

Peaceful-Light

By P'ou Song-lin

In the time when the Shining Dynasty had just conquered the throne, the eastern coasts of the Empire were ravaged by the rapid junks commanded by the cruel inhabitants of the Japanese islands, the irresistible *Wo tsz*.

Now, it happened that the *Wo tsz* Emperor lost his first wife; knowing the beauty of Chinese women, he charged one of his officers to bring back some of them.

The officer, at the head of a numerous troop, landed not far from the town of The-Smoky-wall. No resistance was possible; the population was given the example of flight by the functionaries, at least it was thus said in the Annals of the prefecture.

The country being far from the big centres, the women were not great coquettes; only one, named Peaceful-light, had always been careful, since childhood, not to allow her feet to become naturally large; they were constantly bound up, so much so that she could hardly walk.

Her large soft eyes were shaded with heavy eyelashes; one of the literati of the place took delight in quoting the poets of antiquity on them:

Under the willow of her eyelashes
The tranquil river of her eyes shines forth.
I bend and see my image reflected in them.
Could she be deceitful like the deep water?

When the pirates were coming, she begged her family to leave her, and to fly without the risk of being delayed by her.

"It is the just punishment for my coquetry," she told them. "Fear nothing for me, however. I am going to take a strong dose of the paste extracted from the flowers of Nao-yang which makes one sleep. The pirates will think I am dead, and will leave me."

The family allowed themselves to be persuaded, and departed. As to Peaceful-light, she was asleep almost directly after taking the drug, and she remained motionless on her bed.

The pirates, entering everywhere, at last arrived in the house and remained struck with admiration by her beauty. The officer who was called, at first thought her dead and was much grieved, but, touching her hand and finding it warm and limp, he resolved to carry her away.

When the ravishers were re-embarked, the strong sea-air and the motion of the boat revived the young girl; she awoke, and was horrified to find herself surrounded by strangers. The one who seemed the chief spoke to her in Chinese language in order to reassure her:

"Fear nothing. No harm will come to you. On the contrary, the highest destiny awaits you; my Lord The Emperor designs you to the honour of his couch."

Seeing that no one troubled her, Peaceful-light was reassured; she resolved to wait, confident in her destiny, and knowing that she had still, ready in her sleeve, in case of necessity, a narcotic dose strong enough to kill her.

As soon as she landed, she was taken in great haste to the Palace. The Emperor, greatly satisfied with her beauty, conferred on her at once the rank of first favourite.

But all the luxury and love which surrounded her could not make her forget her family and her country; she resolved to run away.

In order to manage it, she complained to her master how sad it was for her never to be able to speak her own language with companions from her country. The Emperor, happy to be able to please her, gave orders to fit out a sea-junk, in order to go to the Chinese coast.

The day when all was ready the young girl found means of pouring into her master's drink a dose of her narcotic. Then, when he was asleep, she took his private seal and, going out of the room, she called the intendant of the Palace and said to him:

"The Emperor has ordered me to go to China to fetch a magician, a member of my family, who has great power on water and wind. Here is the seal, proof of my mission. The ship must be almost ready."

The intendant knew that a junk had been specially prepared to go to China; he saw the seal; what suspicion could he have? He had a palanquin brought as quickly as possible; two hours after, the wood of the junk groaned under the blows of the unfurling waves.

Arriving in sight of the coast, on the pretext of not frightening the population, the young girl begged the officer who accompanied her to send a messenger to the prefect of the town, bearing a letter that she had prepared. The officer, without distrust, sent one of his men.

The letter of Peaceful-light showed a whole scheme to which the prefect could but give his consent. The messenger returned, bringing to the officer and to the men an invitation to take part in the feast that was being prepared for them, their intentions not being bad.

Peaceful-light retired into her family, who welcomed her with a thousand demonstrations of joy.

In the wine that was freely poured out for the strangers they had dissolved the flowers of Nao-yang. The effects were not long in being felt; a torpor that they attributed to the table excesses seized them one after another. They were soon all sleeping deeply. Men arrived with swords, glided near them, and, a signal being given, cut off their heads.

While these events were passing in China, others still more serious were happening in Japan. Soon after the departure of Peaceful-light, the Emperor's brother penetrated into the room where the sovereign was left sleeping. This brother was ambitious; he profited by the occasion, killed the unhappy Mikado, took possession of the seals of the State, and, calling his partisans in haste, proclaimed himself Chief of the State. Only a part of the princes followed him; the others, filled with indignation by the crime that had been accomplished, united their troops to crush the usurper; civil war tore the whole of Japan to pieces.

As to Peaceful-light, by order of the authorities she received public congratulations and gifts of land which allowed her to marry and be happy, as she merited.