DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN AND MOON

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SCRIBNER

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Cantonese words are transcribed in a modified Yale Cantonese romanization system consistent with the era in which the novel takes place.

Chinese family names come before given names, except in the case of Doctor Tong, who followed the Western custom of putting his family name last.

Ah is an honorific often added to central and southern Chinese names that can appear at the front or end of a family or given name.

This story was inspired by real women:

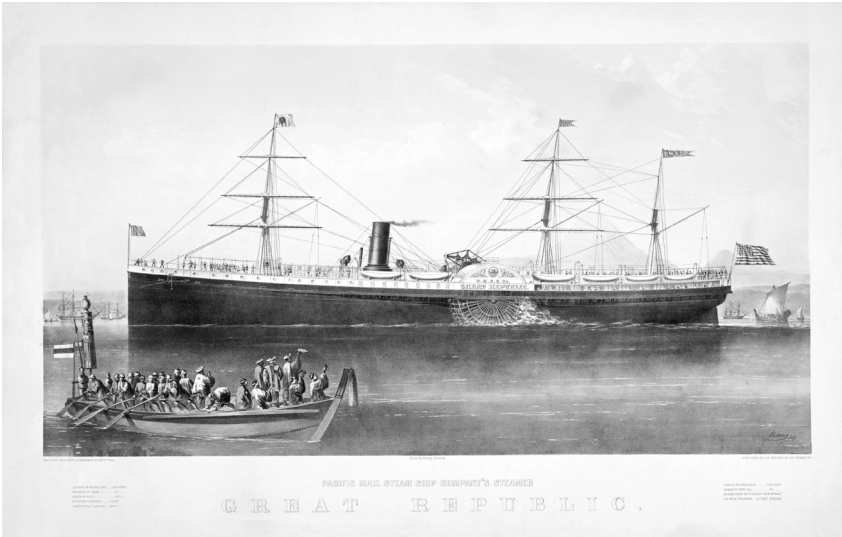
Moon—a doctor's wife, speaks in retrospect as an old woman
Petal—a peasant girl, tells her story as she lives it in the present
Dove—a young wife, seen in the present as an object but from afar

PART I

MAY 1–JULY 10, 1870
AND FROM 1926

Watch your thoughts; they become your words.

—LAO TZU



The Great Republic, *1870*

CHINESE POPULATION A CURSE TO THE COUNTRY: The waves of heathen Chinese arriving on California's shores seemingly have no end. The celestials come here seeking relief from upheavals in their country: the First Opium War, the Second Opium War, the Red Turban Rebellion, the Taiping Rebellion, and the bloody feuds between the Punti and Hakka peoples, which taken together have resulted in countless deaths and much suffering. Mother Nature has showed her displeasure by punishing the almond-eyed brethren with snow, typhoons, floods, and drought. Insect infestations and diseases have killed already struggling crops. As Christian people, we can pity these outcasts, but do they need to invade our land like vermin? They bring filth and disease. They eat squirrels and rats. They covet our women and take our jobs. Throughout the West the rallying cry has begun. The Chinese must go!

—*LOS ANGELES GAZETTE*, MAY 1870

YUT HO (DOVE)

A Girl Is Born Facing Out

The 1st to 28th day of the 4th lunar month
in the 9th year of the Tung Chee emperor's reign
(May 1–28, 1870)

The day Yut Ho turns seventeen, a matchmaker pays a visit to her family's apartment in Rice City—Kwangchow, or what the foreigners have named Canton. "*Marry a chicken, follow a chicken; marry a dog, follow a dog*," the matchmaker recites. "*A bamboo door should be paired with a bamboo door; a wooden door with a wooden door.*" She pauses to let the girl and her parents take in the aphorisms, then she focuses her hard eyes on the father. "Your daughter's complexion is as pale as that of the white peach. Her hair is as black as raven feathers. Her feet are perfect golden lilies, and I can see from the embroidered designs on her shoes that she's been well trained in womanly skills. I have heard from your neighbors that she possesses the Four Virtues—obedience, timidity, reticence, and adaptability." The matchmaker falls silent to allow the praise to soften the parents before her. Then, "She reminds me of one of the Four Great Beauties, of whom it is said each was so exquisite she could lay waste to cities and lands."

The father lifts his brows, interested at last. "Her given name is Yut Ho, but we have always called her Dove."

"*Ah*," the matchmaker says, rubbing her chin. "Let me guess. You were inspired by the Great Beauty Wang Chao-chun, who was so captivating that when birds glimpsed her, they forgot to flap their wings and fell from the sky. Very subtle to name your daughter for one of the birds rather than for Chao-chun, which can mean Fells-Geese, Drops-Birds, or—"

"Entices-Birds-to-Fall," the father finishes.

"All versions are too negative for such beauty," the matchmaker comments, "while many stories and traditions tell us that the dove is a symbol of faithfulness and filial duty."

The father chuckles, happy for the appreciation of his knowledge of literature, art, and the benefits of nuance when applied to naming.

"You have generations of imperial scholars in your family," the matchmaker goes on, with the father believing more compliments are coming. Instead, she frowns and thumps her thighs with her palms, signaling a change in tone. "While the men in your lineage have not distinguished themselves enough to have grand appointments or receive emoluments from the emperor, neither were they sent to the farthest reaches of the empire."

"Your point?" the girl's father asks, embarrassed. After all, why poke a stick into a skinny dog's ribs when he already knows he's hungry? Likewise, the matchmaker has no need to jab at the father's failings when the evidence is all around them. The apartment is passable but shabby. The family's clothes are made of silk that has frayed at the edges. The scholar's wife's face bears wrinkles caused by money worries, disappointment, and the physical exhaustion that comes from running a diminished household without help from servants.

"I could easily match Dove into another scholar's family—bamboo door to bamboo door," the matchmaker says. "But I have a different opportunity that will be financially more rewarding."

The father leans forward. "Go on."

The matchmaker presents her offer. "I am acting on behalf of a woman whose husband, a wealthy merchant, lives in Lo Sang—Los Angeles. She is a grass widow—a woman whose husband is gone for years at a time in the Flowery Flag Nation—America. As a good wife, she wishes to remain in China to take care of her in-laws and children, manage the household, and perform all rites to keep her husband's ancestors happy in the Afterworld. She's looking for someone young to become a second wife and provide her husband with amusements in the barbarian land."

The father's response is not what Dove expects. She thought he would proclaim that his daughter is too precious to become a mere

second wife and that she—like the grass widow in question—would always obey the rules of womanhood and therefore have no desire to adventure beyond her front gate. Instead of an outright no, however, he says, "My wife and I do not wish to be separated from our daughter by mountains and seas."

The matchmaker must have anticipated this reaction because she immediately recites, "*A boy is born facing in; a girl is born facing out*. From the moment your daughter breathed the air of this world, she belonged to her future husband's family. You have been raising Dove for her husband and his clan. Even after she travels to the Afterworld, she will belong to them. This is a daughter's destiny." She pauses. "Please consider what the Sing family is offering as the bride price before you reject the proposal." She withdraws from her sleeve a small scroll, which she unfurls. "Five bolts of brocade, eight bolts of silk, six catties of . . ."

The list goes on and on, ending with the true bride price of many taels of gold and what seems to Dove to be a large quantity of Mexican silver dollars—the most trusted currency in China. She had no idea she could be worth so much.

"I will consider the proposal," the father says, but Dove can tell from his tone that now he's pondering how quickly he can receive the bride price, how it will change his life, how much he will need to spend on her dowry, and if he might be able to negotiate an even better deal.

The next day, a geomancer is brought in to study the genealogies of the two families going back three generations. Dove was born in the Year of the Water Ox, so she is supposed to carry within her the qualities of that creature—patience, endurance, and practicality. The girl's father is honest with the geomancer. "My daughter is the opposite in all respects." To which the geomancer replies, "Good! An older man will prefer the liveliness and impetuousness of a young girl, because these characteristics will be ignited in him as well." Dove learns that her future husband was born in the Year of the Horse. The geomancer does not reveal under which influence—metal, water, wood, fire, or earth—so Dove is unable to determine his age. She tries to guess, though. Since he's already married and has given his wife six children, he could be thirty-six. She imagines this businessman—handsome, important,

shrewdly navigating the waters. That he is a little more than twice her age seems a blessing. He will be kind, respectful, and appreciative. "An Ox and a Horse aren't the most compatible match, but it is firmly in the second tier," the geomancer admits. "We can acknowledge that both are good workers and have a mutual need for security." Dove is dexterous at embroidery, and she's been known to complete an inch of design on slippery silk a day. Beyond this one skill, no one has labeled Dove a good worker before, but neither her mother nor her father corrects the geomancer.

One month later, the marriage contract is completed. Among the final details is that Dove's brother, Ah Guey, will accompany her as far as Big City—San Francisco—where he will take a job working for a benevolent association. In this way, Ah Guey will escape the humiliation of his father's failures, learn a trade, establish a foothold in the Flowery Flag Nation, and eventually start a new enterprise that will stretch between two distant shores, with his father as his partner. This, despite the aphorism that says *While father and mother are alive, a good son does not wander far afield*. But as the matchmaker notes several times, sending the family's son and daughter to the Flowery Flag Nation could pave the way to riches. In San Francisco, Dove will be met by a man named Sam Yuen. He will escort her to Los Angeles and deliver her to her husband.

Almost immediately the father conveys to the Sing household the girl's dowry: a marriage bed, two chairs, and a table—all purchased at pawnshops—as well as two porcelain basins, a pewter spittoon, and a jewelry box filled with enough trinkets of gold, jade, and kingfisher feathers to not be embarrassing. Shortly thereafter, Dove goes to live with her husband's first wife and children so she might learn from them his likes and dislikes and all the best ways to please him.

"Our husband, Old Man Sing, can fall into a foul temper if he doesn't eat at regular times," Wife One instructs. "He likes to rise early so he can take a stroll before work. He enjoys fine things—of which you will be one. Unlike most men, who prefer to keep their treasures hidden and protected from potential thieves, he likes to display what he owns as a way of proving to others the extent of his success and business perspicacity."

Dove tries to mesh these attributes with what she knows from the two men with whom she has spent time. Her brother can be sharp, but is that because he's always been hungry for a better life? She cannot imagine her father taking a stroll. He prefers to stay inside and read *The Book of Odes*. Wife One refers to their husband as Old Man Sing. Dove assumes this is a term of both endearment and respect. As for showing off fine things, Dove's family doesn't own anything of value apart from her, and now she's being sent abroad.

Wife One focuses her most important lessons on what their husband enjoys during what the poets have long called "clouds and rain," inspired by the nocturnal encounter between a traveling king and a mountain goddess. This is both embarrassing and intriguing to the young girl. When Dove imagines what that couple did and what she will now need to do with her husband, warmth creeps into her woman parts. She also reflects on other love stories between beautiful maidens and handsome men that her mother, father, and brother have told her over the years. Surely her marriage will have the same deep connections that cross time, space, and challenges—both earthly and heavenly—that have fed her dreams since childhood.

Then, too quickly, it is time for her to leave China. All her large dowry items remain with Wife One, but Dove is allowed to take her wedding jewelry. Her mother, weeping, says goodbye in the apartment. Her father accompanies his two children to the dock. Dove and Ah Guey perform obeisance, bowing deeply to their father. Then Ah Guey helps his bound-footed sister across a gangplank and onto a ferry that will take them to Hong Kong, where they will stay for a few days before boarding a steamship to carry them across the Pacific Ocean.