

# Weird Tales

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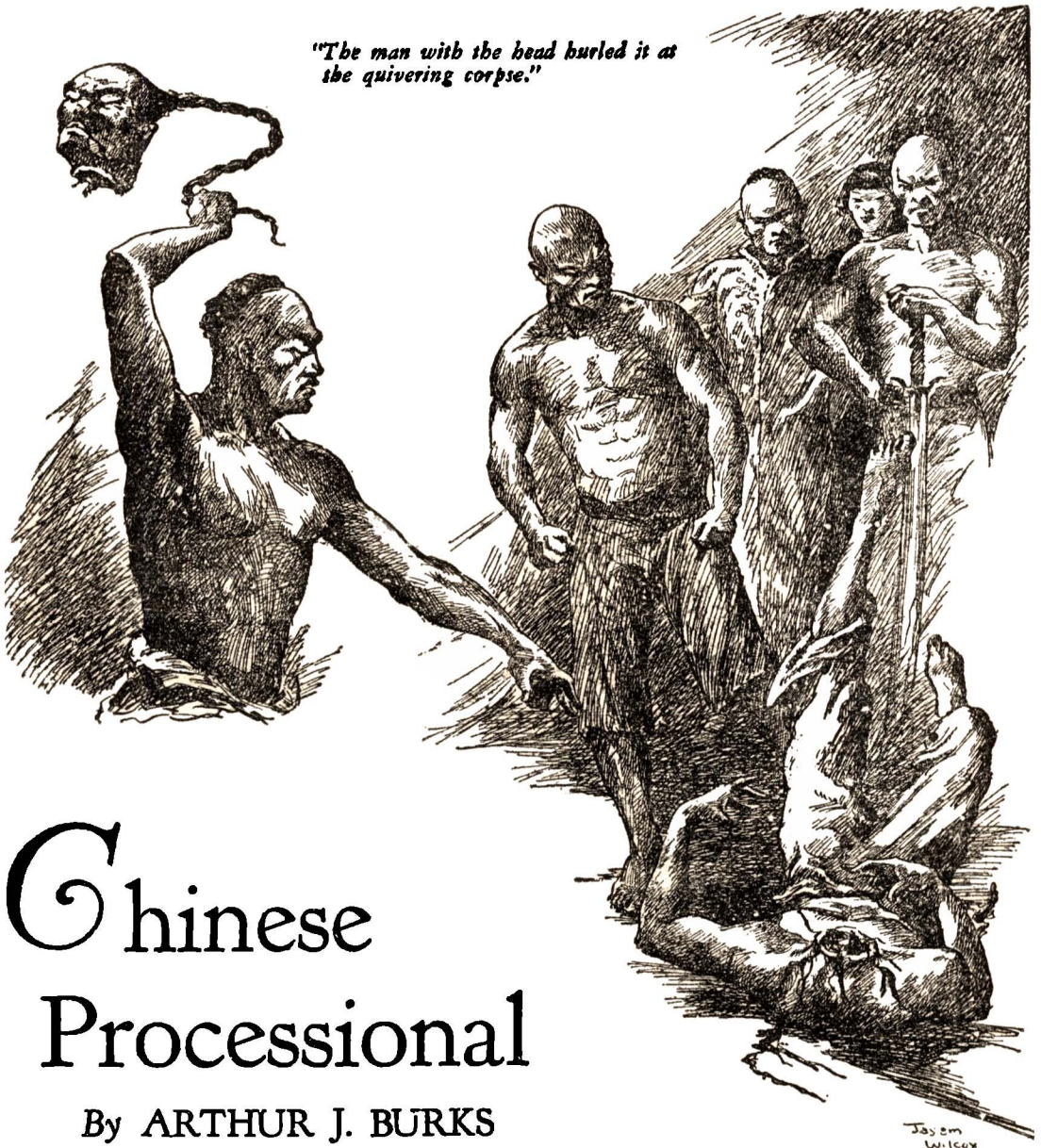
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"The man with the head hurled it at the quivering corpse."



# Chinese Processional

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

*A strange, eery story of the wrath of the Dowager Empress of China,  
and a weird beheading*

**I**T IS true, perhaps, that I am in some small measure psychic; but that does not entirely explain the events of that strange night in the Summer Palace. The Summer Palace lies toward the Western Hills, some seventeen miles from Peking. To this palace—which isn't a palace in the true sense of the word, but a vast group of buildings upon an artificial hill—went Her Majesty Tzu

Hsi, to rest from the cares of state, and there went her predecessors during the existence of the Manchu Court. It was a summer home for the royal family, its retainers, eunuchs, serving-maids and ladies in waiting.

The artificial hill rises some five hundred feet from the level of Kun Ming Lake, which is also artificial, and there are many stories told of the place. Here

for a time the Tragic Emperor was held prisoner . . . and the inner wall of bricks which imprisoned him may be seen if one travels with a competent guide, alongside the house in which the Empress lived while sojourning in the Summer Palace.

I had spent one night in the Forbidden City. I now wished to repeat the experience in the Summer Palace. It, too, was filled with the breath of China's past. The great ones of the Empire had ridden its pleasure barges on the lake, while goldfish of many hues and shapes and sizes darted through the crystal-clear water away from the boats.

During the day I had an opportunity to enter the royal boathouse, which had not been opened since the death of Her Majesty in 1908. The palace was guarded by Cantonese soldiers. I had an argument with one of them, which was none the less acrimonious in that neither of us understood a word the other said . . . and I was, frankly, afraid to duck away from my party and hide in the Summer Palace.

But I did return to the place, just the same. I found myself at the Jade Girdle Bridge, which spans an arm of Kun Ming, just around ten o'clock in the evening. I wasn't far from the Bronze Bull, which all tourists know, and most others have seen in photographs.

Sure that none had seen me, I dropped into Kun Ming and began to swim. My watch had been removed from my wrist and placed under my beret so that water would not befoul it. Thus secure I slipped easily through the water under a bright moon. Small fish broke the water as I swam. I felt them touch my legs. The snaky stalks of lotus tangled my legs and tired me to shake them loose. I had no desire to drown in any lake, artificial or otherwise.

As I swam, the palace on the Hill of Ten Thousand Years seemed to sway and rock with the motion of my swimming. Moonlight on the many windows of the palace buildings made those windows—those of them which vandals had not broken—look like the glaring eyes of dragons. To think of dragons brought up strange fancies. Once before I had visited the Summer Palace, guided by a faker who claimed to be a Manchu. Of course he wasn't, but he had taken me to the Jade Fountain, whose waters empty into Kun Ming. In the old days only the Empress could drink from the fountain. Now anybody could who had a Mex dime and didn't mind drinking out of a community cup.

The guide had told me there was a dragon in the pool under the Jade Fountain, and when I queried him about it he naïvely informed me that the story was true; that he himself had seen the dragon. Being sensitive to impressions, and the water being black and cold, I distinctly felt the scaly bodies of several dragons rub against me as I made the swim toward the Summer Palace. Had I been seen I'd have stopped a few bullets . . . even though Chinese are notoriously inaccurate with firearms. However, nothing of the kind happened. I headed toward a sort of canal which entered the lake. This canal passed one end of the Summer Palace, and the famous marble boat. I had had tea on the marble boat on occasion. There were stories about the boat, too. It seems that Her Majesty made a tax levy to build a Chinese navy. Instead of building a navy she took the money to improve the Summer Palace. When her board of ministers insisted that she show her subjects a navy for their taxes, she built the marble boat at the edge of Kun Ming and said, in effect:

"There's your navy. Sail it away."

Since it is indeed of marble, and so heavy that a thousand horses could scarcely budge it, the marble boat has never sailed anywhere. It represents a jest of Tzu Hsi, known in her day, and to history, as "Old Buddha," because of her wisdom.

I SWAM into the canal, heading for the boathouse I had visited during the day, where two of the royal barges had been moored for twenty years and more. There had been a caretaker, but I knew he wouldn't remain after night. To the Chinese, especially the humble ones, these old buildings which had seen so much history, which had known so many sorrows and heartaches of the royal ones, were a place of whispers, of queer echoes, and of wandering spirits.

The soldiers would be at the far end of the palace grounds and wouldn't hear a thing. I swam to the great doors which barred the boathouse, and drifted under them . . . and was inside the gloomy, huge building which to me will always be recalled as a mausoleum of dead hopes. Pigeons cooed under the eaves . . . and now and again feathers drifted down from the high ceiling to float on the water like tiny boats . . . and to travel out under the great doors, along the canal, to make some unknown port on the shores of Kun Ming.

I grasped the gunwale of one of the boats and crawled out, thence up to the concrete platform around the dock. There I stood, accustoming my eyes to the darkness, waiting. Under the eaves the pigeons cooed sleepily. One huge barge rocked lazily at anchor. Her timbers creaked and the sound was like protesting voices. Her roof was of yellow tile, for the barge was a floating palace. Oars were in place in the sternsheets. There were seats around the gunwales.

On this boat had sat, in the long ago, the great ones of the court, to go forth to enjoy the breezes on Kun Ming.

The other boat . . . well, something had happened to it, across the lock from where I stood. It had sunk by the head and its deck was perpetually awash. The water came onto the green-scummed deck with little rushes of sound that were like whispers of endearment, or commiseration. The boat rocked as the first boat rocked. It too was roofed over in yellow tile. One boat, in the old days, had carried Her Majesty's retainers. The other had carried Her Majesty and her court ladies. I could fancy the beautiful picture they must have made. . . .

There had been scores of eunuchs garbed in gaudy gowns of great richness, created by the imperial tailors. There had been serving-maids no whit less gorgeously garbed. The ladies in waiting had worn gowns only less rich than Her Majesty . . . and Her Majesty's gown, with the dragon emblazoned in gold across its front, must have been a thing to marvel at. The symbol of the Empress was really a phoenix, but Tzu Hsi affected the dragon, symbol of an Emperor, because she regarded herself as a man as far as rulership went.

Yes, it must have been a gorgeous spectacle. Now, all that remained was the shell; but this was summer. Years ago the court had been real at this time of the year, and the soldiers who now guarded the Summer Palace would not have dared even to look at it, and for a man to be caught inside the grounds as I was now, after nightfall, would have meant his flaying alive. The Emperor was the only man allowed in the palace . . . all other males being complete eunuchs.

Yes, it was all gone, but in fancy, perhaps I could bring them back.

I had done it before, in other places, because of my psychic propensities. At least I could delude myself . . . which was what I hoped to do. It was inexpressibly sad, inexpressibly weird, there in the old boathouse, with its high ceiling, the cooing of the invisible pigeons, the whispering of water over the decks of the barge that was partially awash, the creaking protest of both barges as they rubbed their sides against the concrete ways.

The top of one of the high doors had been broken off, as though it had been hit by a powerful explosive shell, and the broken splinters hung down inside, and through the opening came shafts of moonlight, to etch upon the black sullen water the shape of the holes in the boathouse. And the moonlight danced as the water danced. And there must have been things—dragons perhaps?—in the water; for many times, though I heard no wind, it was troubled. It made me think of the pilgrims who went down into Bethesda to bathe, when the waters were troubled . . . I don't know why. It was easy to conjure up pictures and parts of pictures in such surroundings.

I wished, so fervently it was almost a prayer, that the dead could return. . . .

And so suddenly as to frighten me there came a knocking at the door by which, during the day, I had entered. Had the soldiers, searching the grounds, found marks of water on the cobblestones to tell them an intruder was in the palace? Of course not. I hadn't touched land anywhere since leaving the Jade Girdle Bridge, until I crawled forth inside the boathouse . . . and nobody had entered it since I had.

The knocking was repeated.

Then sounded a harsh voice which still had in it a hint of melody.

"Open it quickly! Must we be kept waiting?"

I am quite sure that those were the words used, though I knew the language was mandarin, which I do not know. But somehow it didn't especially surprize me. If I were caught here it would mean death . . . and I wasn't ready for that. If I swam out now my swimming head would be seen in the moonlight; for from the noise outside—a noise which had in it a strange feeling of something distinctly Other—I knew that many people were waiting to be admitted.

So I slipped into the first barge as swiftly and as silently as I knew how, and hid myself in the shadows under the forward end, near the heavy blunt prow. When I sat down I found that, save for a view to the rear of the boat, the only other direction I could see was toward the barge which was awash. I looked there, casually . . . and my heart froze; for a strange thing was happening.

**H**AVE you ever watched the results of certain kinds of trick photography? Have you ever seen a large face fade into, gradually, a face that was smaller, so that the smaller face seemed, in the end, to be the result of several reductions in size of many other faces . . . each of which is seen for a moment, then seen in shadow while the smaller face appears, then the smaller, each face in its turn until the big face has become the small one? Fredric March in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* will illustrate. Only, this wasn't a matter of faces, as I stared at the boat which had sunk by the head.

First, there was the water line . . . and almost immediately afterward, as though it had happened while I blinked my eyes in unbelief, a wet dark streamer all around the part that had been under water . . . and the strip was fully a foot

wide. Even as I looked, the strip became wider . . . and the prow of the barge, which had been under water for twenty years, showed its ugly dragon head above the water.

Yes . . . the sunken barge, untouched by hands that I could see, was rising from the water which for so many years had been its grave! It was impossible, of course; yet I could see it so plainly. I watched it for a full minute, as the prow rose from the black sullen waters . . . like the dragon about which the guide had told me . . . and then my attention was diverted. The door in the side of the boathouse had suddenly banged open as though it had been crashed inward by a high wind. It banged open and crashed back against the wall.

And the voice I had heard spoke again.

"We shall use the other boat."

I darted a look across the ways, and rubbed my eyes, if not with my hands, at least mentally . . . for the boat that had been awash was now floating proudly. The paint of her yellow tiles was as clean as burnished gold where the moonlight touched it. Age had fallen from that barge as a cloak is dropped. I darted a glance at the boat in which I was hiding, to find that it too had been strangely renewed. This time I rubbed my eyes in earnest, but it caused no change.

Then I stared at the people who had entered. The leader was a woman, an imperious old woman. Her skin was fair, her carriage mannish and proud beyond all pride. She wore a dragon robe and her feet were set in Manchu shoes. She strode strongly around the concrete platform toward the second barge. She was, I judged, almost seventy years of age; yet she traveled so swiftly that her followers had difficulty in keeping up with her. By her side walked a huge man with a beheading-knife in his hand . . . and

I cringed as I thought of what use the thing might be put to. I was getting my wish with a vengeance, thus bringing back the shades of the past. Of course I knew that stage mummers could fit themselves into all sorts of rôles. I fully expected to see American tourists enter behind the strange cavalcade, to pay their money, and watch, and laugh over, the puppet show for which they had paid. Tourists had no sentiment and were not above causing such re-enactments for their own pleasure. The aura of heart-ache which shrouded this old place, the knowledge that it had known so much of sorrow and of tears, would not touch them. They were of the sort which sat in golden thrones of dead and gone monarchs and had themselves photographed holding a bottle of beer, with a leg thrown over an arm of the imperial chair.

But no tourists came in. Perhaps they would join the show later . . . and the rising of the barge from its watery grave had been a trick played on my eyes—never too good—by the eery moonlight which came through the cracks and crevices of the boathouse.

Following the elderly, proud old woman was a serving-maid of great beauty carrying in her hand . . . a water pipe of jade. After her came another maid carrying cosmetics on a silken cushion of yellow. After her came a man carrying a yellow stool . . . and he carried it with care . . . and he spoke, and his voice was high-pitched, almost womanish. It startled me, made me remember things I had heard. But of course many eunuchs still lived in Peking, some of them in straitened circumstances, and some of them would have taken part in this mummerly for the money on which to live.

So there was nothing unnatural about it. Behind the eunuch came many others,

each carrying something, one a comb, one an ivory fan decorated with peacock feathers, one a screen, one a cushion upon which many ear-rings rested, like jewels in a case. There were many serving-maids, too, and each carried something, and each thing they carried was something which a high-born lady would have considered necessary to her toilet.

And there were many other ladies who carried nothing at all, and these were dressed only less gorgeously than the old one who led the strange procession. They entered the barge with her. The old one was assisted into the boat by two of the womanish men, who held her by the arms.

**T**HE old woman took her place on golden cushions swiftly placed for her near the center of the boat. Eunuchs and serving-maids so placed themselves that they could best serve her. Those remaining over when she was satisfied that everything had been done for her comfort, were ordered to step aboard the boat on which I was hiding. It seemed strange, when they came and alined themselves on board, that nobody saw me; but that I quickly forgot.

Several eunuchs caught up the poles lying under the thwarts and, taking their stance on runways on either side of the barge, they pressed the poles against the bottom of the ways and pushed. Lines had been cast off and the barge began to move, that one holding the old lady going out first through the door.

I watched the opening of that door. It was held together, the two halves of it, by rusty chains. I couldn't help wondering by what means the doors were opened and swung back. The chains gave, came apart with rusty squeakings, and dropped, rattling, to hang in their rings on either half of the great door. And slowly, as the leading barge approached, the two halves

swung back . . . and they screamed dismally as they swung. It was eery, but still there seemed a reasonable explanation for it all—if I could only find it—despite that I saw no hands fumbling with the chains, saw no one push back the doors.

The leading barge passed through. For a fleeting moment I thought I could see the marble boat directly through the barge and the people on its deck, but of course that was imagination. I distinctly heard the swish of water under the counters of the two barges, heard the swish of water disturbed by the poles, and the spat-spat of bare feet on the runways as the men who poled the barges did their work. Thousands of times I had heard this sound on China's waterways. It wasn't new or strange.

But what was strange was that nobody noticed me, though I was sure that I was in plain view of all; but since none seemed to mind my presence I refused to worry about it further. Besides, the man with the beheading-knife rode in the first barge.

I had looked at my watch when the boathouse door had first swung open to admit the strange procession. It had been five minutes after twelve, exactly, and I have always been finicky about having the right time.

The two barges moved down the canal to the rhythmic swaying of the men who poled them. From the first barge came light laughter and banter, and it wasn't strange that I understood what was said. The ladies in waiting up there were discussing certain allegorical plays which had recently been shown in the old theater in the Summer Palace. Others spoke of strange games of chance, strange dice games of which I had never heard. But I had read about them.

Now we came even with the many palaces which cover Ten Thousand Years

Hill, upon which the Summer Palace—its scores of buildings—was sprawled. And again I rubbed my eyes in amazement. For every building was ablaze with light. The Colonnade, that pride of Old Buddha, had been strung with electric light wires, and the bulbs were like glowing eyes all down the curving length of the colonnade.

And something else had happened: I knew the Summer Palace in the same state of disintegration as the Forbidden City, with grass and weeds growing out of the dust and dirt between the yellow tiles of the roofs. Now there were neither weeds nor grass nor dirt, and the yellow tiles were golden in the bright light of the moon. Certainly I had broken into the Summer Palace at an odd time; certainly tourists—whom I expected at any moment to appear, probably with bottles of beer in their hands, shouting and singing and waving to their paid mummerys on the two barges—were spending a vast sum of money to make the old buildings live again. I felt that they were going too far, but even so I wished to see it all.

I would soon know whether it was mummery, or something else; for three men came down to the boat-landing across the canal from the marble boat, and between them they brought a struggling captive. He was a Chinese in padded gown, and his yellow face was a mask of terror. He did not once look upon the old woman in the first barge, but kept his eyes lowered. His legs were trembling so that his knees knocked together audibly.

"This man was captured inside the walls just now," said one of the man's captors, "and we have brought him to Lao Ye."

It seemed to me that "lao ye" meant old one, but while I was cudgeling my brains to remember, the old woman rose from her place in the first barge. She towered,

regally, above all the others. Her black eyes almost shot flames of anger. She bade her boatmen tie up the barge to the wharf. She bade the boatmen on the barge in which I was hidden to do likewise.

Then she stepped forth, as did those with her, upon the land, the western portion of the Summer Palace. I remained aboard the barge and no one noticed me. The womanish men chattered with excitement and their voices were like the cawing of crows. The serving-maids shrieked. The ladies in waiting talked decorously, but with an undercurrent of excitement in their liquid tones.

Now it came to me that I had seen every detail of this before! Had I seen it in a dream? Heard it described? Read it somewhere? I didn't know, but I found myself anticipating. This, I decided, would happen next . . . and at the prescribed time it *did* happen. I found I could look ahead and see exactly what was to happen, and there was no surprize in it when the thing did come to pass. The woman the guards—and they, too, had womanish voices—called Lao Ye strode up to the prisoner.

"Have you anything to say to us?" she demanded.

The man all but collapsed. He would have sprawled at her feet but for the men who held him. Then he straightened, whereupon they forced him to his knees and made him perform the kowtow, that act of servility which went out of China with the Empire.

"Beat him with the bamboo!" said the old woman.

And there in the moonlight they stripped the man to his waist, and placed him on the ground on his stomach. A man stood on either side of him, and



now in their hands appeared long withes of bamboo.

"Give him fifty lashes," snapped the old one.

The man winced as the lashes, first one and then the other, were laid across his bare flesh. In a matter of seconds the skin had been broken and red blood flowed from the man to dye the cobblestones. And each successive blow struck exactly in the same place . . . it must have been horrible torture before the beating was ended.

They stood the man upon his feet. Still he did not look upon the old one.

"Have you anything to say to us?" demanded the old one again.

"Thy slave has erred and deserves the punishment," the man mumbled, his words filled with pain.

"Ah, then you admit your error?"

"Yes."

The woman turned to her executioner. At this point I decided that the mummery had gone far enough. I jumped from the barge. The man had been beaten. Even this a coolie might agree to do for money . . . but beheading . . . of course it wouldn't come to that.

"Stop!" I shouted. "This has gone far enough."

Nobody stopped me, noticed me, or even seemed to hear. The talking continued. The executioner walked forward. The man was forced to kneel; but of course they couldn't, *wouldn't*, go through with this. Coolie lives were cheap, but dollars would never buy the life of a human being, however lowly, if I could prevent. I ran to first one person, then the other.

"I shall help you," I cried to the prisoner, but he didn't even look up or show that he had heard.

"You must not do this thing," I said to the old woman.

She looked through me as though she heard nothing, and as though she did not see me, though I knew she could not help hearing and seeing. I plucked at the sleeve of this man and that woman, yet did not touch them at all, because they so easily evaded it. Their clothing was in my hands, yet eluded me . . . and sweat was breaking forth all over my body. I knew that something was grimly, horribly wrong, but what?

The lights in the palaces . . . the golden moonlight . . . and this tableau out of China's past . . . mummery, all of it; yet the whipping had been real, for the blood seeped forth from the man's clothing, making it red, almost black in the moonlight. I was gripped by a strange horror, and a fear which I could neither subdue nor understand.

Two of the men forced the prisoner to kneel. A third grabbed at his queue after he had knelt, and pulled, drawing the man's neck taut. I dashed at the executioner, grabbing at his hands as he raised the beheading-knife. He did not see, hear, or even feel me. The unearthliness of the whole thing was now being brought home to me. Was I laboring under a delusion? Was I under some hypnotic spell? God only knew, and my God was not China's God.

The executioner brushed me aside, or rather I stepped aside when I could do nothing with him, to keep the great gleaming knife from descending and cleaving me from crown to chin. But even so I hoped it wouldn't continue to the end it tended toward. But it did. The knife whistled as it flashed through the air. The blade touched the back of the doomed man's neck. The head dangled from the queue still held in the hand of the third man.

The beheaded one jumped and jerked on the cobblestones like a chicken with its

head cut off . . . while I sweated with horror and my eyes must have stood out from my head. The man with the head hurled it at the quivering corpse, as the old woman spoke again.

"Back to the barges! No cringing coward of a coolie will keep us from enjoying our voyage on Kun Ming."

**I** WAS in a daze as I got back aboard, still enjoying that seeming invisibility which prevented discovery.

Now I began to examine, to see what manner of people these were among whom I had fallen, and there was an atmosphere of grimness in them. All looked with fear and trembling at the old woman. She could do to any of them what she had done to the prisoner, their glances said. Who was she? Certainly this was no mummery, else where were those who had paid for the show?

I felt of the solid boards of the barge, as one pinches oneself to see if one dreams . . . and the boards, I am sure, were real. I extended a hand and touched the gown of a man who stood close enough to me that he might have stepped upon me. I wasn't sure of the gown, save that its texture was coarse . . . and that it was extremely cold, icy cold. It made me shiver just to touch it.

Out into Kun Ming we rode. Now two ladies in waiting were singing . . . and they sang of heartbreak and sorrow, of love, of laughter and of tears. The women, in their gaudy, brilliant gowns, were like gorgeous night-flowers blooming in the moon, opening at night to receive the caress of the cool breeze which blew across the breast of Kun Ming. The men poled the two crafts . . . and I heard their spat-spatting feet, and knew that all this was real. I trailed my hand in the water and held it up . . . and drops fell from my fingertips that were

like pearls, or a girl's tears, shining in the faint moonlight. It was real, it *had* to be real . . . and yet . . .

I rode on the second of the two barges and it was like a dream. It wasn't a happy dream. I couldn't escape it. I couldn't jump out and swim to the spot whence I had stepped into Kun Ming at ten o'clock. I couldn't do anything but drift with the barges on Kun Ming . . . and so I settled myself to do just that.

I looked back at the Summer Palace, wondering why so many lights were lighted; why, despite all the light, I could not feel that the Summer Palace was occupied. They were lights in empty buildings, burning without reason or purpose. An eery feeling.

Lily pads were crushed under our keel, to rise after we had passed and flirt the drops of water from their tops. Fish broke water, shining, and went under again. I saw the snaky traces of eels near the surface.

At last, after circling Kun Ming, the old woman spoke:

"It is time to return."

Immediately the barges swung back, heading for the canal. I looked at my watch, then at the eastern sky. This strange procession had begun at five minutes past midnight. It was now less than an hour before dawn . . . and yet the Summer Palace still blazed with light.

We started back, and I was glad that the ride was almost ended. Now I watched things more closely. No sound was heard now, not even the spat-spatting of the feet of those who poled the barges. Everybody had fallen silent because the old woman was silent, sitting on the yellow stool, asleep, but with her black eyes wide open and staring.

We entered the canal . . . and for every foot we traveled after that my terror grew . . . for I looked back as we

approached the boathouse . . . to see the Summer Palace grow old before my eyes! The lights went out in all the buildings as we passed them. The buildings which had been burnished as though newly cleaned changed before my starting eyes. It was as though a scroll which had been unrolled in a twinkling—changing the Summer Palace from desolation to brilliance—were now being rolled up again, keeping pace with us as we entered and traversed the canal. For where the roofs had been clean and golden yellow, now there was dirt and dust between the tiles again, and weeds and grass grew in the dirt, and waved sadly in the night wind.

It was visible, this changing from new brilliance to old desolation. I saw it happen. Here was dirt and grass on rooftops. Just there, ahead of us as we traversed the canal, the roofs of the buildings were bright and golden . . . and then, at once, they were as old as the first part, dirty and covered with grass and weeds.

And the lights kept pace with us, too, extinguishing themselves by some strange necromancy as we advanced.

The barge of the old one entered the boathouse . . . and seemed to vanish.

Then we followed . . . and I rubbed my eyes when they became accustomed to the darkness . . . for the first barge . . . well, it had sunk by the head and its deck was awash!

As my barge moved into the ways it underwent a strange metamorphosis. A patch of shadow struck its prow . . . and a man who had been standing there was gone as though he had stepped into an impenetrable black cloud. The shadow moved toward me. It touched each, in turn, of the people on the barge . . .

and each person in his or her turn, disappeared.

Then the shadow struck me . . . and it was icy cold . . . and I could see all the inside of the boathouse . . . and it was exactly as it had been when I first found it.

There were no voices, no sounds, save the sleepy cooing of the doves up high under the black ceiling. I shivered, numbed, trying to figure it all out. When I thought I knew I . . . no, I didn't swim back across the Kun Ming . . . I ran at top speed through the silent, deserted Summer Palace, found the gate which gave on the world and fled away.

**A** LONG time later there were the morning papers, in Peking.

I read one story with amazement, and a shivering of terror. It ran, in part, as follows:

"Captain Lung Yan, commanding the guard at the Imperial Tombs called Hsi Ling, heard an explosion. It snapped him awake. He ran toward the sound, looking at his watch, which gave the hour as five minutes after midnight. To his horror he discovered that ghouls had blasted open the tomb of Her Majesty, Tzu Hsi, rifled it . . . and had even broken open her coffin and taken out her remains . . . and those of members of her family buried with her . . . to search for precious stones said to have been buried with her. In this respect, quite aside from the horror of the vandalism, the writer recalls a peculiar fancy Her Majesty had during life. She believed that after she died she would still rule over the Middle Kingdom. Superstitious Chinese will await the pleasure of the gods in fear and trembling. . . ."

