THE WEDDED HUSBAND*

A REALISTIC CHINESE PLAY

BY SHEN HUNG

CHARACTERS

LORD WANG, An old man about fifty-five. Rich, responsible, experienced, determined,—sometimes to the point of obstinacy.

MISS WANG, A beautiful lady about twenty-four. Very quiet. A dutiful daughter who strictly observes the ethical teachings of Old China.

SIR CHEN, A kind gentleman, but weak; he never could hold his own ground.

MASTER CHEN, his son, the insane boy, about twenty. A simple, true, open-hearted man.

DOCTOR, A warm-hearted man; perhaps a little too frank.

MR. YANG. A young man about twenty-five, educated in the new school. Independent and daring. However, he still observes the manners and ceremonies of the aristocrats.

MAID, Very devoted to her master and mistress.

PLACE: Tientsin, China.
TIME: Just after the Revolution when nobles were still addressed by their titles and the people in general hesitated to break the old Chinese traditions.

ACT I

THE BETROTHAL

PLACE: Lord Wang's second reception room.
(In the houses of aristocrats there are generally three reception rooms: the big reception room, for polite guests, the second reception room, for intimate friends; and the Ladies' Reception Room, where the mistress of the house receives her friends.)

*For the right to produce this play, apply to the author, Shen Hung, Craigie Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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TIME: Afternoon of a very hot summer day; the betrothal was announced that morning.

LORD WANG, SIR CHEN, MASTER CHEN, DOCTOR, and MR. YANG; all seated at the banquet table. Two servants fanning their masters with big fans. The banquet is about over.

Two jugglers are exhibiting their stunts to amuse the men at the table; this is finished in two minutes. One servant lays his fan on a chair, takes up a bag of silver coins, and throws one handful after another to the jugglers. Each time he throws it, he calls out “This, the reward from LORD WANG,” “From DOCTOR,” etc. The jugglers salute by half-kneeling on one leg. They pick up the coins and go out by left door.

All stand up and salute each other by a “gentleman bow.” The servants are busy arranging the table; they remove the tea cups to the tea tables.

Mr. Yang.—Your lordship, certainly a beautiful banquet. Thank you.

Lord Wang.—Please don’t say thanks; our friendship is beyond that.

Boy.—When will the concert start?

Lord Wang.—About 2 o’clock. My son-in-law is here for the first time. Mr. Yang, will you show him my house and my garden?

Mr. Yang.—Yes, your lordship, let’s take a walk in the garden.

Boy.—Father, let’s go.

Sir Chen.—Perhaps Doctor would like to join us.

Doctor.—No, I prefer to sit down and have a smoke. It’s too hot outside.

Mr. Yang.—Come along, Doctor, I have something to tell you.

(All go out by the left door except the servants)
First Servant.—Hot.
Second Servant.—Yes, very hot.
First Servant.—Hope it won’t be so hot on wedding day.
Second Servant.—(Hesitating) Dreadful to think about—such hot weather!
First Servant.—What is the trouble?
Second Servant.—Nothing.
First Servant.—(With suspicion)—Are—are you well?
Second Servant.—I am all right.
First Servant.—Then make sure of it. The plague is raging in the city. You cannot be too careful.
Second Servant.—Exactly. You know Wang-far and Li-lien-sung. Are they not healthy and strong? Did they not talk and laugh with us just three days ago? Hm, the plague, that worries me.
First Servant.—But you must not worry. His lordship, our master and guests are happy today because of the betrothal ceremony, so we servants should also be cheerful.
Second Servant.—I wish I could be happy. But the plague—you know, there will be a big ceremony on the wedding day—suppose you or I—
First Servant.—Stop. The saying is "If you think of misfortune, misfortune befalls you."
Second Servant.—But I am not afraid of anything.
First Servant.—I am not either. But if anything happens to me on the wedding day, it's—it's because you think of it.
Second Servant.—No, I am all right, don't blame me for anything. Look how you yourself are scared by the plague. I am quite cheerful, why shouldn't we be? We had the betrothal ceremony this morning (First Servant does not answer) Well, it's hot. (Taking up a fan and fanning himself) Whose pipe?
First Servant.—Belongs to Doctor.
Second Servant.—Shall I send it?
First Servant.—Lay it on the tea-table.
(Second Servant does so while the maid enters on the right)
Maid.—Ha, ha, the banquet is over.
Second Servant.—Ah, congratulations, the bride-maid.
Maid.—Yes, thank you. I am happy, happy, happy. I shall be with my Koo Niang for three more years.
Second Servant.—Her Ladyship did not come to see the betrothal gifts.
Maid.—Of course not. You ought to know our customs. She can't come, if the groom is here. She is coming now.
Second Servant.—Don't let her come. The party may return; the concert hasn't started yet.
Maid.—Then I better tell her (Goes out)
(During the above conversation the First Servant has practically finished the table. He puts the fruit dishes on the tea-table.)
Second Servant.—Seems to me the maid is the happiest about the wedding.
First Servant.—She ought to be. Though she is only a maid, she is a great friend of our lady. She has been with her for ten years, and now three years more.

Second Servant.—A good, clever maid.

First Servant.—Yes, she is very warm-hearted. Well, are we through here now?

Second Servant.—Yes, we want to hear the concert too.

(The Doctor enters on the left, followed by Lord Wang. The Doctor takes his pipe which Second Servant lights for him. Both servants take the fans and begin to fum them.)

Lord Wang.—You may go now (The servants leave.)

Doctor.—This room is the best: quiet and cool.

Lord Wang.—You like to smoke; smoking is your duty.

Doctor.—Nct necessarily a duty. But smoking prevents the plague and does many other good things.

Lord Wang.—What are the health conditions in the city now?

Doctor.—You mean the plague? Furious.

Lord Wang.—Too bad.

Doctor.—The hot dry weather causes it. All gatherings are dangerous, including the concert today.

Lord Wang.—It’s our custom to have some sort of entertainment for a happy occasion. If not the betrothal ceremony—

Doctor.—Betrothal ceremony! (Puffing)

Lord Wang.—Yes, why?

Doctor.—Well, old friend, you see yourself the boy is insane.

Lord Wang.—Only a little bit abnormal.

Doctor.—Even a little bit. I cannot see why you insist on marrying your daughter to him. It can’t be for money. Sir Chen is not so well off as your lordship, if you permit me to say that.

Lord Wang.—Doctor! (Trying to stop the Doctor and talk himself.)

Doctor.—I cannot see any reason at all. It is a crazy idea. Insane!

Lord Wang.—Doctor!

Doctor.—I beg your pardon. I confess it’s all useless now, since the betrothal was announced this morning.

Lord Wang.—Doctor!

Doctor.—Your Lordship, let’s talk of something else.

Lord Wang.—No, Doctor. I wish to talk it over with you.

Doctor.—Well?

Lord Wang.—What do you think of me as a friend—as a man?
Doctor.—You are a faithful, responsible friend. Good, kind hearted, though sometimes obstinate.

Lord Wang.—What do you think of me as a father?

Doctor.—Well! It's very hard for me to understand your insistence on this marriage.

Lord Wang.—Do you still remember how I was about twenty years ago.

Doctor.—The old time memory is not so very pleasant, your Lordship.

Lord Wang.—Exactly, twenty years ago, I was a poor student.

Doctor.—Yes.

Lord Wang.—Sir Chen is a mighty good man, but a little too kind, too weak. And his son is also too weak, mentally.

Doctor.—Yes I agree with you perfectly.

Lord Wang.—During the years I have prospered, Sir Chen has met one misfortune after another. The old family is near ruin now.

Doctor.—Yes, you mean financially.

Lord Wang.—Yes, and that's due to his kindness or rather weakness.

Doctor.—Then is it your purpose in this marriage, to save Sir Chen's house?

Lord Wang.—Exactly, my daughter can save it. She is like me, responsible and dutiful. (Short pause) And don't you think it is proper for me to do this? I who owed everything to him.

Doctor.—To give your gratitude?

Lord Wang.—It is also a friend's duty.

Doctor.—In that case—(looking for his tea cup), I understand—

Lord Wang.—Here is your cup—your name is on it.

Doctor.—Thank you. In that case—of course you are less to blame. However, what does your daughter say?

Lord Wang.—She promised me.

Doctor.—Indeed! (Music is heard) My knowledge—er—I know— I thought there was another—let's join them in the hall; the concert has started. (Both go out)

(The Maid enters at the right.)

Maid.—Come along, nobody is here. The concert has started.
Miss Wang (Entering by the right door. She is not particularly joyful today, nor very sad. In fact she has practically no expression on her face).—They had their banquet in this room.

Maid.—Yes, and on the table are your betrothal gifts. Here is a golden hair-pin, wishing you every satisfaction in your marriage. Here are a pair of silver buckles, which will bring good fortune to both of you. Here are embroidered silk bags, for the prosperity of your family, filled with peanuts that greet you with joyful long life. And tea. Happiness in your marriage. Eggs, painted red, you shall be much happier when you have a baby. Sugar, ah, yes, very sweet, very sweet. So beautiful, so graceful.

Miss Wang (During the previous speech, she is only nodding. Ordinarily a Chinese girl would be very happy and very proud of the gifts. Pointing to something on the table).—What is that?

Maid.—A thumb ring.

Miss Wang.—A thumb ring for a betrothal gift! That means—from whom?

Maid.—Why so surprised? What does that mean?

Miss Wang.—That means good-bye for ever. From whom?

Maid.—From Mr. Yang.

Miss Wang.—Yes, of course. (She forces a smile.)

Maid.—Ah, miss, you have not smiled for the last five days. Are you happy now? You used to tell me everything. Tell me, are you happy now?

Miss Wang.—Of course.

Maid (Sighing).—Then Mr. Yang is mistaken this time.

Miss Wang.—Mr. Yang?

Maid.—Yes, he is here to join the ceremony and (Swallowing)—you are not angry with Mr. Yang? You were both so fond of each other before.

Miss Wang.—No, I am not angry.

Maid.—Mr. Yang guessed that you were very unhappy, because of this betrothal.

Miss Wang (Pretending to be angry).—How dare you tell me such a thing?

Maid.—Pardon, miss, I only tell what Mr. Yang said. Mr. Yang said you are going to marry a man whom you don’t care for.

Miss Wang.—I know he will never forgive me.

Maid.—Miss, are you going to marry a man whom you don’t love?

(No answer.)

Miss Wang.—Ah Koo Niang remember, remember the
tradition. You can never marry again, if you are once wedded
to a man. Never—anything may happen; but you, never again.
Miss Wang.—I cannot think of this; I won’t.
Maid.—Ah Koo Niang, think. (In a low voice) Now it is
not yet too late.
(She pauses.)
Miss Wang.—It is my father’s wish.
Maid.—But his lordship would not force you to this marriage
if you refused?
Miss Wang.—He is my father.
Maid.—But your happiness in the future?
Miss Wang.—I have something more to consider than my
own happiness.
Maid.—Something more?
Miss Wang.—Yes, it is a daughter’s duty to obey her father.
Our ethics teaches us so. If I should refuse him—the people—
what would they say?
Maid.—What would they say?
Miss Wang.—They would call it a scandal; my father’s
reputation and family’s reputation would then be ruined by me.
Maid (Sighing).—So the family—
Miss Wang.—No, not that, but—but my father’s happiness.
My refusal would break his heart.
Maid.—Miss, pardon, Mr. Yang is going to Mongolia to-
tomorrow.
Miss Wang (Slightly surprised).—Going to Mongolia?
Maid.—Yes, to the great north, the great desert. He came
here purposely to say farewell to you. Will you see him—in this
room?
Miss Wang.—No, I cannot see him.
Maid.—Miss, you must. He will not understand if you
you don’t explain to him (Laughter is heard outside) Here he
comes. (She runs to the left door but suddenly turns back) Gracious!
The groom is with him. Let’s get away, quick.
(Both go out. Yang enters by left door, followed by Master
Chen.)
Boy.—Mr. Yang, wait for me a minute. Wait for me a
minute.
Mr. Yang (Shaking his head).—You are certainly fond of me
aren’t you?
Boy.—Surely. It is too hot, lend me your fan. (Takes it
and salutes by half-kneeling)  Thanks (Fans himself with two fans)
Like a butterfly!
  Mr. Yang.—Well.
  Boy (Looking around).—Say, don’t tell anybody.  I want to
ask you a question.
  Mr. Yang.—A question?
  Boy.—Yes, is my wife pretty?
  Mr. Yang.—Your wife?
  Boy.—I mean her—Miss Wang.  Once betrothed to me
always my wife.
  Mr. Yang (Shaking his head).—Is that so?
  Boy.—That’s tradition.  My father told me that.  Now tell
me is she pretty.  I love her.
  Mr. Yang.—Why, have you met her before?
  Boy.—Not yet.
  Mr. Yang.—And you say you love her?
  Boy.—Yes.
  Mr. Yang.—How could it be possible?  It’s the greatest joke
I ever heard.  “Love at first sight,” you go beyond that.
  Boy.—If I want to love, I need no sight.
  Mr. Yang.—Tell me why do you love her.
  Boy.—Because, because she is my wife.
  Mr. Yang.—Your wife, to love her is your duty.  (He pauses)
Now let us drop the subject.  It is too ungentlemanly to joke
about such a sacred thing as love.
  Boy.—I mean it seriously.  I love her.
  Mr. Yang (Shaking his head).—Well?
  Boy.—Another question, do you think she will love me?
  Mr. Yang (Thinking hard, then desperately).—She hardly will.
  Boy.—Not?
  Mr. Yang (Looking before him).—No.
  Boy.—Never mind, I love her all the same.  I can wait.
  Mr. Yang (Looking at boy).—Wait?
  Boy.—If she does not love me today, I will wait till tomorrow;
then day after tomorrow.
  Mr. Yang.—Love is a matter of heart and not a matter of
waiting.
  Boy.—All the same to me.  I wait, and wait, and wait till
some day when my hair is white—
  Mr. Yang.—Nonsense!
  Boy.—And if she does not love me then, perhaps she will love
me after my death.
Mr. Yang.—Stop, stop. My friend (Moved) My friend, I am sorry. I—misjudged you.

Boy.—You like me now, do you?

Mr. Yang.—Yes.

Boy.—Take a walk with me in the garden.

Mr. Yang.—No, we cannot go again. The ladies—

Boy.—It's too hot here; I am going alone. (Yang catches him by his coat.)

Mr. Yang.—No, you cannot go, because you are the groom.

Boy.—Too many things a groom can not do. Let me go.

(Appearing to run away.)

Mr. Yang.—A groom is not supposed to meet his bride before the wedding day.

Boy.—Why shouldn't he?

Mr. Yang.—Oh, just a matter of tradition.

Boy (Unbuttoning his coat).—I see, I see, but I am going. (Slipping out of his coat he runs away. At the door he turns back and laughs heartily, pointing at Yang) Now, a walk in the garden. You cannot stop me, you get my coat.

Mr. Yang.—Here, here, get your coat. It is very impolite to go without your coat. Take it, I'll let you go.

Boy.—Throw it at me.

Mr. Yang (Looking at him; smiling).—A lovable fool, isn't he?

Maid (Entering by right).—Mr. Yang.

Mr. Yang.—Oh! How is the messenger?

Maid.—I have done the best I can.

Mr. Yang.—I am very grateful to you.

Maid.—My Mistress is here.

Mr. Yang.—Is she? (Turning he sees Miss Wang. There is silence between them.)

(The Maid withdraws quietly)

(The two salute each other by half-kneeling.)

Miss Wang (Very slowly).—Very glad to see you, Mr. Yang.

Mr. Yang.—Very glad to see your ladyship. (Then) Are you well?

Miss Wang.—Yes, thank you. Deep silence) I heard that you are going away.

Mr. Yang.—To Mongolia, the great North, the great desert, the land of hopes. I shall start tomorrow morning.

Miss Wang.—Tomorrow, that's three days before my wedding. Why in such a hurry?
Mr. Yang.—I don't mean to get away before your wedding. But, you know a broken hearted man is no decoration for a happy occasion.

Miss Wang.—Do you call it a happy occasion?
Mr. Yang.—Yes, well, he isn't so bad as people think he is. A mighty good man; surely a devoted husband. I begin to like him.

Miss Wang.—Mr. Yang, please understand, please forgive me.

Mr. Yang.—Yes?
Miss Wang.—It is not I who am untrue to you.
Mr. Yang.—Please don't say that. I shall not blame you.

(He pauses) Doctor has told me everything.

Miss Wang.—Then no word is necessary from me. (After a pause) Shall this be our last meeting?
Mr. Yang.—Well, I am going to Mongolia tomorrow. Remember me as your friend, I shall always be at your service. Farewell to you.

Miss Wang.—Good-bye.

(It is as if they have a thousand words to speak to each other, but don't know where to begin.)

Maid (Outside).—Beg pardon. (Enters.)
Mr. Yang.—What is it?
Maid.—Let's get away quick. They are coming; the concert is over.

Mr. Yang.—Get away? I beg your pardon!
Maid.—No, no, we are not afraid of them, but the groom, he is coming with them. (Laughter is heard.)

(Yang and Miss Wang salute each other by half-kneeling. Miss Wang goes out by the right door with the Maid. Yang follows several steps behind her, staring at her. They are half way down the stage when the others enter.)

Boy.—Doctor, what is the secret, the point of your story?
Doctor.—The point of the story is they all regret it, after they have done it.
Mr. Yang.—They regret it?
Sir Chen.—Doctor is telling us the legend on which the opera is based.

Mr. Yang.—I see. (Feels relieved.)
Doctor.—This is called the legend of guitar. She was the most beautiful daughter of the emperor. Her marriage to the
Mongolian king was an arranged marriage—you know, to strengthen the alliance of the two nations.

**Mr. Yang.**—Why did they regret it?

**Doctor.**—She was very unhappy.

**Lord Wang.**—That's her sacrifice, admirable!

**Doctor.**—Two nations went into war all the same and she died.

**(Glancing at Lord Wang)** Friends, sometimes sacrifice is worse than no sacrifice.

**Lord Wang.**—Well.

(Maid runs in; saluting.)

**Maid.**—Your lordship, my miss—she has fainted.

**Lord Wang.**—Fainted? Doctor, come with me.

**Mr. Yang.**—Hm.

(The Boy tries to slip out but is caught by Yang.)

**Boy.**—I want to see her, to find out what is the matter.

**Mr. Yang.**—You stay here. I told you before: groom and bride should not meet before the wedding.

**Sir Chen.**—I am afraid that the weather is too hot. What do you think of a postponement of the wedding?

**Mr. Yang.**—That is the right way to do.

**Sir Chen.**—I hope his Lordship will consent to do so.

**Lord Wang (Entering).**—I was frightened, but Doctor wants me to tell you it is not serious.

**Sir Chen.**—Good! Lord Wang, I fear it is too hot.

**Lord Wang.**—Yes, it is.

**Sir Chen.**—Mr. Yang and I are talking about a postponement of the wedding.

**Lord Wang.**—Because of the hot weather?

**Mr. Yang.**—Yes and the plague.

**Lord Wang.**—No, we cannot do it.

**Mr. Yang.**—But my Lord, the plague is a serious matter.

**Lord Wang.**—No, I asked the fortune-teller to select a date for the wedding. He said four days from today we shall be under the best star.

**Mr. Yang.**—Pardon me, your lordship, that's superstition.

**Lord Wang.**—I know it, but that's tradition; and my duty is to observe the tradition.

**Doctor (Entering).**—Very fortunate.

**Mr. Yang.**—How is she now?

**Doctor.**—Overcome by heat.

**Mr. Yang.**—Nothing serious?
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Doctor (Shaking his head).—No, at present nothing very
serious, however she is very weak. Your Lordship, I wish to see
the wedding postponed.

Mr. Yang.—We just decided not to do so on account of the
star.

Lord Wang (Looking at Yang).—No.

Doctor (Appealingly).—She is very weak and liable to be
attacked by the plague.

Lord Wang (Walking away).—No.

Doctor.—Please give me the pipe. Thank you. My advice
was never followed, was it? (He smokes.)

ACT II

THE WEDDING

TIME: Four days after the first act.
PLACE: Sir Chen’s Reception Hall.
A Chinese Marriage Ceremony:

The walls are decorated with red silk; red carpets are on the
floor. A table at center with four chairs. Candles are burning.
1. Ushering in the guests.
2. The master of ceremony takes his position.
3. Reading of greetings.
4. Introducing the groom; music.
5. Introducing the bride; music.
7. Bride introduced to groom.
8. They are introduced to fathers-in-law; to guests.

During the above ceremony, the groom does all the bowing and the
bride stands still with the bride-maids. Servants fan the guests.

Lord Wang.—The weather is so hot. If the guests will excuse
the bride.

A Guest.—Certainly, let us all be introduced together.

(The groom bows. The bride is given a mirror. The bride is
also given one end of the red and green “happy-silk”; the groom,
the other end. The groom, helped by his best man, walk backward
to the “wedding apartment.” They walk on red cloth or red carpets
which two servants are busy in arranging. They are preceded by a
happy young couple, each carrying one candle stand. The musicians
and the lantern-carriers precede the candle-carriers.)
(Suddenly the bride drops her mirror. A shiver runs through the guests.)*

* A Guest.—She dropped it!
(The bride throws away the silk.)

A Guest.—She throws away the silk! (The music stopped by Lord Wang, abruptly. Lord Wang shows surprise and indignance on his face. He starts to speak.)
The Bride.—Help me, help me.

Guest.—She speaks! (The music starts again, while the Maid helps her to walk.)

Lord Wang.—What is the matter?
Maid.—Her ladyship is, her ladyship is very—, she is unconscious now.

Doctor.—Sick? (Running to the bride) What is the matter? Stop the music. Lord Wang, if you will entertain the guests in the other room—

Lord Wang.—But the wedding ceremony is not complete.
Doctor (To the Maid).—Let me help you. (They go out through the left door.)

Lord Wang.—Friends, kindly pardon me a minute, I must—
(He follows the Doctor and Maid.)

Sir Chen.—I feel very sorry that the ceremony should be interrupted like this. But you will excuse my daughter-in-law.

A Guest.—Certainly, certainly. It is an accident. An accident very often happens. We do not mind the impoliteness; because it's an accident.

Sir Chen.—Perhaps it is the heat.
A Guest.—Perhaps, perhaps. Since it is the heat, she perhaps will soon recover.

Sir Chen.—And we may resume the ceremony.

(Lord Wang is heard saying "I will take your advice this time." "I understand.")

Lord Wang.—Our honored friends, I feel very sad because the ceremony cannot be continued today.

Guests.—We are very sorry, your lordship.

Sir Chen.—Serious?

Lord Wang.—Doctor thinks it is not serious unless it is the plague. Friends, if you will allow me to entertain you in the other room—

A Guest.—Certainly, certainly, your lordship. Since the

*The dropping of the mirror means exceedingly great misfortune. The bride is not supposed to speak, at least not before the guests.
important part of the ceremony has already taken place, your humble—er—friends beg to ask leave. (*He glances at the other guests*) Your permission.

**Lord Wang.**—I really do not know what I was saying. I don't mean to ask you to part from us.

**A Guest.**—No, not at all. Please don't let this matter worry your lordship too greatly. May we greet you with good day? (*Saluting*.)

**Lord Wang.**—Thank you. (**Sir Chen** and **Lord Wang usher the guest out.** All the guests salute the groom before they leave the room.)

(*The Groom picks up the "happy-silk" and piles it on a chair.*)

(*The Maid enters.*)

**Boy (Brightening up).**—Ah, how is she now?

**Maid.**—Very ill sir.

**Boy (As if the lady's illness does not concern him).**—Maid, do you know where Mr. Yang is?

**Maid (Very much surprised).**—Mr. Yang?

**Boy.**—Yes, I want to ask him something; I don't know what to do now. (*Sighing*) I am so lonely.

**Maid (Very angry, controlling herself with difficulty).**—Mr. Yang is now in Mongolia. Your humble maid wishes he were here.

**Boy.**—I wish so too. I want to ask him something; but too far away now (*Sighing*) So many things the groom cannot do!

(*Lord Wang and Sir Chen enter at the right.*)

**Lord Wang.**—We have dismissed our guests. It is too bad to have an interruption like this upon a wedding ceremony. But they are gone now.

**Sir Chen.**—It is too hot, your lordship.

**Lord Wang (To Maid).**—How is my daughter now?

**Maid.**—She is still unconscious, your lordship.

**Lord Wang.**—What did Doctor say?

**Maid.**—He sent me to wait upon your lordship.

**Sir Chen.**—I hope it is not the plague.

**Lord Wang.**—No, I think not. She was weak.

**Sir Chen.**—Perhaps not yet recovered from the fever she had a few days ago.

**Lord Wang.**—Maybe. I am disappointed. We old men cannot always take care of the young; and arrange all things for
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them. They ought to know their own duty, their own responsibility. Such an interruption! Just because of illness!

Doctor.—Have you followed my advice?
Lord Wang.—Yes I have dismissed all polite guests. Yet I don’t see the necessity of doing so.
Doctor.—Well (A pause.)
Lord Wang.—What about my daughter?
Doctor.—Too bad, too bad.
Lord Wang.—How, tell me!
Doctor (Looking at him).—You can guess it, can you?
Lord Wang.—What do you mean by that?
Doctor (In a low voice).—The plague. (Then very loudly and with force) The plague!
Boy and Maid.—Oh! The plague!
Lord Wang.—The plague, is it true? (Looking at the Doctor’s face) Yes, it is. (Pacing the floor) No, I cannot believe it.
Doctor.—The plague is raging in the city. It spreads like fire. What a hot day it is, and a trying ceremony!
Lord Wang.—Doctor, are you sure of that?
Doctor.—Sorry to tell you I am only too sure.
Lord Wang (Exceeding grief makes him give way like a woman).—My fault, my fault. She was very ill; I insisted on the wedding to take place today. My fault!
Doctor.—To regret what has been carries us nowhere. The present is more important; the present demands more of our attention.

Lord Wang.—But how could I help regretting the has-been. Since the other day you told me the true state of things—, if anything should happen.

Boy.—Hm. (He is playing with the silk during the preceding speeches.)

Lord Wang.—I killed her, I killed— (Completely losing control.)

Doctor (Trying his best).—But she might recover.
Lord Wang.—Let us hope so, let us hope so. Then I shall do my best to make her happy, to make up my mistake.

Boy.—Father, she will recover.
Doctor (Interrupting Boy).—Very good, very good, now I want to say something.

Lord Wang.—Yes.

Doctor.—Advise you again. This time whether you like it or not, it must be carried out.
Lord Wang.—Doctor, your advice is always right. If I had ever listened to you before—

Doctor.—All right. Now listen to me. The plague is very contagious and very dangerous. As a matter of safety, I want to quarantine this house. Do you all understand me?

Lord Wang and Sir Chen (Showing disapproval).—Quarantine! Impossible!

Doctor.—It is absolutely necessary—a matter of life and death. I order you to leave here at once.

Lord Wang.—What about my daughter?

Doctor.—I will get nurses to take care of her.

Lord Wang.—But she will need some—

Doctor.—Now my friend, and Sir Chen, I have been a friend of your families for years and I am a doctor. I know what I am talking about. You never followed any of my advice before, and I don’t care. But this time my duty as doctor demands me to make you follow my advice. All of you must leave here. Now are you going to co-operate or are you not?

Lord Wang.—To send away the maid and the servants too?

Doctor.—Unless you want to risk their lives.

Lord Wang (Glancing at Sir Chen).—Perhaps this is the wisest way.

Sir Chen.—But your lordship, this is not our custom.

Doctor.—Every tradition has been broken down during the revolution, Sir Chen. Quarantine is a common practice of the West and surely a wise one.

Lord Wang.—We have to talk it over, Sir Chen. Let’s go to your library. (To Doctor) We have some preparations to make.

(Both go out.)

Boy.—Doctor, I want to ask you a question.

Doctor.—What do you want to know?

Boy.—Do you want all of us to go away?

Doctor.—Yes.

Boy.—How about me?

Doctor.—You too.

Boy.—How about my wife?

Doctor (A little surprised).—Of course she can not go.

Boy.—Is she going to be all alone in this house?

Doctor.—The nurses will be here shortly.

Boy.—Why do you take away all her beloved ones?
Doctor.—It is for your safety, and for the community's safety. I can do nothing else.
Boy.—Suppose I stay here?
Doctor.—What is that?
Boy.—I stay here and nurse my wife.
Doctor (Looking at Boy, cannot help laughing).—Ha, ha, no, you cannot.
Boy.—Why not?
Doctor.—The reason is apparent. My friend, (Short pause) this must be a great shock to you, quiet yourself.
Boy.—Doctor, I am not nervous. I want to stay because I love her.
Doctor.—Sir Chen and Lord Wang, they are all going. They all love her.
Boy.—Let them go; but I am not going.
Doctor.—The plague is very contagious. (To himself frowning) What is the trouble; what idea is getting into his head.
Boy.—No, I won't desert her.
Doctor (Appealingly).—Now, my dear friend, you are not deserting her—nothing of that kind. The plague is very contagious and exceedingly dangerous. It means your safety, your life—
Boy (Shaking his head).—Because I am her husband.
Doctor.—The idea of deserting her. It's foolish. Quarantine is a universal practice of the West.
Maid (Interrupting).—Pardon my master, let your maid stay for you.
Doctor.—What's the idea?
Maid.—I am a maid. But my master—he cannot take chances.
Boy.—But why, why, you are only a maid.
Maid.—I am, sir. My mistress, her ladyship—would be very sad, if you—anything happens to you.
Boy.—I thank you, but you won't do. I am going to her right away.
(Doctor catches him)
Doctor.—Here, here! Where are you going?
Boy.—To my wife!
Doctor (Staring at him fiercely).—You fool!
(Lord Wang and Sir Chen enter by the right door.)
Lord Wang (Startled by the word fool).—What is the matter?
Doctor.—You are his superior; you understand; you are sane. Why don’t you explain to him? He wants to be with his wife.

Lord Wang.—Impossible!

Boy.—Doctor, I want to ask you—er—another—philosophical question.

Doctor.—Huh, philosophical! (Shaking his head.)

Boy.—People call me insane, a fool. So if my question is not right, please don’t—

Doctor (Impatiently).—What is it?

Boy.—Why should a man love his wife?

Doctor.—Why should a man love? I give it up. I say, I give it up.

Sir Chen.—The plague is a serious matter. I have only one boy, that is you.

Boy.—Father, the plague is everywhere. This is as safe as any place.

Doctor.—Now tell me what good can you do by staying here?

Boy.—Nurse my wife; perhaps she is not so hopeless after all. She might recover.

Doctor.—Of course she might. But I warn you, if you stay, you will get it yourself.

Boy.—Doctor, doctor, I want to ask you another question.

Doctor (Almost losing his temper).—Yes, Sir.

Boy.—What is your profession?

Doctor.—I am a physician, a medical man.

Boy.—What will a physician do?

Doctor.—I am trying my best to take care of the sick; cure them and save their—

Boy.—No, Doctor, you don’t do that. (Pauses) You don’t cure the sick; you give them up. And now, now, now (unbuttoning his coat) you talk about my safety, the community’s safety, you want to save your own life. (Runs away, slips out of his coat; stands at the door; laughs, turns back and points at the Doctor.) At last, to my wife. Doctor, you cannot stop me, you get my coat.

Doctor (Roaring).—Hu-er, hopeless now, hopeless now.

Sir Chen (Dropping into a chair, Lord Wang helping him.)

Maid.—If your lordship permits, I want to stay with my master and mistress. (She walks in.)

Doctor (Sorrowing).—Huh, three victims of the plague. My advice was never followed.

First Servant (Entering by right).—Sir, the nurses are here, waiting for your lordship’s order.
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Lord Wang.—(Nods. The servant goes out.)

ACT III

Love

Time: Eight weeks after the second Act.
Place: Ladies' reception room in Sir Chen's House.

Madam Chen is playing a flute. The music is very soft and low; and the incense is burning.

Maid (Dancing in slowly; in a low voice).—Beautiful, beautiful.

(Her Lady nods, and continues to play till finishing the piece.)

Maid.—Ah, madam; that's beautiful. It makes me so happy.

You must be very happy yourself, aren't you?

Madam Chen.—I am. I gave up this for a long time because it tires the player so much. But today—I don't mind it at all.

Maid.—Ah, Madam Chen.

Madam Chen.—Shall I play you "The Birds Welcome the Spring"? That's Mr. Yang's favorite.

Maid.—Madam, won't you have a little nap and rest yourself?

Madam Chen.—No, thank you.

Maid.—You exert yourself too much today; remember you have just recovered from your illness. Seven weeks! Just think.

Madam Chen.—It seems to be a long time, doesn't it?

Maid.—Seven weeks, terrible. Such a long time. It must have been awfully tiresome to you.

Madam Chen.—No, I don't think so. You know a very ill person is not conscious of time. He forgets everything.

Maid (After a moment's reflection).—Is that really so?

Madam Chen.—Yes, it is so to me. I don't know what happened when I was ill. I can't remember a thing. (Shaking her head) It must seem terribly tiresome to other people.

Maid.—Madam, the plague is a bad thing; it is contagious.

Even doctors could not do much.

Madam Chen.—Was it you who nursed me during those seven long weeks?

Maid.—I am lucky, I came out unhurt.

Madam Chen.—We should be thankful that it is all over.

Maid (Sighs).—But the dead can never come to life again.

Madam Chen.—It is our duty to think more of the living.
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(During the above scene, the Maid is adding more incense to the burner. Lord Wang enters.)

Lord Wang.—I have some good news for you. His telegram says he will arrive this afternoon. We expect him every minute.

Madam Chen.—So soon?

Lord Wang.—Yes, because he is quite anxious to see you.

Madam Chen (Embarrassed).—Yes, father.

Lord Wang.—I want you to meet Mr. Yang in your ceremonial dress. This color is too dull—looks like half mourning. Why don’t you dress in red? That is the traditional color for happy occasions.

Madam Chen.—But my father-in-law would—

Lord Wang.—No, he will not object. The mourning period for your husband was over last week. Now I am going to order the servants to decorate the house. I don’t want to see any white, I want everything in red. You do what I tell you.

Madam Chen.—Yes, I will.

(Lord Wang goes out.)

Maid.—Madam, Lord Wang ordered us to change our mourning dress; all white things are put away. They said Mr. Yang is coming today.

Madam Chen.—He is coming back. I am going to appear in my ceremonial dress to receive him.

Maid.—He was in Mongolia.

Madam Chen.—He was called back by my father.

Maid.—Did his lordship—

Madam Chen.—And Mr. Yang shall be the future master of the house.

Maid.—Future master?

Madam Chen.—Are you surprised? You didn’t think so before, did you? From now on, I shall be the happiest woman on the earth!

Maid.—Why madam, (Smiles) haven’t you been happy before?

Madam Chen.—Yes, I am happy when my father is. I am his daughter. But poor father—my father changed his mind.

Maid.—Changed his mind for what?

Madam Chen (Grasping the maid’s hands).—Can’t you understand, can’t you? Mr. Yang is coming back. How delighted—oh, how happy I am. Ah, why do you look at me? Am I blushing—if you were in love!

Maid.—After all this, his lordship changed his mind.
Madam Chen.—Of course, my father-in-law also consented. maid (Thinking a moment as if seeking light).—Do you still? Madam Chen.—Yes. maid.—You are not going to marry him? Madam Chen.—Yes. Maid (Surprised).—You are? Madam Chen.—It is my father's wish. Maid.—Oh, his wish; he arranged for you again. Madam, madam, don't, don't!

Madam Chen.—My father did this for my sake, for my happiness. Mr. Yang and I have been friends for years. Maid.—Yes, happiness. But there is something more than happiness we have to consider. Madam, your husband loved you. Madam.—I don't understand you. Maid.—Yes, he loved you, your husband did. Madam Chen.—I cannot believe it. Maid.—Yes, he did. Madam, his lordship would not force you to this marriage if you refused. Madam Chen.—I am sorry. But this does not concern you. Maid (Weeping; losing control).—I am a maid; what concerns me. Nothing, nothing.

Madam Chen.—How dare you? How could you forget yourself and be so rude to me? I am your mistress. Maid.—Mistress, mistress, no more mistress. I am Madam Chen's bride-maid. Shall never be Madam Yang's maid, never, never.

Madam Chen.—Master Chen is my husband only in name. I never loved him. Maid.—But Madam, once you are wedded to him you can never marry again. Master Chen is your wedded husband. Madam Chen.—The ceremony was not complete. Maid.—No it was not complete. Madam Chen.—It is not a wedding then. I am Madam Chen, at most, only in name. It is only in name. Maid.—In name (Weeping) if you knew how he died for you, you wouldn't say in name.

Madam Chen.—Died for me? How is that? (Standing up and grasping the Maid's hand.)

Maid.—Don't ask me; I won't tell.

Madam Chen.—You must.

Maid.—I won't. I promised his lordship I would not.
Madam Chen.—You must—if you are still faithful—to your master.
Maid.—Don’t ask me, Madam, you can remember.
Madam Chen.—Remember what?
Maid.—He nursed you.
Madam Chen.—He nursed me?
Maid.—When Doctor ordered everyone away, he stayed and nursed you. Of course, he got the plague.
Madam Chen.—He nursed me?
Maid.—Madam, you remember; you talked to him yourself. He gave you the medicine; you said “thank you;” he asked you “do you like me now;” you said “yes;” he said, “then it is not in vain.”

Madam Chen (Looking before her).—Yes, yes, yes.
Maid.—When he himself took ill—Doctor stood there—Master Chen held my hand and smiled “it is worth while,” “it is worth while.” Madam, madam.
Madam Chen.—Yes I understand now. You are good to me.
Maid (After a silence).—Madam, forgive me.
Madam Chen.—For what?
Maid.—For my rudeness, I forgot myself.
Madam Chen.—I forgive you. (Silence, the Maid slowly stands up.)
Maid.—Yes, madam.
Madam Chen.—Why talk about the wedding; he is my husband. Are you glad to be Madam Chen’s maid again?
Maid.—Yes, to be your maid. I like you and my master.
Madam Chen.—I am your mistress, once and forever. I shall never be Madam Yang.
Maid (Running to her).—Madam! (Both weeping.)
First Servant (Outside).—Does your ladyship permit me to come in?
Maid.—Who is there?
First Servant.—Your humble servant.
Madam Chen.—Tell him to come in.
Maid (Walks to the door and enters with servant; the servant salutes.)
First Servant.—Congratulations, congratulations, your ladyship. Allow your humble servant to congratulate you.
Madam Chen (Slightly surprised).—Why congratulations.
First Servant.—Mr. Yang has just arrived. Sir Chen bids me to tell you.
Madam Chen.—Mr. Yang?
First Servant.—From Mongolia.
Madam Chen.—Yes, very kind of my father-in-law. I thank him. (Half kneeling) (This salute is to her father-in-law. The servant should stand still and receive it for his master.)
First Servant.—Yes your ladyship. And Lord Wang requests you to meet Mr. Yang in ceremonial dress.
Madam Chen.—In ceremonial dress?
First Servant.—His lordship said “This is a good day.” From now on, everything shall be good, pleasant. He ordered anything of white color be put away, but decorate the house with red—preparing for a wedding ceremony.
Madam Chen (Stands up and speaks boldly).—Tell his lordship I shall change my dress.
Maid.—(Very much surprised.)
First Servant.—Yes madam. (Walking to the door) Lord Wang and Mr. Yang are coming to this room.
Madam Chen.—Come with me and help me change. They are coming.
Maid (After a pause).—Yes, madam. (Both go out.) (Outside is heard “Sir, her ladyship thanks you for your kindness. You may retire.” Yang, Chen and Wang enter)
Lord Wang.—My daughter is dressing; shall be here in a minute. Sit down. Mr. Yang, Mongolia benefitted you much?
Mr. Yang.—Certainly. But Mongolia is such a big country. Three weeks experience would not be worthy of your lordship’s attention.
Lord Wang.—How far have you gone into that country?
Mr. Yang.—Traveling is slow on the camel’s back. Only three hundred miles.
Lord Wang.—Have you seen such historical places as the Great Wall, the Gate, General Lee’s Tablet, the Valley of Concert?
Mr. Yang.—Yes, they are more or less in ruin now. But there is a tomb, the natives call it “Green Tomb.”
Lord Wang.—What about it?
Mr. Yang.—It is the only green spot in thousands of miles of desert. She sacrificed her happiness for her country; but only in vain. We know her in the legend of guitar.
Lord Wang (Understanding).—This was thousands of years ago. Let’s forget the by-gones and think of the living.
Mr. Yang.—If we only could forget it! Something lives after death!
Lord Wang (Attempting to change subject).—My daughter must have tried to dress herself as elaborately as a bride; it takes such a long while.

Sir Chen.—Indeed!

Lord Wang.—I can assure you, Mr. Yang, she will be exceedingly happy to meet you.

Maid (Entering).—Your lordship, my mistress will not meet Mr. Yang.

(All are startled.)

Maid.—Her ladyship bids me to inform you.

Lord Wang.—But she must meet Mr. Yang. It is my order, I, her father.

Maid.—Yes your lordship. (Withdraws quietly.)

Lord Wang (Paces the floor; suddenly takes big steps. Goes out through the left door.)

Sir Chen.—Poor old man!

Mr. Yang.—Only eight weeks, he is no longer the same man. Look at the deep lines on his face!

Sir Chen.—Yes, quite weak now. I hope nothing more will happen. It nearly broke our hearts.

Mr. Yang.—What has happened since my departure?

Sir Chen.—My boy died, my daughter-in-law was very ill—she only recovered last week. Of course you know all this through Lord Wang's letter.

Mr. Yang.—Yes, the letter says they were both victims of the plague.

Sir Chen.—It was on the wedding day, a very, very hot day, that the bride was attacked by the plague. She was already weak and the ceremony was too much for her.

Mr. Yang.—Yes.

Sir Chen.—Then my boy. Of course my boy was insane. He insisted on nursing her and—and he must have loved her.

Mr. Yang.—Did Lord Wang know all about this?

Sir Chen.—Yes, but for the sake of his daughter who was ill till last week, he hid the fact from her.

Mr. Yang.—Then what's his reason of calling me back? To torture me?

Sir Chen.—Lord Wang was told by the doctor, she and you were once in love. For her future happiness and for yours, he proposed to marry her to you. He came and consulted me. And of course as I never objected to anything he did, I consented.

Mr. Yang.—But how could it be possible for Lord Wang to
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forget the most sacred tradition: a woman once wedded can never marry again.

Sir Chen.—The ceremony was interrupted. Lord Wang and I do not consider it a marriage.

Mr. Yang (Revoltling).—What did Madam Chen say about it? (He uses the polite term, Madam Chen, now.)

Sir Chen.—She hesitated; but since a daughter's duty is to obey her father, she consented.

Mr. Yang.—Hm, everything duty and tradition. It's absolute nonsense.

Sir Chen.—Since you consented to this match by coming here,—the old man (pointing to himself) gives best wishes.

Mr. Yang (Softly).—Sir Chen, I would not say I consented.

No, No.

Lord Wang (Pacing the floor. Grumbling.)

Mr. Yang.—Will you speak out, my lord?

Lord Wang.—She won't listen to me any more. She refuses to see you.

Mr. Yang.—I sympathize with her.

Lord Wang (Looking at Yang severely.)

Mr. Yang.—Please don't misunderstand me. I mean—er—

If I were in her place.

Sir Chen.—What makes her so change her mind?

Lord Wang.—She seemed to know the true state of things.

The maid, the maid

Maid (Entering.)

Lord Wang.—Did you tell her, I forbid you; I forbid you.

Maid.—Your lordship, Madam Chen is coming.

(All are startled.)

Madam Chen ( Appearing in heavy mourning dress—White )

(Salutes.)

Sir Chen.—Ah, in full mourning dress!

Lord Wang (Indignantly, sadly).—What do you mean by coming here in full mourning.

Madam Chen.—Father, father, you have always meant well. It is for my happiness that you arrange this second marriage for me.

Lord Wang.—Yes, my dear child, I regret my first doing.

Madam Chen.—When I promised you the first marriage, I prepared for a suffering life. But I am quite satisfied, quite happy now as it is. (Pauses) And father-in-law, you are so kind to me. (Pauses again) And Mr. Yang, how do you do? I am
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sorry for you. Our marriage is out of the question. Remember me as your friend—as your sister; but for that sacred love, the love between man and wife, (To Lord Wang) father, allow me to reserve it for my husband. He loved me and died. Good-bye, Mr. Yang. (She controls herself well during the speech; but breaks down at the end. The MAID helps her; and they both walk to the left door.)

Mr. Yang (Following her several steps).—Madam Chen, remember me as your friend, I shall always be at your service.

Lord Wang (Sinks into a chair, Sir Chen helps him.)
(Mr. Yang turns back and walks towards Lord Wang as the curtain falls.)

THE MOTHER SUPERIOR

(“Ihr Gesicht glich einem Codex Palimpsestus”—Henrich Heine)

BY ROY TEMPLE HOUSE

Her face was like a palimpsest
Where pious monkish fingers trace
The legends of the somber blest
Those chiefest grace is Heaven’s Grace—

These fresh, black characters above;
And underneath then, half-described,
Sweet pagan lines, which sang of love
And golden, golden hopes that died.