiality, and after a long conversation declared that he was prepared to submit to the will of the gods, and to accept him as his son-in-law. Kwang-Jui was of course in raptures at the brilliant prospects which were suddenly opening up before him. The day, indeed, was a red-letter one—an omen, he hoped, that fate was preparing to pour down upon him good fortune in the future. In one brief day he had been hailed as the most distinguished scholar in the Empire, and he had also been acknowledged as the son-in-law of the Empire's greatest official, who had the power of placing him in high positions where he could secure not only honours but also wealth sufficient to drive poverty away for ever from his home.

As there was no reason for delay, the hand of the beautiful daughter who had thrown the embroidered ball, and who was delighted that Heaven had chosen for her such a brilliant husband, was bestowed upon him by her parents. Times of great rejoicing succeeded, and when Kwang-Jui thought of the quiet and uninteresting days when he was still unknown to fame, and contrasted them with his present life, it seemed to him as though he were living in fairy-land. His wildest dreams in the past had never conjured up anything so grand as the life he was now leading. In one bound he had leaped from comparative poverty to fame and riches.

After a time, through the influence of his father-in-law, and with the hearty consent of the Emperor, who remembered what a brilliant student he had been, Kwang-Jui was appointed to be Prefect of an important district in the centre of China.

Taking his bride with him, he first of all proceeded to his old home, where his mother was waiting with great anxiety to welcome her now famous son. The old lady felt rather nervous at meeting her new daughter-in-law, seeing that the latter came from a family which was far higher in rank and far more distinguished than any in her own clan. As it was very necessary that Kwang-Jui should take up his office as Prefect without any undue delay, he and his mother and his bride set out in the course of a few days on the long journey to the distant Prefecture, where their lives were destined to be marred by sorrow and disaster.

They had travelled the greater part of the way, and had reached a country market-town that lay on their route, when Kwang-Jui's mother, worn out with the toilsome journey, fell suddenly ill. The doctor who was called in shook his head and pronounced that she was suffering from a very serious complaint, which, whilst not necessarily fatal, would necessitate a complete rest for at least two or three months. Any further travelling must therefore be abandoned for the present, as it might be attended with the most serious consequences to the old lady.

Both husband and wife were greatly distressed at the unlucky accident which placed them in such an awkward position at this wayside inn. They were truly grieved at the serious sickness of their mother, but they were still more puzzled as to what course they should pursue in these most trying

circumstances. The Imperial Rescript appointing Kwang-Jui to his office as Prefect commanded him to take up his post on a certain definite date. To delay until his mother would again be able to endure the fatigues of travel was out of the question, as disobedience to the Emperor's orders would be attended by his grave displeasure. Eventually his mother suggested that he and his wife should go on ahead, and that after taking up the duties of his office he should then delegate them for a time to his subordinates and return to take her home.

This advice Kwang-Jui decided to carry out; though with great reluctance, as he was most unwilling to abandon his mother to the care of strangers. He accordingly made all the arrangements he possibly could for her comfort whilst they were parted from each other; he had servants engaged to attend upon her, and he left sufficient money with her to meet all her expenses during his absence.

With a mind full of consideration for his mother, and wishing to show how anxious he was to give her pleasure, he went out into the market of the town to see if he could buy a certain kind of fish of which she was passionately fond. He had hardly got outside the courtyard of the inn, when he met a fisherman with a very fine specimen of the very fish that he wished to purchase.

As he was discussing the price with the man, a certain something about the fish arrested his attention. There was a peculiar look in its eyes that seemed full of pathos and entreaty. Its gaze was concentrated upon him, so human-like and with such intensity, that he instinctively felt it was pleading with him to do something to deliver it from a great disaster. This made him look at it more carefully, and to his astonishment the liquid eyes of the fish were still fixed upon him with a passionate regard that made him quiver with excitement.

"Fisherman," he said, "I want to buy this fish, and here is the price that you ask for it. I have but one stipulation to make, and that is that you take it to the river from which you caught it, and set it free to swim away wherever it pleases. Remember that if you fail to carry out this part of the bargain, great sorrow will come upon you and your home."

Little did either of them dream that the fish was the presiding God of the River, who for purposes of his own had transformed himself into this form, and who, while swimming up and down the stream had been caught in the net of the fisherman.

After travelling for some hours Kwang-Jui and his wife came to the bank of a considerable river, where they hired a large boat to convey them to their destination.

The boatman they engaged was a man of very low character. He had originally been a scholar and of good family, but, utterly depraved and immoral, he had gradually sunk lower and lower in society, until at last he had been compelled to fly from his home to a distant province, and there to engage in his present occupation in order to earn his living. The large amount of property which Kwang-Jui had with him seemed to arouse the worst passions in this man, and while the boat was being carried along by a fair wind and a flowing tide, he planned in his mind how he was to become the possessor of it. By the time that they reached the place where they were to anchor for the night, he had already decided what measures he should adopt.

A little after midnight, accordingly, he crept stealthily towards the place where Kwang-Jui was sleeping, stabbed him to the heart and threw his body into the fast-flowing river. He next threatened the wife that if she dared to utter a sound, he would murder her also and send her to join her husband in the Land of Shadows. Paralyzed with terror, she remained speechless, only a stifled sob and groan now and again breaking from her agonized heart. Her first serious idea was to commit suicide, and she was preparing to fling herself into the water that gurgled along the sides of the boat, when she was restrained by the thought that if she destroyed herself, she would never be able to avenge her husband's death or bring punishment upon the villain who had just murdered him.

It was not mere robbery, however, that was in the mind of the man who had committed this great crime. He had bigger ideas than that. He had noticed that in personal appearance he very much resembled his victim, so he determined to carry out the daring project of passing himself off as Kwang-Jui, the mandarin whom the Emperor had despatched to take up the appointment of Prefect.

Having threatened the widow that instant death would be her portion if she breathed a word to anyone about the true state of the case, and having arrayed himself in the official robes of the man whom he had stabbed to death, the boatman appeared at the yamen, where he presented the Imperial credentials and was duly installed in his office. It never entered his mind that it was not cowardice which kept the widow silent, but the stern resolve of a brave and high-minded woman that she would do her part to see that vengeance should in time fall upon the man who had robbed her of a husband whom she looked upon as the direct gift of Heaven.

Now, immediately after the body of Kwang-Jui had been cast into the water, the customary patrol sent by the God of the River to see that order was kept within his dominions, came upon it, and conveyed it with all speed into the presence of the god himself.

The latter looked at it intently for a moment, and then exclaimed in great excitement, "Why, this is the very person who only yesterday saved my life, when I was in danger of being delivered over to a cruel death! I shall now be able to show my gratitude by using all the power I possess to serve his interests. Bring him to the Crystal Grotto," he continued, "where only those who have distinguished themselves in the service of the State have ever been allowed to lie. This man has a claim upon me such as no one before him ever possessed. He is the saviour of my life, and I will tenderly care for him until the web of fate has been spun, and, the vengeance of Heaven having been wreaked upon his murderer, he shall once more rejoin the wife from whom he has been so ruthlessly torn."

With the passing of the months, the widow of Kwang-Jui gave birth to a son, the very image of his father. It was night-time when he was born, and not long after his birth, a mysterious voice, which could not be traced, was heard distinctly saying, "Let the child be removed without delay from the yamen, before the return of the Prefect, as otherwise its life will not be safe."

Accordingly, on the morrow, the babe, about whose destiny even Heaven itself seemed concerned, was carefully wrapped round with many coverings to protect it against the weather. Inside the inmost dress, there was enclosed a small document, telling the child's tragic story and describing the danger from a powerful foe which threatened its life. In order to be able to identify her son, it might be after the lapse of many years, the mother cut off the last joint of the little finger of his left hand; and then, with tears and sighs, and with her heart full of unspoken agony, she took a last, lingering look upon the face of the little one.

A confidential slave woman carried him out of her room, and by devious ways and secret paths finally laid him on the river's bank. Casting a final glance at the precious bundle to see that no danger threatened it, she hurried back in the direction of the city, with the faint cries of the abandoned infant still sounding in her ears.

And now the child was in the hands of Heaven. That this was so was evident from the fact that in a few minutes the abbot of the monastery, which could be seen crowning the top of a neighbouring hill, passed along the narrow pathway by the side of the river. Hearing a baby's cry, he hastened towards the place from which the sounds came, and picking up the little bundle, and realizing that the infant had been deserted, he carried it up to the monastery and made every arrangement for its care and comfort. Fortunately he was a man of a deeply benevolent nature, and no more suitable person could have been found to take charge of the child.

We must now allow eighteen years to pass by. The child that had been left on the margin of the river had grown up to be a fine, handsome lad. The abbot had been his friend ever since the day when his heart had been touched by his cries, and his love for the little foundling had grown with the years. The boy had become a kind of son to him, and in order not to be parted from him he had taught him the temple duties, so that he was now a qualified priest in the service of the gods.

One morning the young man, whose name was Sam-Choang, came to the abbot with a restless, dissatisfied look on his face, and begged to be told who his father was, and who his mother. The old priest, who had long been aware of the tragic story of Kwang-Jui's murder, felt that the time had come when the lad ought to know what he had hitherto concealed from him. Taking out the document

which he had found upon him as a baby, he read it to him, and then the great secret was out. After this a long and serious discussion took place between the two as to the wisest methods to be adopted for bringing the Prefect to justice and delivering the lad's mother from the humiliating position which she had so heroically borne for all these eighteen years.

The next day a young priest, with shaven head and dressed in the usual slate-coloured gown, appeared at the yamen of the Prefect to solicit subscriptions for the neighbouring monastery. As the Prefect was absent on some public business, he was ushered into the reception-room, where he was received by his mother, who had always been a generous supporter of the Goddess of Mercy.

At the first sight of this striking-looking young bonze, she found her heart agitated in a strange and powerful way, such as she had not experienced for many a long year; and when she noticed that the little finger on his left hand was without the last joint, she trembled with the utmost excitement.

After a few words about the object for which he had come, the young priest slipped into her hand the very paper which she had written eighteen years ago; and as she looked at her own handwriting and then gazed into his face and saw the striking likeness to the man at whom she had thrown the embroidered ball, the mother-instinct within her flashed suddenly out, and she recognized that this handsome lad was her own son. The joy of the mother as she looked upon the face of Sam-Choang was reflected in the sparkling eyes and glowing look of pleasure that lit up his whole countenance.

Retiring for a short time his mother returned with a letter which she handed to him. In a low voice she told him that it was to her father, who still lived in the capital, and to whom he was to take it without any delay. In order to prevent suspicion on the part of the Prefect, he was to travel as a priest, who was endeavouring to obtain subscriptions for his monastery. He was to be sure, also, to visit the place where his grandmother had been left, and to try and find out what had become of her. In order to defray his expenses she gave him a few bars of gold, which he could exchange for the current money at the banks on the way.

When Sam-Choang arrived at the inn where his father had parted with his grandmother, he could find no trace of her. A new landlord was in possession, who had never even heard her name; but on enquiring amongst the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood, he found to his horror that she was now a member of the beggars' camp, and that her name was enrolled amongst that degraded fraternity.

On reaching the wretched hovel where she was living, he discovered that when her money was exhausted and no remittance came to her from her son, she had been driven out on to the street by the innkeeper, and from that time had tramped the country, living on the scraps and bits which were bestowed upon her by the benevolent. Great was her joy when her grandson led her away to the best inn in the place, and on his departure gave her an ample supply of money for all her needs until they should meet again.

When Sam-Choang reached the capital and handed his mother's letter to his grandfather, the most profound excitement ensued. As soon as the Emperor was officially informed of the case, he determined that the severest punishment should be inflicted upon the man who had not only committed a cruel murder, but through it had dared to usurp a position which could only be held at the Sovereign's command. An Imperial Edict was accordingly issued ordering the Prime Minister to take a considerable body of troops and proceed with all possible speed to the district where such an unheard-of crime had been committed, and there to hand over the offender to immediate execution.

By forced marches, so as to outstrip any private intelligence that might have been sent from the capital, the avenging force reached the city a little before the break of day. Here they waited in silence outside the city gates, anxiously listening for the boom of the early gun which announces the dawn, and at the same time causes the gates to be flung wide open for the traffic of the day to commence.

As soon as the warders had admitted the waiting crowd outside, the soldiers, advancing at a run, quickly reached the yamen, and arrested the Prefect. Without form of trial but simply with a curt announcement from the Prime Minister that he was acting upon instructions from the Emperor,

the mandarin was dragged unceremoniously through the gaping crowds that rushed from their doors to see the amazing spectacle.

The feet of Fate had marched slowly but with unerring certainty, and had at last reached the wretched criminal.

But where was he being taken? This road did not lead to the execution ground, where malefactors were doomed to end their careers in shame. Street after street was passed, and still the stern-faced soldiers forced the mandarin down the main thoroughfares, whose sides had often been lined with respectful crowds as he swept by with his haughty retinue. At last they reached the city gate, through which they marched, and then on towards the river, which could be seen gleaming like a silver thread in the distance.

Arrived at its bank, the troops formed into a square with the prisoner in the centre. Addressing him, the Prime Minister said, "I have selected this spot rather than the public execution ground where criminals are put to death. Your crime has been no common one; and so to-day, in the face of high Heaven whose righteousness you have dared to violate, and within sound of the flowing waters of the stream that witnessed the murder, you shall die."

Half a dozen soldiers then threw him violently to the ground, and in a few minutes the executioner had torn his bleeding heart from his bosom. Then, standing with it still in his hand, he waited by the side of the Prime Minister, who read out to the great multitude the indictment which had been drawn up against the Prefect. In this he described his crimes, and at the same time appealed to Heaven and to the God of the River to take measures to satisfy and appease the spirit of him who had been cut off in the prime of life by the man who had just been executed.

As soon as the reading of the document had been concluded, it was set fire to and allowed to burn until only the blackened ashes remained. These, together with the criminal's heart, were then cast into the river. They were thus formally handed over to the god, who would see that in the Land of Shadows there should come a further retribution on the murderer for the crimes he had committed on earth.

The water patrol happened to pass by soon after the ashes and heart had been flung into the river, and picking them up most carefully, they carried them to the official residence of the god. The indictment was at once formally entered amongst the archives of the office, to be used as evidence when the case was in due time brought before the notice of Yam-lo: and after looking at the heart with the intensest scrutiny for some little time, the god exclaimed, "And so the murderer has at last received some part of the punishment he so richly deserved. It is now time for me to awake the sleeping husband, so that he may be restored to the wife from whom he has been separated for eighteen years."

Passing into the Crystal Grotto, where the unconscious form of Kwang-Jui had reposed for so many years, the god touched the body gently with his hand, and said:—"Friend, arise! Your wife awaits you, and loving ones who have long mourned you. Many years of happiness are still before you, and the honours that your Sovereign will bestow upon you shall place you amongst the famous men of the State. Arise, and take your place once more amongst the living!"

The Prime Minister was sitting with his daughter, listening to the sad story of the years of suffering through which she had passed, when the door was silently opened, and the figure of her long-lost husband glided in. Both started up in fear and amazement, for they believed that what they saw was only a restless spirit which had wandered from the Land of Shadows and would speedily vanish again from their sight. In this, however, they were delightfully disappointed. Kwang-Jui and his wife were once more reunited, and for many a long year their hearts were so full of gladness and contentment, that the sorrows which they had endured gradually became effaced from their memories. They always thought with the deepest gratitude of the God of the River, who for eighteen years had kept the unconscious husband alive and had finally restored him to his heart-broken wife.

III

THE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER OF LIU-KUNG

In one of the central provinces of this long-lived Empire of China, there lived in very early times a man of the name of Chan. He was a person of a bright, active nature which made him enjoy life, and caused him to be popular amongst his companions and a favourite with every one who knew him. But he was also a scholar, well-versed in the literature of his country, and he spent every moment that he could spare in the study of the great writings of the famous men of former days.

In order that he might be interrupted as little as possible in his pursuit of learning, he engaged a room in a famous monastery some miles away from his own home. The only inhabitants of this monastery were a dozen or so of Buddhist priests, who, except when they were engaged in the daily services of the temple, lived a quiet, humdrum, lazy kind of existence which harmonized well with the solitude and the majestic stillness of the mountain scenery by which they were surrounded.

This monastery was indeed one of the most beautiful in China. It was situated on the slope of a hill, looking down upon a lovely valley, where the natural solitude was as complete as the most devoted hermit could desire. The only means of getting to it were the narrow hill footpaths along which the worshippers from the great city and the scattered villages wound in and out on festal days, when they came trooping to the temple to make their offerings to the famous God enshrined within.

Chan was a diligent student, and rarely indulged in recreation of any kind. Occasionally, when his mind became oppressed with excessive study he would go for a quiet walk along the hillside; but these occasions were few and far between, for he made up for every hour he spent away from his beloved books by still closer application to them in the hours that followed.

One day he was strolling in an aimless kind of way on the hillside, when suddenly a party of hunters from the neighbouring city of Eternal Spring came dashing into view. They were a merry group and full of excitement, for they had just sighted a fox which Chan had seen a moment before flying away at its highest speed in mortal dread of its pursuers.

Prominent amongst the hunters was a young girl, who was mounted on a fiery little steed, so full of spirit and so eager to follow in the mad chase after the prey, that its rider seemed to have some difficulty in restraining it. The girl herself was a perfect picture. Her face was the loveliest that Chan had ever looked upon, and her figure, which her trim hunting dress showed off to the utmost advantage, was graceful in the extreme. As she swept by him with her face flushed with excitement and her features all aglow with health, Chan felt at once that he had lost his heart and that he was deeply and profoundly in love with her.

On making enquiries, he found that she was named Willow, that she was the daughter of the chief mandarin of the town in which she lived, and that she was intensely fond of the chase and delighted in galloping over the hills and valleys in the pursuit of the wild animals to be found there. So powerfully had Chan's mind been affected by what he had seen of Willow, that he had already begun to entertain serious thoughts of making her his wife; but while his mind was full of this delightful prospect he was plunged into the deepest grief by hearing that she had suddenly died. For some days he was so stricken with sorrow that he lost all interest in life, and could do nothing but dwell on the memory of her whom he had come to love with all the devotion of his heart.

A few weeks after the news of her death, the quiet of the retreat was one day broken by a huge procession which wound its way along the mountain path leading to the monastery doors. On looking out, Chan saw that many of the men in this procession were dressed in sackcloth, and that in front of it was a band of musicians producing weird, shrill notes on their various instruments.

By these signs Chan knew that what he saw was a funeral, and he expected to see the long line of mourners pass on to some spot on the hillside where the dead would be buried. Instead of that,

however, they entered through the great gates of the monastery, and the coffin, the red pall of which told him that it contained the body of a woman, was carried into an inner room of the building and laid on trestles that had been made ready for it.

After the mourners had dispersed, Chan asked one of the priests the name of the woman who had died, and how it was that the coffin was laid within the precincts of the temple instead of in the house of the deceased, where it could be looked after by her relatives and where the customary sacrifices to the spirit of the dead could be offered more conveniently than in the monastery.

The bonze replied that this was a peculiar case, calling for special treatment.

"The father of the poor young girl who died so suddenly," he said, "was the mandarin of the neighbouring city of Eternal Spring. Just after the death of his daughter an order came from the Emperor transferring him to another district, a thousand miles from here.

"The command was very urgent that he should proceed without delay to take up his post in the far-off province, and that he was to allow nothing to hinder him from doing so. He could not carry his daughter's body with him on so long a journey, and no time was permitted him to take the coffin to his home, where she might be buried amongst her own kindred. It was equally impossible to deposit the coffin in the yamen he was about to leave, for the new mandarin who was soon to arrive would certainly object to have the body of a stranger in such close proximity to his family. It might bring him bad luck, and his career as an official might end in disaster.

"Permission was therefore asked from our abbot to allow the coffin to be placed in one of our vacant rooms, until the father some day in the future can come and bear the body of his beloved daughter to the home of his ancestors, there to be laid at rest amongst his own people.

"This request was readily granted, for whilst he was in office the mandarin showed us many favours, and his daughter was a beautiful girl who was beloved by everyone; and so we were only too glad to do anything in our power to help in this unhappy matter."

Chan was profoundly moved when he realized that the woman whom he had loved as his own life lay dead within a chamber only a few steps away from his own. His passion, instead of being crushed out of his heart by the thought that she was utterly beyond his reach, and by no possibility could ever be more to him than a memory, seemed to grow in intensity as he became conscious that it was an absolutely hopeless one.

On that very same evening, about midnight, when silence rested on the monastery, and the priests were all wrapped in slumber, Chan, with a lighted taper in his hand, stole with noiseless footsteps along the dark passages into the chamber of death where his beloved lay. Kneeling beside the coffin with a heart full of emotion, in trembling accents he called upon Willow to listen to the story of his passion.

He spoke to her just as though she were standing face to face with him, and he told her how he had fallen in love with her on the day on which he had caught a glimpse of her as she galloped in pursuit of the fox that had fled through the valley from the hunters. He had planned, he told her, to make her his wife, and he described, in tones through which the tears could be heard to run, how heart-broken he was when he heard of her death.

"I want to see you," he continued, "for I feel that I cannot live without you. You are near to me, and yet oh! how far away. Can you not come from the Land of Shadows, where you are now, and comfort me by one vision of your fair face, and one sound of the voice that would fill my soul with the sweetest music?"

For many months the comfort of Chan's life was this nightly visit to the chamber where his dead love lay. Not a single night passed without his going to tell her of the unalterable and undying affection that filled his heart; and whilst the temple lay shrouded in darkness, and the only sounds that broke the stillness were those inexplicable ones in which nature seems to indulge when man is removed by sleep from the scene, Chan was uttering those love notes which had lain deeply hidden

within his soul, but which now in the utter desolation of his heart burst forth to ease his pain by their mere expression.

One night as he was sitting poring over his books, he happened to turn round, and was startled to see the figure of a young girl standing just inside the door of his room. It seemed perfectly human, and yet it was so ethereal that it had the appearance of a spirit of the other world. As he looked at the girl with a wondering gaze, a smile lit up her beautiful features, and he then discovered to his great joy that she was none other than Willow, his lost love whom he had despaired of ever seeing again.

With her face wreathed in smiles, she sat down beside him and said in a timid, modest way:—"I am here to-night in response to the great love which has never faltered since the day I died. That is the magnet which has had the power of drawing me from the Land of Shadows. I felt it there, and many speak about it in that sunless country. Even Yam-lo, the lord of the spirits of that dreary world, has been moved by your unchanging devotion; so much so that he has given me permission to come and see you, in order that I might tell you how deeply my heart is moved by the profound affection that you have exhibited for me all these months during which you never had any expectation of its being returned."

For many months this sweet intercourse between Chan and his beloved Willow was carried on, and no one in the whole monastery knew anything of it. The interviews always took place about midnight, and Willow, who seemed to pass with freedom through closed doors or the stoutest walls, invariably vanished during the small hours of the morning.

One evening whilst they were conversing on topics agreeable to them both, Willow unburdened her heart to Chan, and told him how unhappy she was in the world of spirits.

"You know," she said, "that before I died I was not married, and so I am only a wandering spirit with no place where I can rest, and no friends to whom I can betake myself. I travel here and there and everywhere, feeling that no one cares for me, and that there are no ties to bind me to any particular place or thing. For a young girl like me, this is a very sad and sorrowful state of things.

"There is another thing that adds to my sorrow in the Land of Shadows," she went on to say, with a mournful look on her lovely countenance. "I was very fond of hunting when I was in my father's home, and many a wild animal was slain in the hunting expeditions in which I took an active part. This has all told against me in the world in which I am now living, and for the share I took in destroying life I have to suffer by many pains and penalties which are hard for me to endure.

"My sin has been great," she said, "and so I wish to make special offerings in this temple to the Goddess of Mercy and implore her to send down to the other world a good report of me to Yam-lo, and intercede with him to forgive the sins of which I have been guilty. If you will do this for me, I promise that after I have been born again into the world I will never forget you, and if you like to wait for me I shall willingly become your wife and serve you with the deepest devotion of which my heart is capable, as long as Heaven will permit you and me to live together as husband and wife."

From this time, much to the astonishment of the priests in the monastery, Chan began to show unwonted enthusiasm for the service of the Goddess, and would sometimes spend hours before her image and repeat long prayers to her. This was all the more remarkable, as the scholar had rarely if ever shown any desire to have anything to do with the numerous gods which were enshrined in various parts of the temple.

After some months of this daily appeal to the Goddess of Mercy, Willow informed him that his prayers had been so far successful that the misery of her lot in the Land of Shadows had been greatly mitigated. The pleadings of the Goddess with Yam-lo had so influenced his heart towards Willow that she believed her great sin in the destruction of animal life had been forgiven, and there were signs that the dread ruler of the Underworld was looking upon her with kindness.

Chan was delighted with this news, and his prayers and offerings became still more frequent and more fervent. He little dreamed that his devotion to the Goddess would be the means of his speedy separation from Willow, but so it was. One evening she came as usual to see him, but instead

of entering with smiling face and laughter in her eyes, she was weeping bitterly as though she were in the direst sorrow.

Chan was in the greatest distress when he saw this and asked her to explain the reason for her grief. "The reason for my tears," she said, "is because after this evening I shall not see you again. Your petitions to the Goddess have had such a powerful effect upon her mind that she has used all her influence with Yam-lo to induce him to set me free from the misery of the Land of Shadows, and so I am to leave that sunless country and to be born again into life in this upper world."

As she uttered these words her tears began to flow once more and her whole frame was convulsed with sobbing.

"I am glad," she said, "that I am to be born once more and live amongst men, but I cannot bear the thought of having to be separated for so long from you. Let us not grieve too much, however. It is our fate, and we may not rebel against it. Yam-lo has been kinder to me than he has ever been to any one in the past, for he has revealed to me the family into which I am to be born and the place where they live, so if you come to me in eighteen years you will find me waiting for you. Your love has been so great that it has entered into my very soul, and there is nothing that can ever efface it from my heart. A thousand re-births may take place, but never shall I love any one as I love you."

Chan professed that he was greatly comforted by this confession of her love, but all the same he felt in despair when he thought of the future.

"When next I shall see you," he said with a sigh, "I shall be getting so old that you, a young girl in the first flush of womanhood, will not care to look at me. My hair will have turned grey and my face will be marked with wrinkles, and in the re-birth you will have forgotten all that took place in the Land of Shadows, and the memory of me will have vanished from your heart for ever."

Willow looked with loving but sorrowful eyes upon her lover as he was expressing his concern about the future, but quickly assured him that nothing in the world would ever cause her to cease to remember him with the tenderest affection.

"In order to comfort you," she said, "let me tell you of two things that the dread Yam-lo, out of consideration for your love for me, has granted me—two things which he has never bestowed upon any other mortal who has come within the region of his rule. The first is, he has allowed me to inspect the book of Life and Death, in which is recorded the history of every human being, with the times of their re-births and the places in which they are to be born. I want you this very minute to write down the secret which has been revealed to me as to my new name and family and the place where I shall reside, so that you will have no difficulty in finding me, when eighteen years hence you shall come to claim me as your wife.

"The next is a gift so precious that I have no words in which to express my gratitude for its having been bestowed upon me. It is this. I am given the privilege of not forgetting what has taken place during my stay in the Land of Shadows, and so when I am re-born into another part of China, with a new father and mother, I shall hold within my memory my recollection of you. The years will pass quickly, for I shall be looking for you, and this day eighteen years hence will be the happiest in my life, for it will bring you to me never more to be separated from me.

"But I must hasten on," she hurriedly exclaimed, "for the footsteps of fate are moving steadily towards me. In a few minutes the gates of Hades will have closed against me, and Willow will have vanished, and I shall be a babe once more with my new life before me. See, but a minute more is left me, and I seem to have so much to say. Farewell! Never forget me! I shall ever remember you, but my time is come!"

As she uttered these words, a smile of ineffable sweetness flashed across, her beautiful face, and she was gone.

Chan was inexpressibly sad at the loss he had sustained by the re-birth of Willow, and in order to drive away his sorrow he threw his heart and soul into his studies. His books became his constant companions, and he tried to find in them a solace for the loneliness which had come upon him since

the visits of Willow had ceased. He also became a diligent worshipper of the idols, and especially of the Goddess of Mercy, who had played such an important part in the history of his beloved Willow.

The years went slowly by, and Chan began to feel that he was growing old. His hair became dashed with silver threads, and wrinkles appeared in his forehead and under his eyes. The strain of waiting for the one woman who had taken complete possession of his heart had been too much for him. As the time drew near, too, when he should go to meet her, a great and nervous dread began to fill him with anxiety. Would she recognize him? And would she, a young girl of eighteen, be content to accept as a husband a man so advanced in years as he now was? These questions were constantly flashing through his brain.

At last only a few months remained before he was to set out on his journey to the distant province where Yam-lo had decided that Willow was to begin her new life on earth.

He was sitting one evening in his study, brooding over the great problem that would be solved before long, when a man dressed in black silently entered the room. Looking on Chan with a kindly smile which seemed to find its way instantly to his heart, he informed him that he was a fairy from the Western Heaven and that he had been specially deputed by the rulers there to render him all the assistance in his power at this particular crisis, when they knew his heart was so full of anxiety.

"We have all heard in that far-off fairyland," he continued, "of the devotion you have shown to Willow, and how during all the years which have intervened since you saw her last you have never faltered in your love for her. Such affection is rare among mortals, and the dwellers in fairyland would like to help in bringing together two such loving hearts; for let me assure you that however strong your feeling for the one whom you are so anxious to see again, she on her part is just as deeply in love with you, and is now counting the days until she will be able to see you and until you need never again be parted from each other. In order to assist in this happy consummation, I want you to take a short trip with me. It will only take a few hours, and you will then find that something has happened to remove all your fears as to how you will be received by Willow."

The fairy man then led Chan to the door, and gave a wave of his hand in the direction of the sky. Instantly the sound of the fluttering and swish of wings was heard, and in a moment a splendid eagle landed gracefully at their feet. Taking their seats upon its back, they found themselves flashing at lightning speed away through the darkness of the night. Higher and higher they rose, till they had pierced the heavy masses of clouds which hung hovering in the sky. Swift as an arrow the eagle still cleft its way upward until the clouds had vanished to an infinite distance below them; and still onward they were borne in the mighty stillness of an expanse where no human being had ever travelled before.

Chan felt his heart throb with a nervousness which he could not control. What if the bird should tire, he thought, and he should be dropped into the fathomless abyss below? Life's journey would then come to a tragic end. Where, too, was he being carried and how should he be ever able to return to his far-off home on the earth? He was becoming more and more agitated, when the fairy took hold of his hand and in a voice which at once stilled his fears, assured him that there was not the least danger in this journey through the air.

"We are as safe here," he assured him, "as though we were standing upon a mountain whose roots lie miles below the surface of the earth. And see," he continued, pointing to something in the distance, "we shall arrive at our destination in the course of a few seconds."

True enough, he had hardly finished speaking when a land, fairer than Chan had ever seen on earth or pictured in imagination, loomed up suddenly in front of them; and before he could gather together his astonished thoughts, the eagle had landed them on its shores, and with outspread wings was soaring into the mystery of the unknown beyond.

The fairy now led Chan along a road surrounded by the most bewildering beauty. Rare flowers, graceful trees, and birds which made the groves resound with the sweetest music, were objects that kept his mind in one continual state of delight. Before long they arrived in front of a magnificent

palace, so grand and vast that Chan felt afraid to enter within its portals, or even tread the avenue leading up to it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.