

Maugham William Somerset

East of Suez: A Play in Seven Scenes



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Содержание

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	5
SCENE I	6
SCENE II	7
SCENE III	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

William Somerset Maugham

East of Suez: A Play in Seven Scenes

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Daisy

George Conway

Henry Anderson

Harold Knox

Lee Tai Cheng

Sylvia Knox

Amah

Wu

The action of the play takes place in Peking

SCENE I

Scene: A street in Peking

Several shops are shown. Their fronts are richly decorated with carved wood painted red and profusely gilt. The counters are elaborately carved. Outside are huge sign-boards. The shops are open to the street and you can see the various wares they sell. One is a coffin shop, where the coolies are at work on a coffin: other coffins, ready for sale, are displayed; some of them are of plain deal, others are rich, with black and gold. The next shop is a money changer's. Then there is a lantern shop in which all manner of coloured lanterns are hanging. After this comes a druggist where there are queer things in bottles and dried herbs. A small stuffed crocodile is a prominent object. Next to this is a shop where crockery is sold, large coloured jars, plates, and all manner of strange animals. In all the shops two or three Chinamen are seated. Some read newspapers through great horn spectacles; some smoke water pipes.

The street is crowded. Here is an itinerant cook with his two chests, in one of which is burning charcoal: he serves out bowls of rice and condiments to the passers-by who want food. There is a barber with the utensils of his trade. A coolie, seated on a stool, is having his head shaved. Chinese walk to and fro.

Some are coolies and wear blue cotton in various stages of raggedness; some in black gowns and caps and black shoes are merchants and clerks. There is a beggar, gaunt and thin, with an untidy mop of bristly hair, in tatters of indescribable filthiness. He stops at one of the shops and begins a long wail. For a time no one takes any notice of him, but presently on a word from the fat shopkeeper an assistant gives him a few cash and he wanders on. Coolies, half naked, hurry by, bearing great bales on their yokes. They utter little sharp cries for people to get out of their way. Peking carts with their blue hoods rumble noisily along. Rickshaws pass rapidly in both directions, and the rickshaw boys shout for the crowd to make way. In the rickshaws are grave Chinese. Some are dressed in white ducks after the European fashion; in other rickshaws are Chinese women in long smocks and wide trousers or Manchu ladies, with their faces painted like masks, in embroidered silks. Women of various sorts stroll about the street or enter the shops. You see them chaffering for various articles.

A water-carrier passes along with a creaking barrow, slopping the water as he goes; an old blind woman, a masseuse, advances slowly, striking wooden clappers to proclaim her calling. A musician stands on the curb and plays a tuneless melody on a one-stringed fiddle. From the distance comes the muffled sound of gongs. There is a babel of sound caused by the talking of all these people, by the cries of coolies, the gong, the clappers, and the fiddle. From burning joss-sticks in the shops in front of the household god comes a savour of incense.

A couple of Mongols ride across on shaggy ponies; they wear high boots and Astrakhan caps. Then a string of camels sways slowly down the street. They carry great burdens of skins from the deserts of Mongolia. They are accompanied by wild looking fellows. Two stout Chinese gentlemen are giving their pet birds an airing; the birds are attached by the leg with a string and sit on little wooden perches. The two Chinese gentlemen discuss their merits. Round about them small boys play. They run hither and thither pursuing one another amid the crowd.

END OF SCENE I

SCENE II

A small verandah on an upper storey of the British American Tobacco Company's premises, the upper part of which the staff lives in. At the back are heavy arches of whitewashed masonry and a low wall which serves as a parapet. Green blinds are drawn. There is a bamboo table on which are copies of illustrated papers. A couple of long bamboo chairs and two or three smaller arm chairs. The floor is tiled.

On one of the long chairs Harold Knox is lying asleep. He is a young man of pleasing appearance. He wears white ducks, but he has taken off his coat, which lies on a chair, and his collar and tie and pin. They are on the table by his side. He is troubled by a fly and, half waking but with his eyes still closed, tries to drive it away.

Knox. Curse it. [*He opens his eyes and yawns.*] Boy!

Wu. [*Outside.*] Ye.

Knox. What's the time?

[*Wu comes in; he is a Chinese servant in a long white gown with a black cap on his head. He bears a tray on which is a bottle of whisky, a glass and a syphon.*]

Wu. My no sabe.

Knox. Anyhow it's time for a whisky and soda. [*Wu puts the tray down on the table. Knox smiles.*] Intelligent anticipation. Model servant and all that sort of thing. [*Wu pours out the whisky.*] You don't care if I drink myself to death, Wu – do you? [*Wu smiles, showing all his teeth.*] Fault of the climate. Give me the glass. [*Wu does so.*] You're like a mother to me, Wu. [*He drinks and puts down the glass.*] By George, I feel another man. The bull-dog breed, Wu. Never say die. Rule Britannia. Pull up the blinds, you lazy blighter. The sun's off and the place is like an oven.

[*Wu goes over and pulls up one blind after the other. An expanse of blue sky is seen. Henry Anderson comes in. He is a man of thirty, fair, good-looking, with a pleasant, honest face. His obvious straightforwardness and sincerity make him attractive.*]

Harry. [*Breezily.*] Hulloo, Harold, you seem to be taking it easy.

Knox. There was nothing to do in the office and I thought I'd get in my beauty sleep while I had the chance.

Harry. I thought you had your beauty sleep before midnight.

Knox. I'm taking time by the forelock so as to be on the safe side.

Harry. Are you going on the loose again to-night?

Knox. Again, Henry?

Harry. You were blind last night.

Knox. [*With great satisfaction.*] Paralytic... Hulloo, who's this? [*He catches sight of the Amah who has just entered. She is a little, thin, wrinkled, elderly Chinawoman in a long smock and trousers. She has gold pins in her sleek black hair. When she sees she has been noticed she smiles obsequiously.*] Well, fair charmer, what can we do for you?

Harry. What does she want, Wu?

Knox. Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?

Amah. My Missy have pay my letter.

Harry. [*With sudden eager interest.*] Are you Mrs. Rathbone's amah? Have you got a letter for me?

Amah. My belong Missy Rathbone amah.

Harry. Well, hurry up, don't be all night about it. Lend me a dollar, Harold. I want to give it to the old girl.

[*The Amah takes a note out of her sleeve and gives it to Harry. He opens it and reads.*]

Knox. I haven't got a dollar. Give her a chit or ask Wu. He's the only man I know who's got any money.

Harry. Let me have a dollar, Wu. Chop-chop.

Wu. My go catchee.

[He goes out. The Amah is standing near the table. While Knox and Harry go on talking she notices Knox's pin. She smiles and smiles and makes little bows to the two men, but at the same time her hand cautiously reaches out for the pin and closes on it. Then she secretes it in her sleeve.]

Harry. I thought you were going to play tennis this afternoon.

Knox. So I am later on.

Harry. *[Smiling.]* Do it now, dear boy. That is a precept a business man should never forget.

Knox. I should hate to think you wanted to be rid of me.

Harry. I dote on your company, but I feel that I mustn't be selfish.

Knox. *[Pulling his leg.]* To tell you the truth I don't feel very fit to-day.

Harry. A little bilious, I dare say. Half a dozen hard sets are just what you want. *[He hands Knox his coat.]*

Knox. What is this?

Harry. Your coat.

Knox. You're making yourself almost more distressingly plain than nature has already made you.

[Wu comes back and hands Harry a dollar, and then goes out. Harry gives the dollar to the Amah.]

Harry. Here's a dollar for you, amah. You go back to missy and tell her it's all right and will she come chop-chop. Sabe?

Amah. My sabe. Goo'-bye.

Knox. God bless you, dearie. It's done me good to see your winsome little face.

Harry. *[With a smile.]* Shut up, Harold.

[The Amah with nods, smiles and bows, goes out.]

Knox. Harry, my poor friend, is it possible that you have an assignation?

Harry. What is possible is that if you don't get out quick I'll throw you out.

Knox. Why didn't you say you were expecting a girl?

Harry. I'm not; I'm expecting a lady.

Knox. Are you sure you know how to behave? If you'd like me to stay and see you don't do the wrong thing I'll chuck my tennis. I'm always ready to sacrifice myself for a friend.

Harry. Has it struck you that the distance from the verandah to the street is very considerable?

Knox. And the pavement is hard. I flatter myself I can take a hint. I wonder where the devil my pin is. I left it on the table.

Harry. I expect Wu put it away.

Knox. It's much more likely that old woman pinched it.

Harry. Oh, nonsense. She wouldn't dream of such a thing. I believe Mrs. Rathbone's had her for ages.

Knox. Who is Mrs. Rathbone?

Harry. *[Not wishing to be questioned.]* A friend of mine.

[George Conway comes in. He is a tall, dark man in the early thirties. He is a handsome, well-built fellow, of a somewhat rugged appearance, but urbane and self-assured.]

George. May I come in?

Harry. *[Eagerly, shaking him warmly by the hand.]* At last. By Jove, it's good to see you again. You know Knox, don't you?

George. I think so.

Knox. I wash bottles in the B. A. T. I don't expect the legation bloods to be aware of my existence.

George. [*With a twinkle in his eye.*] I don't know that an Assistant Chinese Secretary is such a blood as all that.

Knox. You've just been down to Fuchow, haven't you?

George. Yes, I only got back this morning.

Knox. Did you see Freddy Baker by any chance?

George. Yes, poor chap.

Knox. Oh, I've got no pity for him. He's just a damned fool.

Harry. Why?

Knox. Haven't you heard? He's married a half-caste.

Harry. What of it? I believe she's a very pretty girl.

Knox. I daresay she is. But hang it all, he needn't have married her.

George. I don't think it was a very wise thing to do.

Harry. I should have thought all those prejudices were out of date. Why shouldn't a man marry a half-caste if he wants to?

Knox. It can't be very nice to have a wife whom even the missionary ladies turn up their noses at.

Harry. [*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] You wait till Freddy's number one in Hankow and can entertain. I bet the white ladies will be glad enough to know his missus then.

George. Yes, but that's just it. He'll never get a good job with a Eurasian wife.

Harry. He's in Jardine's, isn't he? Do you mean to say it's going to handicap a man in a shipping firm because he's married a woman who's partly Chinese?

George. Of course it is. Jardine's are about the most important firm in China and the manager of one of their principal branches has definite social obligations. Freddy Baker will be sent to twopenny halfpenny outposts where his wife doesn't matter.

Knox. I think he's damned lucky if he's not asked to resign.

Harry. It's cruel. His wife may be a charming and cultivated woman.

Knox. Have you ever known a half-caste that was?

Harry. I have.

Knox. Well, I've been in this country for seven years and I've never met one, male or female, that didn't give me the shivers.

Harry. I've no patience with you. You're a perfect damned fool.

Knox. [*A little surprised, but quite good-humoured.*] You're getting rather excited, aren't you?

Harry. [*Hotly.*] I hate injustice.

George. Do you think it really is injustice? The English are not an unkindly race. If they've got a down on half-castes there are probably very good grounds for it.

Harry. What are they?

Knox. We don't much like their morals, but we can't stick their manners.

George. Somehow or other they seem to inherit all the bad qualities of the two races from which they spring and none of the good ones. I'm sure there are exceptions, but on the whole the Eurasian is vulgar and noisy. He can't tell the truth if he tries.

Knox. To do him justice, he seldom tries.

George. He's as vain as a peacock. He'll cringe when he's afraid of you and he'll bully when he's not. You can never rely on him. He's crooked from the crown of his German hat to the toes of his American boots.

Knox. Straight from the shoulder. Take the count, old man.

Harry. [*Frigidly.*] Oughtn't you to be going?

Knox. [*Smiling.*] No, but I will.

Harry. I'm sorry if I was rude to you just now, old man.

Knox. Silly ass, you've broken no bones; my self-esteem, thank God, is unimpaired. [*He goes out.*]

Harry. I say, I'm awfully glad you're back, George. You can't think how I miss you when you're away.

George. As soon as the shooting starts we'll try and get two or three days together in the country.

Harry. Yes, that would be jolly. [*Calling.*] Wu.

Wu. [*Outside.*] Ye'.

Harry. Bring tea for three.

George. Who is the third?

Harry. When you said you could come round I asked somebody I want you very much to meet.

George. Who is that?

Harry. Mrs. Rathbone ... I'm going to be married to her and we want you to be our best man.

George. Harry.

Harry. [*Boyishly.*] I thought you'd be surprised.

George. My dear old boy, I am so glad. I hope you'll be awfully happy.

Harry. I'm awfully happy now.

George. Why have you kept it so dark?

Harry. I didn't want to say anything till it was all settled. Besides, I've only known her six weeks. I met her when I was down in Shanghai...

George. Is she a widow?

Harry. Yes, she was married to an American in the F. M. S.

George. Is she American?

Harry. Only by marriage. I'm afraid she didn't have a very happy married life.

George. Poor thing. I think I'd take a small bet that you won't beat her.

Harry. I mean to try my best to make her happy.

George. You old fool, I've never known a man who was likely to make a better husband.

Harry. I'm most awfully in love with her, George.

George. Isn't that ripping? How old is she?

Harry. Only twenty-two. She's the loveliest thing you ever saw.

George. And is she in love with you?

Harry. She says so.

George. She damned well ought to be.

Harry. I do hope you'll like her, George.

George. Of course I shall. You're not the sort of chap to fall in love with a woman who isn't nice.

[*Harry walks up and down for a moment restlessly.*]

Harry. Will you have a whisky and soda?

George. No, thanks ... I'll wait for tea.

Harry. She ought to be here in a moment. [*Suddenly making up his mind.*] It's no good beating about the bush. I may as well tell you at once. Her – her mother was Chinese.

George. [*Unable to conceal his dismay.*] Oh, Harry. [*A pause.*] I wish I hadn't said all that I did just now.

Harry. Of course you didn't know.

George. [*Gravely.*] I should have had to say something very like it, Harry. But I shouldn't have put it so bluntly.

Harry. You said yourself there were exceptions.

George. I know. [*Distressed.*] Won't your people be rather upset?

Harry. I don't see how it can matter to them. They're nine thousand miles away.

George. Who was her father?

Harry. Oh, he was a merchant. He's dead. And her mother is too.

George. That's something. I don't think you'd much like having a Chinese mother-in-law about the place.

Harry. George, you won't let it make any difference, will you? We've known one another all our lives.

George. My dear old chap, as far as I'm concerned I shouldn't care if you married the first cousin of the Ace of Spades. I don't want you to make a hash of things.

Harry. Wait till you see her. She's the most fascinating thing you ever met.

George. Yes, they can be charming. I was awfully in love with a half – with a Eurasian girl myself years ago. It was before you came out to the country. I wanted to marry her.

Harry. Why didn't you?

George. It was up in Chung-king. I'd just been appointed vice-consul. I was only twenty-three. The Minister wired from Peking that I'd have to resign if I did. I hadn't a bob except my salary and they transferred me to Canton to get me away.

Harry. It's different for you. You're in the service and you may be Minister one of these days. I'm only a merchant.

George. Even for you there'll be difficulties, you know. Has it occurred to you that the white ladies won't be very nice?

Harry. I can do without their society.

George. You must know some people. It means you'll have to hobnob with Eurasian clerks and their wives. I'm afraid you'll find it pretty rotten.

Harry. If you'll stick to me I don't care.

George. I suppose you've absolutely made up your mind?

Harry. Absolutely.

George. In that case I've got nothing more to say. You can't expect me not to be a little disappointed, but after all the chief thing is your happiness, and whatever I can do I will. You can put your shirt on that.

Harry. You're a brick, George.

George. The little lady ought to be here, oughtn't she?

Harry. I think I hear her on the stairs.

[He goes to the entrance and then out. Wu brings in the tea and sets it on the table. George walks over to the parapet and looks thoughtfully before him. There is a sound of voices in the adjoining room.]

Harry. *[Outside.]* Come in; he's on the verandah.

Daisy. *[Outside.]* One brief look in the glass and then I'm ready.

[Harry enters.]

Harry. She's just coming.

George. I bet she's powdering her nose.

Daisy. Here I am.

[Daisy enters. She is an extremely pretty woman, beautifully, perhaps a little showily, dressed. She has a pale, very clear, slightly sallown skin, and beautiful dark eyes. There is only the very faintest suspicion in them of the Chinese slant. Her hair is abundant and black.]

Harry. This is George Conway, Daisy.

[George stares at her. At first he is not quite sure that he recognizes her, then suddenly he does, but only the slightest movement of the eyes betrays him.]

Daisy. How do you do. I told Harry I had an idea I must have met you somewhere. I don't think I have after all.

Harry. George flatters himself he's not easily forgotten.

Daisy. But I've heard so much about you from Harry that I feel as though we were old friends.

George. It's very kind of you to say so.

Harry. Supposing you poured out the tea, Daisy.

George. I'm dying for a cup.

[She sits down and proceeds to do so.]

Daisy. Harry is very anxious that you should like me.

Harry. George and I have known one another since we were kids. His people and mine live quite close to one another at home.

Daisy. But I'm not blaming you. I'm only wondering how I shall ingratiate myself with him.

Harry. He looks rather severe, but he isn't really. I think you've only got to be your natural charming self.

Daisy. Have you told him about the house?

Harry. No. *[To George.]* You know the temple the Harrisons used to have. We've taken that.

George. Oh, it's a ripping place. But won't you find it rather a nuisance to have those old monks on the top of you all the time?

Harry. Oh, I don't think so. Our part is quite separate, you know, and the Harrisons made it very comfortable.

[Harold Knox comes in. He has changed into tennis things.]

Knox. I say, Harry ... *[He sees Daisy.]* Oh, I beg your pardon.

Harry. Mr. Knox – Mrs. Rathbone.

[Knox gives her a curt nod, but she holds out her hand affably. He takes it.]

Daisy. How do you do.

Knox. I'm sorry to disturb you, Harry, but old Ku Faung Min is downstairs and wants to see you.

Harry. Tell him to go to blazes. The office is closed.

Knox. He's going to Hankow to-night and he says he must see you before he goes. He's got some big order to give.

Harry. Oh, curse him. I know what he is. He'll keep me talking for half an hour. D'you mind if I leave you?

Daisy. Of course not. It'll give me a chance of making Mr. Conway's acquaintance.

Harry. I'll get rid of him as quickly as I can.

[He goes out accompanied by Knox.]

Knox. *[As he goes.]* Good-bye.

[George looks at Daisy for a moment. She smiles at him. There is a silence.]

George. Why didn't you warn me that it was you I was going to meet?

Daisy. I didn't know what you'd say about me to Harry if you knew.

George. It was rather a risk, wasn't it? Supposing I'd blurted out the truth.

Daisy. I trusted to your diplomatic training. Besides, I'd prepared for it. I told him I thought I'd met you.

George. Harry and I have been pals all our lives. I brought him out to China and I got him his job. When he had cholera he would have died if I hadn't pulled him through.

Daisy. I know. And in return he worships the ground you tread on. I've never known one man think so much of another as he does of you.

George. All that's rot, of course. Sometimes I don't know how I'm going to live up to the good opinion Harry has of me. But when you've done so much for a pal as I have for him it gives you an awful sense of responsibility towards him.

Daisy. What do you mean by that?

[A short pause.]

George. I'm not going to let you marry him.

Daisy. He's so much in love with me that he doesn't know what to do with himself.

George. I know he is. But if you were in love with him you wouldn't be so sure of it.

Daisy. [*With a sudden change of tone.*] Why not? I was sure of your love. And God knows I was in love with you.

[George *makes a gesture of dismay. He is taken aback for a moment, but he quickly recovers.*

George. You don't know what sort of a man Harry is. He's not like the fellows you've been used to. He's never knocked around as most of us do. He's always been as straight as a die.

Daisy. I know.

George. Have mercy on him. Even if there were nothing else against you he's not the sort of chap for you to marry. He's awfully English.

Daisy. If he doesn't mind marrying a Eurasian I really don't see what business it is of yours.

George. But you know very well that that isn't the only thing against you.

Daisy. I haven't an idea what you mean.

George. Haven't you? You forget the war. When we heard there was a very pretty young woman, apparently with plenty of money, living at the Hong Kong Hotel on very familiar terms with a lot of naval fellows, it became our business to make enquiries. I think I know everything there is against you.

Daisy. Have you any right to make use of information you've acquired officially?

George. Don't be a fool, Daisy.

Daisy. [*Passionately.*] Tell him then. You'll break his heart. You'll make him utterly wretched. But he'll marry me all the same. When a man's as much in love as he is he'll forgive everything.

George. I think it's horrible. If you loved him you couldn't marry him. It's heartless.

Daisy. [*Violently.*] How dare you say that? You. You. You know what I am. Yes, it's all true. I don't know what you know but it can't be worse than the truth. And whose fault is it? Yours. If I'm rotten it's you who made me rotten.

George. I? No. You've got no right to say that. It's cruel. It's infamous.

Daisy. I've touched you at last, have I? Because you know it's true. Don't you remember when I first came to Chung-king? I was seventeen. My father had sent me to England to school when I was seven. I never saw him for ten years. And at last he wrote and said I was to come back to China. You came and met me on the boat and told me my father had had a stroke and was dead. You took me to the Presbyterian mission.

George. That was my job. I was awfully sorry for you.

Daisy. And then in a day or two you came and told me that my father hadn't left anything and what there was went to his relations in England.

George. Naturally he didn't expect to die.

Daisy. [*Passionately.*] If he was going to leave me like that why didn't he let me stay with my Chinese mother? Why did he bring me up like a lady? Oh, it was cruel.

George. Yes. It was unpardonable.

Daisy. I was so lonely and so frightened. You seemed to be sorry for me. You were the only person who was really kind to me. You were practically the first man I'd known. I loved you. I thought you loved me. Oh, say that you loved me then, George.

George. You know I did.

Daisy. I was very innocent in those days. I thought that when two people loved one another they married. I wasn't a Eurasian then, George. I was like any other English girl. If you'd married me I shouldn't be what I am now. But they took you away from me. You never even said good-bye to me. You wrote and told me you'd been transferred to Canton.

George. I couldn't say good-bye to you, Daisy. They said that if I married you I'd have to leave the service. I was absolutely penniless. They dinned it into my ears that if a white man marries a Eurasian he's done for. I wouldn't listen to them, but in my heart I knew it was true.

Daisy. I don't blame you. You wanted to get on, and you have, haven't you? You're Assistant Chinese Secretary already and Harry says you'll be Minister before you've done. It seems rather hard that I should have had to pay the price.

George. Daisy, you'll never know what anguish I suffered. I can't expect you to care. It's very natural if you hate me. I was ambitious. I didn't want to be a failure. I knew that it was madness to marry you. I had to kill my love. I couldn't. It was stronger than I was. At last I couldn't help myself. I made up my mind to chuck everything and take the consequences. I was just starting for Chung-king when I heard you were living in Shanghai with a rich Chinaman.

[Daisy gives a little moan. There is a silence.]

Daisy. They hated me at the mission. They found fault with me from morning till night. They blamed me because you wanted to marry me and they treated me as if I was a designing cat. When you went away they heaved a sigh of relief. Then they started to convert me. They thought I'd better become a school teacher. They hated me because I was seventeen. They hated me because I was pretty. Oh, the brutes. They killed all the religion I'd got. There was only one person who seemed to care if I was alive or dead. That was my mother. Oh, I was so ashamed the first time I saw her. At school in England I'd told them so often that she was a Chinese princess that I almost believed it myself. My mother was a dirty little ugly Chinawoman. I'd forgotten all my Chinese and I had to talk to her in English. She asked me if I'd like to go to Shanghai with her. I was ready to do anything in the world to get away from the mission and I thought in Shanghai I shouldn't be so far away from you. They didn't want me to go, but they couldn't keep me against my will. When we got to Shanghai she sold me to Lee Tai Cheng for two thousand dollars.

George. How terrible.

Daisy. I've never had a chance. Oh, George, isn't it possible for a woman to turn over a new leaf? You say that Harry's good and kind. Don't you see what that means to me? Because he'll think me good I shall be good. After all, he couldn't have fallen in love with me if I'd been entirely worthless. I hate the life I've led. I want to go straight. I swear I'll make him a good wife. Oh, George, if you ever loved me have pity on me. If Harry doesn't marry me I'm done.

George. How can a marriage be happy that's founded on a tissue of lies?

Daisy. I've never told Harry a single lie.

George. You told him you hadn't been happily married.

Daisy. That wasn't a lie.

George. You haven't been married at all.

Daisy. *[With a roguish look.]* Well then, I haven't been happily married, have I?

George. Who was this fellow Rathbone?

Daisy. He was an American in business at Singapore. I met him in Shanghai. I hated Lee. Rathbone asked me to go to Singapore with him and I went. I lived with him for four years.

George. Then you went back to Lee Tai Cheng.

Daisy. Rathbone died. There was nothing else to do. My mother was always nagging me to go back to him. He's rich and she makes a good thing out of it.

George. I thought she was dead.

Daisy. No. I told Harry she was because I thought it would make it easier for him.

George. She isn't with you now, is she?

Daisy. No, she lives at Ichang. She doesn't bother me as long as I send her something every month.

George. Why did you tell Harry that you were twenty-two? It's ten years since you came to China and you were seventeen then.

Daisy. [*With a twinkle in her eye.*] Any woman of my age will tell you that seventeen and ten are twenty-two.

[*George does not smile. With frowning brow he walks up and down.*]

George. Oh, I wish to God I knew nothing about you. I can't bring myself to tell him and yet how can I let him marry you in absolute ignorance? Oh, Daisy, for your sake as well as for his I beseech you to tell him the whole truth and let him decide for himself.

Daisy. And break his heart? There's not a missionary who believes in God as he believes in me. If he loses his trust in me he loses everything. Tell him if you think you must, if you have no pity, if you have no regret for all the shame and misery you brought on me, you, you, you – but if you do, I swear, I swear to God that I shall kill myself. I won't go back to that hateful life.

[*He looks at her earnestly for a moment.*]

George. I don't know if I'm doing right or wrong. I shall tell him nothing.

[*Daisy gives a deep sigh of relief, Harry comes in.*]

Harry. I say, I'm awfully sorry to have been so long. I couldn't get the old blighter to go.

Daisy. [*With complete self-control.*] If I say you've been an age it'll look as though Mr. Conway had been boring me.

Harry. I hope you've made friends.

Daisy. [*To George.*] Have we?

George. I hope so. But now I think I must bolt. I have a long Chinese document to translate. [*Holding out his hand to Daisy.*] I hope you'll both be very happy.

Daisy. I think I'm going to like you.

George. Good-bye, Harry, old man.

Harry. I shall see you later on in the club, sha'n't I?

George. If I can get through my work.

[*He goes out.*]

Harry. What have you and George been talking about?

Daisy. We discussed the house. It'll be great fun buying the things for it.

Harry. I could have killed that old Chink for keeping me so long. I grudge every minute that I spend away from you.

Daisy. It's nice to be loved.

Harry. You do love me a little, don't you?

Daisy. A little more than a little, my lamb.

Harry. I wish I were more worth your while. You've made me feel so dissatisfied with myself. I'm such a rotter.

Daisy. You're not going to disagree with me already.

Harry. What about?

Daisy. About you. I think you're a perfect duck.

[*The Amah appears.*]

Harry. Hulloo, who's this?

Daisy. Oh, it's my amah.

Harry. I didn't recognize her for a moment.

Daisy. She doesn't approve of my being alone with strange gentlemen. She looks after me as if I was a child of ten.

Amah. Velly late, missy Daisy. Time you come along.

Harry. Oh, nonsense.

Daisy. She wants me to go and be fitted. She never lets me go out in Peking alone.

Harry. She's quite right.

Daisy. Amah, come and be introduced to the gentleman. He's going to be your master now.

Amah. [*Smiling, with little nods.*] Velly nice gentleman. You keep missy Daisy old amah – yes? Velly good amah – yes?

Daisy. She's been with me ever since I was a child.

Harry. Of course we'll keep her. She was with you when you were in Singapore?

Daisy. [*With a little sigh.*] Yes, I don't know what I should have done without her sometimes.

Harry. Oh, Daisy, I do want to make you forget all the unhappiness you have suffered.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her on the lips. The Amah chuckles to herself silently.*]

END OF SCENE II

SCENE III

Scene: The Temple of Fidelity and Virtuous Inclination. The courtyard of the temple is shown. At the back is the sanctuary in which is seen the altar table; on this are two large vases in each of which are seven lotus flowers, gilt but discoloured by incense, and in the middle there is a sand-box in which are burning joss-sticks; behind is the image of Buddha. The sanctuary can be closed by huge doors. These are now open. A flight of steps leads up to it.

A service is finishing. The monks are seen on each side of the altar kneeling in two rows. They are clad in grey gowns and their heads are shaven. They sing the invocation to Buddha, repeating the same words over and over again in a monotonous chaunt. Daisy stands outside the sanctuary door, on the steps, listlessly. The Amah is squatting by her side. Now the service ends; the monks form a procession and two by two, still singing, come down the steps and go out. A tiny acolyte blows out the oil lamps and with an effort shuts the temple doors.

Daisy comes down the steps and sits on one of the lower ones. She is dreadfully bored.

Amah. What is the matter with my pletty one?

Daisy. What should be the matter?

Amah. [*With a snigger.*] Hi, hi. Old amah got velly good eyes in her head.

Daisy. [*As though talking to herself.*] I've got a husband who adores me and a nice house to live in. I've got a position and as much money as I want. I'm safe. I'm respectable. I ought to be happy.

Amah. I say, Harry no good, what for you wanchee marry? You say, I wanchee marry, I wanchee marry? Well, you married. What you want now?

Daisy. They say life is short. Good God, how long the days are.

Amah. You want pony – Harry give you pony. You want jade ring – Harry give you jade ring. You want sable coat – Harry give you sable coat. Why you not happy?

Daisy. I never said I wasn't happy.

Amah. Hi, hi.

Daisy. If you laugh like that I'll kill you.

Amah. You no kill old amah. You want old amah. I got something velly pletty for my little Daisy flower.

Daisy. Don't be an old fool. I'm not a child any more. [*Desperately.*] I'm growing older, older, older. And every day is just like every other day. I might as well be dead.

Amah. Look this pletty present old amah have got.

[*She takes a jade necklace out of her sleeve and puts it, smiling, into Daisy's hand.*

Daisy. [*With sudden vivacity,*] Oh, what a lovely chain. It's beautiful jade. How much do they want for it?

Amah. It's a present for my little Daisy.

Daisy. For me? It must have cost five hundred dollars. Who is it from?

Amah. To-day is my little Daisy's wedding-day. She have married one year. Perhaps old amah want to give her little flower present.

Daisy. YOU! Have you ever given me anything but a beating?

Amah. Lee Tai Cheng pay me necklace and say you give to Daisy.

Daisy. You old hag. [*She flings the necklace away violently.*]

Amah. You silly. Worth plenty money. You no wanchee, I sell rich Amelican.

[*She is just going after the necklace, when Daisy catches her violently by the arm.*

Daisy. How dare you? How dare you? I told you that you were never to let Lee Tai speak to you again.

Amah. You very angry, Daisy. You very angry before, but you go back to Lee Tai; he think perhaps you go back again.

Daisy. Tell him that I loathe the sight of him. Tell him that if I were starving I wouldn't take a penny from him. Tell him that if he dares to come round here I'll have him beaten till he screams.

Amah. Hi, hi.

Daisy. And you leave me alone, will you. Harry hates you. I've only got to say a word and he'll kick you out in five minutes.

Amah. What would my little Daisy do without old amah, hi, hi? What for you no talkee true? You think old amah no got eyes? [*With a cunning, arch look.*] I got something make you very glad. [*She takes a note out of her sleeve.*]

Daisy. What's that?

Amah. I got letter.

Daisy. [*Snatching it from her.*] Give it me. How dare you hide it?

Amah. Have come when you long Harry. I think perhaps you no wanchee read when Harry there. [*Daisy tears it open.*] What he say?

Daisy. [*Reading.*] "I'm awfully sorry I can't dine with you on Thursday, but I'm engaged. I've just remembered it's your wedding-day and I'll look in for a minute. Ask Harry if he'd like to ride with me."

Amah. Is that all?

Daisy. "Yours ever. George Conway."

Amah. You love him very much, George Conway?

Daisy. [*Taking no notice of her, passionately.*] At last. I haven't seen him for ten days. Ten mortal days. Oh, I want him. I want him.

Amah. Why you no talkee old amah?

Daisy. [*Desperately.*] I can't help myself. Oh, I love him so. What shall I do? I can't live without him. If you don't want me to die make him love me.

Amah. You see, you want old amah.

Daisy. Oh, I'm so unhappy. I think I shall go mad.

Amah. Sh, sh. Perhaps he love you too.

Daisy. Never. He hates me. Why does he avoid me? He never comes here. At first he was always looking in. He used to come out and dine two or three days a week. What have I done to him? He only comes now because he does not want to offend Harry. Harry, Harry, what do I care for Harry?

Amah. Sh. Don't let him see. Give amah the letter.

[*She snatches it from Daisy and hides it in her dress as Harry comes in. Daisy pulls herself together.*]

Harry. I say, Daisy, I've just had the ponies saddled. Put on your habit and let's go for a ride.

Daisy. I've got a headache.

Harry. Oh, my poor child. Why don't you lie down?

Daisy. I thought I was better in the air. But there's no reason why you shouldn't ride.

Harry. Oh, no, I won't ride without you.

Daisy. Why on earth not? It'll do you good. You know when my head's bad I only want to be left alone. Your pony wants exercising.

Harry. The boy can do that.

Daisy. [*Trying to conceal her growing exasperation.*] Please do as I ask. I'd rather you went.

Harry. [*Laughing.*] Of course if you're so anxious to get rid of me...

Daisy. [*Smiling.*] I can't bear that you should be done out of your ride. If you won't go alone you'll just force me to come with you.

Harry. I'll go. Give me a kiss before I do. [*She puts up her lips to his.*] I'm almost ashamed of myself, I'm just as madly in love with you as the day we were married.

Daisy. You are a dear. Have a nice ride, and when you come back I shall be all right.

Harry. That's ripping. I shan't be very long.

[*He goes out. The lightness, the smile, with which she has spoken to Harry disappear as he goes, and she looks worried and anxious.*]

Daisy. Supposing they meet?

Amah. No can. Harry go out back way.

Daisy. Yes, I suppose he will. I wish he'd be quick. [*Violently.*] I must see George.

Amah. [*Picking up the necklace.*] Velly pletty necklace. You silly girl. Why you no take?

Daisy. Oh, damn, why can't you leave me alone? [*Listening.*] What on earth is Harry doing? I thought the pony was saddled.

Amah. [*Looking at the necklace.*] What shall I do with this?

Daisy. Throw it in the dust-bin.

Amah. Lee Tai no likee that very much.

Daisy. [*Hearing the sound of the pony, with a sigh of relief.*] He's gone. Now I'm safe. Where's my bag? [*She takes a little mirror out of it and looks at herself.*] I look perfectly hideous.

Amah. Don't be silly. You velly pletty girl.

Daisy. [*Her ears all alert.*] There's someone riding along.

Amah. That not pony. That Peking cart.

Daisy. You old fool, I tell you it's a pony. At last. Oh, my heart's beating so... It's stopping at the gate. It's George. Oh, I love him. I love him. [*To the Amah, stamping her foot.*] What are you waiting for? I don't want you here now, and don't listen, d'you hear. Get out, get out.

Amah. All-light. My go away.

[*The Amah slinks away. Daisy stands waiting for George, holding her hands to her heart as though to stop the anguish of its beating. She makes a great effort at self-control as George enters. He is in riding kit. He has a bunch of orchids in his hand.*]

George. Hulloo, what are you doing here?

Daisy. I was tired of sitting in the drawing-room.

George. I remembered it was your wedding-day. I've brought you a few flowers. [*She takes them with both hands.*]

Daisy. Thank you. That is kind of you.

George. [*Gravely.*] I hope you'll always be very happy. I hope you'll allow me to say how grateful I am that you've given Harry so much happiness.

Daisy. You're very solemn. One would almost think you'd prepared that pretty speech beforehand.

George. [*Trying to take it lightly.*] I'm sorry if it didn't sound natural. I can promise you it was sincere.

Daisy. Shall we sit down?

George. I think we ought to go for our ride while the light lasts. I'll come in and have a drink on the way back.

Daisy. Harry's out.

George. Is he? I sent you a note this morning. I said I couldn't dine on Thursday and I'd come and fetch Harry for a ride this afternoon.

Daisy. I didn't tell him.

George. No?

Daisy. I don't see you very often nowadays.

George. There's an awful lot of work to do just now. They lead me a dog's life at the legation.

Daisy. Even at night? At first you used to come and dine with us two or three nights a week.

George. I can't always be sponging on you. It's positively indecent.

Daisy. We don't know many people. It's not always very lively here. I should have thought if you didn't care to come for my sake you'd have come for Harry's.

George. I come whenever you ask me.

Daisy. You haven't been here for a month.

George. It just happens that the last two or three times you've asked me to dine I've been engaged.

Daisy. [*Her voice breaking.*] You promised that we'd be friends. What have I done to turn you against me?

George. [*His armour pierced by the emotion in her voice.*] Oh, Daisy, don't speak like that.

Daisy. I've tried to do everything I could to please you. If there's anything I do that you don't like, won't you tell me? I promise you I won't do it.

George. Oh, my dear child, you make me feel such an awful beast.

Daisy. Is it the past that you can't forget?

George. Good heavens, no, what do I care about the past?

Daisy. I have so few friends. I'm so awfully fond of you, George.

George. I don't think I've given you much cause to be that.

Daisy. There must be some reason why you won't ever come near me. Why won't you tell me?

George. Oh, it's absurd, you're making a mountain out of a molehill.

Daisy. You used to be so jolly, and we used to laugh together. I looked forward so much to your coming here. What has changed you?

George. Nothing has changed me.

Daisy. [*With a passion of despair.*] Oh, I might as well batter my head against a brick wall. How can you be so unkind to me?

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