

The Journey

BY OLIVE TILFORD DARGAN

CHARACTERS

PRINCESS WONG FE, *bride of Yu Tai Shun*

SO SIU, *her friend*

PRINCE CHING MAKURO, *of Japan*

YU TAI SHUN, *of all nations*

THE JOURNEY

SCENE: Room in a farmhouse above Siangtan, where the Siang flows among hills. The rear of room has wide exit to a porch, beyond which show the tops of pear and peach trees in full bloom. Steps lead down to the orchard, and the orchard slopes to the river.

WONG FE *and* SO SIU *present.*

Wong Fe

My lily So Siu, has not the dishonorable color left my wretched cheeks? Is not my face like the dough before it goes into the oven?

So Siu

Oh, my golden Fe, pearls in the dawn are no fairer!

Wong Fe

But these cow-girl's tatters! Would not my gown of meadow-green mist with the peach-gold underrobe make me less haggard?

So Siu

When your lord, Yu Tai Shun, returns from the hills he will say----

Wong Fe

Oh, what will he say?

So Siu

That the fairies have been your friends. They wove for you this robe of rose-leaves, and threw over you a gray cloud from the Witch's Mountain.

(WONG FE trips gaily, then with sudden surrender begins to weep.)

So Siu

Have no shame, beloved of miserable So Siu. Water must follow the fire. I am only a maid, but I know that when the honeymoon is without tears two pigs have married. Ah, wet my sleeve, my dear one, and not thine that will lie on the neck of the golden lord, Yu Tai Shun.

Wong Fe

When I awoke this morning the sunlight was on my pillow, but Yu Tai Shun was gone. All day I have not seen his face. And now the last swallow has left the sky.

So Siu

Why did Prince Ching and the young Japanese choose this day to be guests of Yu Tai Shun? It is sad for the wife when the friends of her lord find her alone. Yu Tai Shun will beat his doorstep for not calling him.

Wong Fe

He will! Prince Ching is almost his father. May his age climb as the hills, always nearer the sky!

So Siu

Indeed, you would be sitting alone in a cloud of sighs, not fast wedded to the bringer of dawn, Yu Tai Shun, if Prince Ching had not won his way to your brothers, the mighty princes, Wong Li and Wong Sen.

Wong Fe

I kiss his honorable dust! He shall live with my ancestors! And Makuro, the young Japanese, I shall love him too, for he is most dear to Yu Tai Shun. Do they still sit in the orchard?

So Siu

They have not moved, nor paused in their talking. Do you not hear? Like bees that cannot choose their flower. It may be that they have brought news to Yu Tai Shun, and his gloom will pass.

Wong Fe

No, I feel it was their coming, like a far cloud, that shadowed him. Oh, my So Siu, it will be darker now!

So Siu

I have sent tea and cakes to the orchard.

Wong Fe

It shall not be dark. Do not the fairies of the sun weave a white world out of the threads of midnight? I will pray to them. We must be merry, my lily So Siu.

So Siu

And why not?

Wong Fe

I shall dance to-night before Yu Tai Shun. (*Tripping.*) Is it not good to have feet? My honorable and glorious mamma weeps when I dance,

but it is because she was born too soon and they crippled her beloved feet.

So Siu

How glad I am that the old world is gone when only the painted flower-girls could do the happy things!

Wong Fe

And it was my own lord, Yu Tai Shun, who made the earth new again!

(She listens, suddenly still.)

So Siu

He is here!

Wong Fe

My darling So Siu....

So Siu

I go! *(Darts from room, right.)*

Wong Fe

I would be dancing, but I cannot move. There are anchors of fear on my toes.

(Enter YU TAI SHUN, left. He is dressed in gray flannels, of American pattern.)

Shun (stopping before WONG FE)

I left a witch-cloud on the hills, and it has dropped down before me.

(She courtesies to the floor. He snatches her up.)

Shun

No! I want my Western bride to-night.

Wong Fe

But this is a Chinese orchard, and it is springtime. Let me worship a little.

Shun

Never, my mountain bird!

(Draws her to the steps, where they sit.)

Wong Fe

You are weary, beloved?

Shun

Not now. I have my rest. To-morrow you shall go with me.

Wong Fe

Up the mountain?

Shun

I will show you where I dropped the storm in my heart.

Wong Fe (timidly)

Will it come again, Yu Tai Shun?

Shun

Nothing can wake it again.

Wong Fe

Then indeed I am your bride!

Shun

Heart of my body art thou, Wong Fe!

(Holds her to his breast a moment, looking distantly out. Suddenly sees his friends approaching.)

Shun

We have guests?

Wong Fe (quickly springing up)

Forgive me! Your friends are here. Prince Ching, and Makuro, from Japan.

Shun

Makuro?

(He throws up his right hand. In a moment PRINCE CHING and Makuro are seen advancing from the orchard.)

Wong Fe

They have had my welcome. I leave you. *(Crosses to right, reluctantly.)*

Shun

Return to us soon, my gold of the morning.

(She goes out. CHING and the Japanese enter.)

Ching

We have waited, Yu Tai Shun. We knew that the setting sun would turn a bridegroom home.

Makuro

Master!

Shun

My friend! What brings you to China?

Makuro (with steady gaze)

You know. I have come for you.

Shun (stubbornly, as if chidden)

My work is done. China is free.

Ching

Her slavery is only beginning. You may hide your body but you cannot bury your mind under peach-blossoms.

Shun

The republic is established.

Ching

But not a democracy.

Shun

My work is done. Twenty years have I given to the cause of the people. Now until I die I will toil and sing in the fields of my fathers.

(They have gradually come to centre of room, which servants have lighted. WONG FE silently returns, but at a sign from CHING she retreats and remains by wall, right, participating in the scene that

follows, though YU TAI SHUN and MAKURO are unaware of her presence.)

Makuro

Do you remember when I stood here once before, Yu Tai Shun?

Shun

Can you ask me that, Makuro?

Makuro

Why not, when you seem to have forgotten all that passed between us? I went from that meeting with an imperishable fire in my heart. I return, and the light that kindled mine is dark. We stood here, and the words you spoke were brighter than the lamps of Siangtan that we looked down upon. Shall I repeat them, Yu Tai Shun?

(Shun is silent.)

Ching

I would hear them, Makuro.

Makuro

The master said: "Forty centuries has China been content to plough, to sow, to reap, and with her harvest support one-quarter of the human lives on our planet. Drudgery has been her lot, frugality her virtue. Only so had she lease of breath. Now she is to unlock her mines, build ships, and roads of commerce, and with the magic of machinery set her people free. If that magic is owned by a few, there will be no freedom, but a slavery whose agony no man can tell. Every owner will be a monarch greater than the Son of Heaven to whom we bowed. We cannot shut them out by war. We can do it solely by making China a true democracy where the people themselves own the magic tools and the great ways to the markets. To do this is the work of all who love Freedom, and I know no other goddess." Were these your words, Yu Tai Shun?

Shun

Yes ... my words.

Makuro

That was five years ago. From all parts of the earth come powers fulfilling your fear. Leagued with our own purblind princes and dwellers in the dusk, they hover over China, waiting for war and bribery to dismember her. And you say your work is done. Yu Tai Shun, where have you buried my master?

Ching

In the heart of the Princess Wong Fe.

Shun (rallying)

May we not be too stern in our judgment of the lords of steam and iron? Lei Kung Sang and the British minister of the So-nan mineral beds have built houses for the people.

Ching

And have taken their land. Men who plucked their own fruit, and took food from their own gardens, now cannot eat until they have torn new treasure out of the earth for the kind Briton and the good Lei Kung Sang.

Shun

Their days of work were always long and weary.

Ching

But they toiled as free men in the sun, and as free men sang from the river-boats when the moon rose. In America, where there is still much land and few people, there are places where children go down into the mines and never see the sun except on the day they call "holy." How

will it be with China's four hundred millions, when there are not even waste places where those who would flee may gather? For even her great untilled spaces are being covered by the foreign hand.

Makuro

Slavery will be born again with depths the ancients never knew.

Shun

But the spirit of brotherhood is growing.

Makuro

Power has no brothers! It was you who taught me that, Yu Tai Shun.

Shun

Do you forget that we built our republic with the aid of these same princes of power?

Ching

We forget nothing. They let us beat down the throne because they could not use it--a rigid tradition--but the republic--*they* are the republic!

Shun

Can we not trust a little? In our greatest need, alien hands have reached out to help us. And we have true hearts among our Chinese lords. Not all have joined with the invader to herd the people into slave-yards. Pei Chen-Ping and Sa Yi are most liberal. You, Prince Ching, and those you gather to you, have hearts like the rising sun. And the noble princes of the house of Wong--have they not given me my bride?

Ching

Ay, when your sighs had blown around the world for seven years,
they yielded her. You were a power to be checked, and they set a
woman in your path.

Shun

No!

Ching

It was a Japanese from the Fushun collieries, a Russian prince of the
Northern railways, a French buyer of Yunnan copper, a British ship-
baron of Hongkong, and the Chinese owners of the unworked gold
veins of Szechuan, who went to the brothers of Wong Fe and said:
"Give Yu Tai Shun his bride."

Shun

It was you who spoke for me!

Ching

You had no father, and in my heart you were my son. I spoke for you
because I believed in you. I did not think that any bribe could lure you
from us. Yours was a soul that we thought would be a torch to every
nation of earth. And you choose to go out like a candle in the breath of
a woman.

(YU TAI SHUN *is bowed and silent.* MAKURO *touches his sleeve.*)

Makuro

Come with us, master.

Ching

In half an hour the boat will stop at the orchard pier for Makuro. He
starts for Japan. It is there you are needed.

Makuro

I come from our friends with their summons. Japan's oligarchy of traders, with every means known to power--school, religion, racial pride and hate--is fostering the spirit of war. All the seeds of the jungle are being deliberately sown once more in men's hearts. They are preparing Japan to hold the largest share of an industrially broken China and weld her millions into one instrument of hate against the West.

Shun

A pigmy's dream!

Ching

A dream that will come true if our giants continue to sleep.

Makuro

It is the menace of America that Japan holds before her people till their hearts roll with fear, their brains grow sick with rage. America, who has insulted us with exclusion--who has snatched an island chain from our Eastern waters, and shot, starved, imprisoned thousands ignorant enough and brave enough to resist her. *That* is the America my people are taught to believe in. But you know a different America, where people love honor and hate war--whose religion is love thy neighbor as thyself. Come, teach them of that America! You are known in a million homes of Japan. You have taught us to love you, and where we love, we listen.

Shun (with great effort)

I cannot go. If I part from Wong Fe the blood will leave my veins and flow back to her.

Makuro

Then take her with you.

Shun

You know what this journey means.

Ching

Yes, you must go free. With such a weight you would be useless. I will take Wong Fe to her brothers.

Shun

I shall hold her forever!

Ching

You think joy can last so long? (*To MAKURO, shrugging.*) A boy yet!

Shun

In Japan you have my young scholar, Onoto. All my knowledge I have given him. In his heart is my purpose, his eyes hold my vision.

Makuro

Onoto!

Shun

His years are younger, his flame will leap higher. I am only one who fails you. In every nation our numbers are growing. Do not fear for humanity. Our brothers are everywhere.

Makuro

You say Onoto?

Shun

He has the gift of the shining word--the word that draws the heart as a full moon at sea draws the eye. I can turn my back on the world and rob it of nothing, for I have given it Onoto.

Ching

How long have you been chirping here like a cricket under a leaf, with no news from the roadside?

Shun

It is three weeks to-day since I brought Wong Fe to the door of my fathers.

Ching

Three weeks! On the very day of your joy Onoto was thrown into prison.

Shun

They would not dare!

Makuro

They did dare.

Shun

In prison--Onoto!

Makuro

No, he is not now in prison.

Shun

Free?

Makuro

The enmity of the powers was bitter. Everywhere he was sowing the seed of peace. In many a house the ancestral sword was broken at his bidding.

Shun

But he is free?

Makuro

Yesterday (*glances out at the stars*), at this hour, he was shot.

Shun (slowly comprehending)

Then I have been twenty-four hours dead.

(He steps uncertainly out to the little porch. They gaze at the floor, respecting his grief. WONG FE makes a motion to follow him. CHING stops her with a gesture, and she shrinks back. YU TAI SHUN re-enters.)

Shun

Your mercy, friends. (*Crosses left, to exit.*)

Ching

You will go with us now?

Shun (turns and hurls the word)

No!

(An instant of silence follows his exit, then WONG FE comes forward.)

Wong Fe

Peace to your hearts, honorable friends of Yu Tai Shun! He will depart with you.

Ching

Not yet. We must wait. Invisible chains cannot be broken. But they will disunite of themselves. Then he will come.

Wong Fe

I will send him with you to-night.

Ching

You send him?

Wong Fe

Do you think I will divide his life so that the two halves can bear no fruit? That I will wait until he hates me for that ruin?

Ching (with laughter)

Hates you, oh princess!

Wong Fe

Wait till I must glean in his heart behind a spent passion?--like a poor widow in the track of a grain-cart?

Ching

The coral of your lips will defeat their command, Wong Fe. Near you he is a dry fagot seized by a flame.

Wong Fe

I tell you he will go! Wait in the orchard until you hear the first whistle of the boat. Then come for him. He will be ready. Go, honorable friends! He is returning.

Ching

It is useless. Your words may bite like winter, but his eyes will see only the Spring morning.

Wong Fe

Go, I beg you, go!

(They pass out down the steps of porch. WONG FE hurries to a small table, opens a lacquered box and takes from it a stiletto, which she hides in the folds of her sleeve. She is dancing as YU TAI SHUN enters, and sings as she dances.)

The thousand odors of Spring
Are the thousand arms of love. They
find thee in the valleys,
On the crest of the hills they reach thee;
Till Spring bear no fragrance
Thou canst not escape them,
The thousand arms of love!

The orchard pool is a pillow,
A pillow for the twin lotus,
And the wings of the flying geese
Are warm in the air of heaven;
They drop to the shadowy lake-sedge,
For sweet looks the earth from the roads of
the sky,
And in heaven are no cool grasses.

Ever listening
Are the leaves of the slim dryanda,
Whose heart is the harp of the Spring-wind.
A dryanda-tree is my lover,
And my thoughts are the leaves that listen.
Autumn, Autumn, touch not my leaf-thoughts!
Cast them not down when the pool is grey,
And the teal no more sail two and two
With their breasts above one shadow.

Shun

Come to me, Wong Fe! I feel that you have blown through my door like a rose petal, and will drift away again, leaving me not a footprint to kiss.

Wong Fe

Neither in life nor in death shall I leave you, my lord. Though I seem to die, and these graces that please you fall to earth like willow-blossoms, it is not I that will lie on the sand.

Shun

Why do you speak of death, Wong Fe?

Wong Fe

Because I am so happy. The sages say that we can have no fairer fortune than to die in our happiest moment.

Shun

Do not speak of death. The word blisters the air, though your lips be as two drops of June rain.

Wong Fe

But how sweet to die when I am fairest in your eyes! Every year, at this time, you would walk down the peach-flower lanes and recall the glow of my cheek. Oh, Heaven, let me not be a faded wife in the blooming time of the year!

Shun

Thy soul, Wong Fe, is the flower of my worship.

Wong Fe

And death would give my soul wholly to you. I should be near you always. Then morning would not call you to the peaks, leaving me behind in the tear-dew.

Shun

To-morrow we shall go together. Your shadow will be with mine on the rocks, and under the fir-trees we shall forget the valley.

Wong Fe

And the world? Oh, my lord, there are distances farther than the peaks of Siang, and they will call you from me. It cannot be that you who have known all lands will be content with one. I would see the strange people you have made your brothers, would listen to their dreams, and read the future with their hearts. There are dangers you would not let my body share--I do not ask that--but my soul, you could forbid it nothing.

Shun

What have you heard? What has Makuro said to you?

Wong Fe

What should he say but that the cakes were good, and the tea had the flavor of the fields of Hunan?

Shun

We must join our friends. Where do they wait?

Wong Fe

They listen for the boat that will stop at the foot of the orchard. Why do they go? Old friends should not be so brief in greeting. Could they not stay one night?

Shun

No--no. (*Sits down.*) They must go.

Wong Fe (laying her hand on his shoulder)

What voice dost thou hear, and wilt not answer?

Shun

Nothing--nothing.

Wong Fe

You will not long be deaf between the beating of our two hearts. You will hear and go. That is why I long for the death-fairy to come in my hour of happiness. You have joined with strong men to lift a heavy yoke from the world. My smiles cannot feed your spirit. Go with your friends. Let the whistle of the boat part us.

Shun

The cassia-tree may draw itself from earth, and walk on feet of roots through the world, but I cannot divide my days from yours, for you are myself, Wong Fe.

Wong Fe (resigned)

I believe you, my lord. We shall not part. But what joy it would be to die now in your presence, while the love-cup is full! Oh, I could not meet death alone! You know the poor ghost in the song who died in the absence of her lover? She is always pleading to be allowed to die again when his arms may be around her. So would my ghost go wailing if I lost your kiss in death. (*Touches his cheek.*) Is that a tear, Yu Tai Shun? I torture you because I am so happy! You shall laugh, my prince! I know a new game we shall play. Little So Siu taught it to me to-day. She says it is an American game. We call it "Guess behind you!" You turn your back--like that--and you must tell me what I am doing. When you miss three times, then I shall tell you what you must pay. Now--what is it I do?

Shun

You throw me a kiss.

Wong Fe

So I do! And now, my soul's light?

(*Takes stiletto from her sleeve. The whistle of the boat is heard. He turns. She hides stiletto.*)

Shun

Our friends are going.

Wong Fe

But wait--there is time. You must guess once more! Oh, you are slow as ten turns of a river! There!

(Turns his head with her hands, then snatches the stiletto, stabs herself and falls. He turns, kneels dazedly, and takes her in his arms as she dies. CHING and MAKURO enter.)

Ching

The boat-- *(Stops in consternation.)*

Makuro (softly)

Master, I did not ask this price.

Shun (rising)

It is paid.

(CURTAIN)