

THE MAGIC CARPET MAGAZINE




Registered in U. S. Patent Office.

Volume 4 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1934 Number 1

EVERY STORY COMPLETE—NO SERIALS!

Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Speed Planes for Moscow"</i>		
Speed Planes for Moscow	S. Gordon Gurwit	3
<i>Russia—a tale of the Five Year Plan and a romance surrounded with perils and death</i>		
The River of Perfumes	Warren Hastings Miller	18
<i>Indo-China—a fascinating tale of love, lust, and a wild adventure</i>		
Alleys of Darkness	Patrick Ervin	29
<i>Singapore—a story of Dennis Dorgan, hardest-fisted slugger in the merchant marine</i>		
The Shadow of the Vulture	Robert E. Howard	39
<i>Vienna—A stirring tale of Suleyman the Magnificent, Sultan of Turkey, when Christendom stood at bay</i>		
Five Merchants Who Met in a Tea-House	Frank Owen	65
<i>China—a fantasy about five men whose thoughts gave beauty to the wanton girl of their dreams</i>		
The Little Affair of the Eiffel Tower	Arthur Morris Crosby	71
<i>A tale of the Paris underworld—Henri the Fox scorned to use the gross means of hired assassins, but his methods were just as effective</i>		
Passport to the Desert	G. G. Pendarves	82
<i>Algeria—a story of intrigue involving an American girl and an Arab slave-dealer</i>		
The Spider Woman	Seabury Quinn	101
<i>Netherlands—a terrific adventure of Carlos the Tiger, and the Dutch-Spanish wars</i>		
Hindoo Student's Prayer	Katharine C. Turner	120
<i>Verse</i>		
The Souk		121
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		
The Mayor's Four Chins	James W. Bennett	123
<i>Java—a wily French adventuress pulls a fast one on a countryman of hers</i>		
Rivers	Hung Long Tom	128
<i>Verse</i>		

Published quarterly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter, September 8, 1930, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Indiana, under Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$1.00 a year in the United States, \$1.40 a year in Canada, \$1.20 in other countries. English office: Charles Lavall, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet St., E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRUGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1933, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company
COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



Five Merchants Who Met in a Tea-House

By FRANK OWEN

*A bizarre Chinese fantasy about five men whose thoughts gave beauty
to the wanton girl of their dreams*

THIS is the story of five merchants who met in a tea-house on the road to Canton. From various sections of China they had come, and their paths converged in the tea-house. They were not friends: they had never met until that auspicious occasion when

M. C.—5

they paused at the house of Lum Lee to sip of the beverage that makes all men brothers.

Ling Yoong, who came from Peiping, was a jade master, well known throughout all the provinces. Where jade was concerned his word was law, and not in-

frequently he was called in by wealthy Manchus, war lords, and even far-off Indian potentates, to appraise odd bits of jade and nephrite carvings. Few there were in all of China to compare with him in choosing jewels or women. Although he was an expert in all jewels, most of his attention was given to jade, for jade like women is endless in variety; no two specimens are alike, and like women it is alluring, pleasant to the touch and comforting.

On this particular day when he arrived at the tea-house he was in a most amiable mood. He was fat and bland and smiling. The world was good. That trip had been very satisfactory. He had picked up many gorgeous jewels and knickknacks which he was carrying to the lady of his heart, a collection of snuff-boxes that was worth a fortune; for Mai-da, the lady of his dreams, was an art connoisseur, a collector of antiques, rich porcelains and jewels. What Ling Yoong did not know was that Mai-da found it very remunerative to be a collector. Many of her gifts she kept and displayed to advantage, but not a few of her presents found their way into the hands of a shrewd shopkeeper who dwelt on Lantern Street.

Never had Ling Yoong come across so lovely a collection of snuff-boxes as he now was carrying with him: porcelain snuff-boxes of great age, boxes of lacquer, malachite, bamboo, snaky-crystal, coral, and aventurin. And he also was taking to her jade seals, beautiful pendants of cloisonné enamel and a complete tea-set of eggshell porcelain decorated with famille rose enamel. No wonder that Ling Yoong was very happy as he breathed the sweet aroma of the tea.

Dien Lee, the second merchant, was handsome, young and fabulously wealthy. His face was like the full moon and his

nose was almost flat against his face. He had inherited his rug, silk and tapestry business from his father. From his father too he had inherited his love of women and silk. For fine silks are as soft and fragrant as the body of a beloved woman. Dien Lee traveled miles on end to secure bits of silk and rich tapestries of which he had heard legendary stories. He joyed to strip girls nude and then clothe them in silks as fragile as moonbeam mist and as brilliant as the sun at dawn. And it almost seemed as though the silk and the skin of the beloved woman blended and became one; for the love of a man can bring out the beauty in a woman. It is almost as though from his love she draws a divine light that makes her body glow. Now Dien Lee was returning to Canton with silks from the far north, the softest silks he had ever beheld or touched. And with them he intended to drape the gorgeous body of his lady.

Chu Kai was a philosopher and a dreamer, older than either Ling Yoong or Dien Lee. All his life he had devoted to the study and care of chrysanthemums. From the daisy the Chinese developed this lushest of all flowers, and it was the ambition of Chu Kai to develop it into something even more beautiful.

It was his wish that some day he could imbue a chrysanthemum with a soul, a flower that would love, that would sway toward him as he approached, or lift up its head for his kiss, a flower that would tremble at his embrace even as did that lovely lady in Canton toward whose home he was hastening. And he was carrying a gift for her, the rarest gift in the floral world, a perfectly blue chrysanthemum, the only one of its kind in the world; not an ordinary blue, but blue like the velvet sky of night in which the soft stars sleep. Perhaps some day he would be able to

raise a chrysanthemum as beautiful as the lady of his dreams.

Chu Chen was a business man. He had spent his life in counting-houses, along the various wharves of China, and his thoughts were in the various warehouses of the world. He was a rice king. It was his boast that at one time one quarter of all the people of China existed on his rice; but Chu Chen was a past master at exaggeration. Nevertheless he was wealthy. He considered rice the very blood of China. It represented life. He cared more for it than anything else beneath the sun except the lovely lady in Canton, the lady who was all his and now waited for him in her Cantonese garden.

Voong Wo, the last of the merchants, dealt in tea. He was older and more complacent than any of the others. He liked to sip tea and think of the Canton lady of his dreams. She gladdened the pictures which he imagined existed in the perfume. Now he was hastening to her with a gift of tea that was as precious as jewels, tea from Ming Shan Mountain in Western Szechuan, the rarest of all known teas, cultivated by Buddhist priests. For tea is the soul of life.

Now the tea-house of Lum Lee was called "The Tea-House of the Jasmine Gate," and merchants from far and near liked to stop and sip of the flower-scented tea for which it was famous. Lum Lee was a Tea-Master. His father before him had been a Tea-Master. For generations the family of Lum Lee had been Masters of the most elusive of all beverages. And when Lum Lee poured tea he made a perfect ritual of it. It must be served in cups of finest china, so delicate that they might have been fashioned from the petals of a flower. To bring out the best that is in tea it must be handled with reverence. Never would he

serve customers when there were harsh noises filtering into the shop. For tea is sensitive. It can only give of its best when it is serene. Tea is liquid poetry. It is music. It is the soul of China.

Everyone who entered the tea-house talked in hushed whispers. No man was ever served unless he was dressed in suitable attire. Lum Lee kept extra suits which he loaned to those whom he wished to make his guests. And the windows of the tea-house opened upon a garden. Through the room floated the mingled perfumes of peach blossoms, wisteria and sandalwood. Tea-drinking is a religion. To the man who has faith, tea gives much: dreams, contentment, rest.

On this day the tea-house was deserted except for the five merchants who were strangers to each other. They sat at separate tables and sipped the amber beverage. And then they were no longer strangers, for the aroma of the tea rose from all their cups until it mingled with the perfume of the room. Lee Lum noticed that they were beginning to nod to one another. Impulsively he did something which had never before been done in the history of his house. He invited them all to sit about a common table, a round table which was the pivot of the room.

"Tea makes all men brothers," he said as they eagerly complied with their host's suggestion. While he withdrew to bring new cups, they conversed in whispers with one another.

"I am Ling Yoong," said the first. "I am a jewel merchant. I have been on a long journey. Now I am returning to the woman I love, who dwells in Canton."

"I am Dien Lee," said the second, "a merchant in tapestry and rare silks. I too am returning to Canton to the woman I love."

"I am Chu Kai," said the third, "a

flower merchant. I specialize in chrysanthemums. Like the others, I am returning to Canton to the home of the mistress whom I adore."

"I am Chu Chen," said the fourth, "a rice merchant, and strange though it may seem, I too am on a love mission to Canton. My girl is of a beauty that no painter could portray."

"I am Voong Wo," said the fifth and last of the merchants. "It is fitting that I should pause at this house, for I deal in tea, tea of a hundred different flavors and countless different blends. But no tea has a flavor sweeter than the lips of her whom I worship. I am even now en route to her house in Canton."

Now Lum Lee had returned with the new tea. He placed a cup before each of the merchants.

"In truth," mused Chu Kai, "it seems that we are in a manner brothers even though we have only met this hour. For each of us is being drawn to Canton by the vibrations of love. And now we have paused to sip tea together. And by drinking this tea we become even closer. It is an invisible tie binding us together."

Then in silence they sipped their tea, while the perfume of wisteria and roses floated in from the garden and the wind sighed softly through the treetops. And the aroma from each cup swirled upward until it formed a golden spiral, a staircase down which a beloved woman walked.

And each of the merchants beheld the tea-vision, the fragrant dream of loveliness. And each merchant recognized the woman as the girl whom he loved above all other women. And now slowly she began to dance. She cast aside her thin draperies until she danced nude on the table before them, a glorious golden girl, with glowing slender body. Fragrance of wisteria, fragrance of tea, fragrance of

the body of that golden girl. On and on she danced until the tea grew cool and the aroma lessened. Then the vision faded, melted into the air, dissolved into the perfumed atmosphere of the tea-house. Nor did any of the merchants at the table explain to the others what he had seen.

For a few moments in a lifetime these men were brothers, held together by the alchemy of tea.

Now they separated. They had little to say, for each was lost in dreams and purple fancies.

And each took the road to Canton which he preferred, the road that would take him most quickly to the house of his lady.

Two days later, the five merchants met again. This time they met before the gateway to the garden of Mai-da who was the favored one of Ling Voong, so naturally he was annoyed. Still he was a Chinaman and had learned to hide his true feelings behind a mask-like expression. But now there was no cordiality among the merchants. They lacked the tea of Lum Lee to make them brothers, to hold them together in a common bond. They gazed at each other askance, as one might peer at thieves. There was hatred in their eyes, whereas only a few days before there had been naught but dreams and brotherly love.

They hesitated awhile, each hoping that the others would depart. But as no such thing happened, at last reluctantly they passed through the Gate of Welcome like warriors returning from a lost battle. There was no lightness in their step. There was no friendliness. They were no longer brothers. They walked around the spirit screen, then into the spacious gardens of Mai-da, gardens in which were many Moon Bridges over a

running stream in which ducks and swans swam gracefully about. Among all the white beautiful birds there was one black swan. Each merchant noticed it and cursed. They imagined that it was an evil omen.

And now they beheld Mai-da coming down a flower path. Each merchant stepped forward. "Beloved!" he cried. But the ducks and swans were making such a clamor that she did not hear them. Nor did she even notice their approach. Her arms were held out to a young man who was just stepping out of a small boat at the tiny river's edge. The next moment she was in his arms.

The five merchants gazed upon the scene horrified. For of each merchant, Mai-da was the beloved woman, the woman whom he worshipped above all others. No wonder she was beautiful, magnificent to gaze upon, for each of the merchants had given of his best to her. She bloomed and became more gorgeous, fed on the worship of these men. The beauty of women is painted with love. The adoration of many people creates the soft tones and colors that bring out her perfection of grace and form.

Ling Yoong had always gazed upon her with eyes of enchantment. She was like a rare jewel. Her eyes sparkled like diamonds, her lips were rubies, her teeth were pearls, and her hands were pink coral. Now he saw her in the blackness of her duplicity. The fire died in her eyes, the glow of her lips faded, her teeth became less white, her hands lost their pink freshness. He was disenchanted. And he turned away.

Dien Lee had seen her body, silk-soft and glowing. He had loved to strip her nude that he might array her in fine silks. But now the silk-bloom had gone from her body. It would be sacrilege to array

her in these rare silks he had brought. Her body was ordinary. It was purchasable. It could be used by any man who could pay the price. His silks deserved a better mistress than Mai-da. And he turned away. For the first time his vision was clear. He could see her as she really was.

And Chu Kai the dreamer and philosopher gazed upon her sadly. He had always thought of her as a lovely poem. There was music in her voice. There was fragrance on her lips. But now the poetry was harsh. It lacked design. Gone was all rhythm and harmony. It held no allure for him. The music was stilled. Sadly he turned away.

Chu Chen had always loved the grace of Mai-da, the lovely manner in which she came toward him. She was like a dryad of the hills; her step was fairy magic, her laugh was music. But now he looked at her coldly. No longer did she have grace for him. When a woman shares her grace with all men it belongs to none. And Chu Chen turned away. Above all he was a business man. His business with Mai-da was done.

Then Voong Wo the tea merchant gazed upon her. Inasmuch as for years he had dealt in tea he was keenly sensitive to every change of mood. How he had loved to walk at night with Mai-da through the garden, his arm about her waist, his hand cupping the soft warm curve of her breast! And when she yielded to him he had imagined that something divine was happening to him. He was ennobled, transformed, transcended. Now he gazed at her with harsh eyes. There was really nothing extraordinary about her appearance. She was kissing the boatman in a rather vulgar manner. And Voong Wo, too, turned away.

Now once more the five merchants were on the road outside the garden of Mai-da's house.

"Let us return to the tea-house of Lum Lee," suggested Ling Yoong. "I feel as though I need the steadying influence of that divine beverage."

"A good idea," echoed Dien Lee.

"But," mused Chu Kai, "will the aroma of the tea be as sweet now that there is no beloved woman for us to dream about?"

"After all," declared Chu Chen, who was a clever, shrewd business man, "what is one woman more or less? Truly it has been well said by the old philosophers that to educate a woman is to educate a monkey. To this I wish to add that to love a woman seriously makes a man equally ape-like. Women are like melons, to be plucked and eaten when they are ripe. They should be enjoyed quickly ere they spoil, but if one proves to be tasteless or disappointing there are many more melons."

And Voong Wo, the fifth merchant, who had traded much in tea and therefore was steeped in its quaint philosophy, said, "After all, we haven't lost much. A single woman. Divided among the five of us there would hardly be enough for an evening's enjoyment. We have lost her. What matter? Better far had she been destroyed as a child. She had a mother and father who were too genial. Now on the credit side, what have we gained? Each of us has found four brothers. We five are held together by the spirit of the tea. I say as merchants we have all made a good bargain, one treacherous woman for four brothers."

And they continued onward together to the tea-house of Lum Lee.

Meanwhile in the garden of Mai-da's house, the remaining lover who had come by boat stood gazing at her, much perplexed. What had he ever seen in this girl?

There was no fire in her eyes. Her teeth were not pretty. Her form was not graceful. She walked in an ugly fashion. Her voice was harsh and no longer were her lips fragrant. He must have been drunk when he fell in love with this girl on the preceding night as his boat drifted down the river past her garden. Perhaps the moon had etherealized her form as she bathed nude at the river's edge. Under the moon the siren song she murmured had seemed sweetly plaintive. After all, he had enjoyed the nightly interlude. What matter that by day the girl was disappointing? And yet it was strange, she had seemed to be almost divine as she came walking down the path toward him. He must be growing prematurely old. He was no longer a good judge of women. As soon as he conveniently could, he made excuses and retired.

Mai-da did not mind his going, nor was she aware that five merchants had come to the garden and departed. She sighed softly. Perhaps Ling Yoong would soon be back with her. More jewels, more love. It was easy to put up with his embraces when he paid her so well.

She smiled complacently. Nor was she aware of the sorry condition into which her beauty had fallen. Each of the merchants had withdrawn the attributes of loveliness with which he had endowed her and naught but wreckage remained.

Although Mai-da did not know it, it was time for all her men to choose another melon.

