

FRAGRANT WORM.

Tell you something about Chinese women? Well, I don't know an awful lot, and I'd hardly know where to start. Yes, they do look shy, and sweet, and docile, I'll admit; and they can be all of that. But you ought to hear the old ones rave and scream and curse heaven and earth when they're riled—or the young ones, for that matter.

Fall in love? Why, certainly—in their own way, of course. As a matter of fact they're just like other women, as far as I've seen, only more so—if you get what I mean. I mean to say they show it more, if that's clear. It's hard to explain. Maybe it's because they're plainer-spoken about some things—so plain-spoken sometimes it makes you jump.

I never knew but one at all, and perhaps she wasn't a fair sample; for she was an unusual girl, certainly. That was the Fragrant Worm that I've often talked about. No? I thought everybody had heard that story. Well, then, I must tell you about the Fragrant Worm.

It was up in Shansi that I ran across her, at a little stall of an inn, with a food stall and tables outside, on a mountain road. It was the year of the last bad flood in the Fen Valley. That was nine or ten years ago. Ten it was for it was the spring before I was married. Anyway, the roads were jammed with flood refugees moving northwards toward Taiyuan, like the beggars in the old rhyme—"some in rags, and some in tags, and some in velvet gowns."

A district magistrate had started a cotton mill up there and he had an idea that he wanted to buy oil from us in bulk. I had been up to help the agent, but the contract when the flood raged both mill and magistrate. I was returning to the railroad at Taiyuan in a chair cart when we stopped at this inn to feed the mules; and I sat out at a roadside table to drink tea, one of a dozen or so doing the same.

While I sat there a refugee family came along, with the household goods and the lady of the presumably missing house balancing each other on opposite sides of a high-wheeled barrow. Paterfamilias was pushing it, and behind him shuffled a rather pretty young girl with big liquid eyes who looked very tired or very sore with destiny.

The barrow was set down for a rest almost in front of me, and the man, a tall, gaunt fellow with an aquiline, red-Indian profile and hollow eyes, began to negotiate a small food purchase. Then he noticed me and dropped his haggling over fractions of a cent to dive into the grimy bundle on his barrow and bring forth a very nice little dark red jar of the sort that we call ginger jars.

"There, foreign excellency," said he, "is something that you will want. Look at the stamp on the bottom. It's Ming. I know it's real, because it has been in our house for three hundred years. It's all I saved that's worth anything when the water calamity came. What will you give for it?"

"I'm not buying," said I. "In the first place, I don't understand the values of antiques, so I never buy them. Then if it is, as you say, a family treasure I don't think you ought to sell it."

The fellow stared at me as though he pitied my stupidity. "You speak our language, excellency," said he, "but you don't know our country, for you don't understand the position I'm in. How am I to walk the roads without food?"

"Unless I have money? Perhaps it's otherwise in your esteemed country, but this is China. At a price I must sell anything that men will buy—my right hand, or an eye, if there's a price for it."

"The old woman?" asked a hard-faced muleteer in jest, pointing to the bedraggled and woebegone creature on the barrow, for which he was rewarded by the butt of the joke with a husband's lip curled, and with a short laugh he said, "I hear no offer, so I'll quote no price."

"What about the skinny wench, then?" asked a fat-faced Tientsin man in the greasy suds of a petty merchant. "Is she for sale?"

The surly look disappeared and the girl's eye widened as she stared in unblinking appraisal at the brutal fat face of the merchant. "To know that she would not starve but would be well cared for—certainly," said the father with something like cold dignity. "What will you give?"

"Ten dollars," snapped the greasy one. "It's too little," said the father wearily. "I can't bargain on such a bid."

but a whipping now and then will improve her." "I'll give fifteen dollars, and that's the last word!" shouted the greasy one. "Twenty," said I on an angry impulse. "Twenty-five," snapped the merchant, scowling at me.

The father's hungry eyes moved swiftly from one to the other of us. He searched my face appealingly. "Thirty," said I. "Befuddled fool!" exclaimed the greasy one, as he rose red-faced to waddle away; but he turned suddenly and addressed the crowd.

"Isn't this a disgrace to our China?" he demanded. "What honor or have we left when a yellow-headed savage can buy our Chinese flesh and blood?"

"She's not an infant," the parent interrupted. "She's sixteen, and she'll serve you faithfully. Why not a Chinese wife while you're in China? When you return to your country you can leave her a little money or give her to a friend."

The girl's liquid eyes were fixed upon my face. "Now see here!" I shouted irritably, feeling that I was somehow being enmeshed. "I tell you that I don't want her, sixteen or sixty. She looks about eleven to me. I'm going to give you thirty dollars to write me a pledge that you will keep the girl until you've settled down, where and can find her a husband. I'm a fool. It's throwing thirty dollars away, but, anyway, that pig-faced dealer in women doesn't get her. Draft me a document saying the girl is mine but that she is to remain with you until she marries. Here's ten dollars as bargain money."

The rest I'll pay you if you bring the paper to the Fu Tai Inn at Taiyuan tonight or tomorrow morning."

And with that I got up and stalked away, angry with myself for squandering the money when I'd probably never see the man again, and thoroughly disgusted with his cold-blooded attitude toward the sale of his child. I got in a still worse humor when I had rumbled away in my cart, for it then dawned on me that the Tientsin merchant would probably reappear and buy the girl while the assembled loafers had a good laugh at the mad foreigner.

In this I was wronged the father, however, for he was at the Fu Tai Inn the following morning long before I was up, and with him, somehow looking a little neater and certainly not so sullen, was the big-eyed "bit of merchandise." He left her in the corridor when I took him into my room, which was a relief, for the unblinking stare was getting on my nerves.

From his bosom he produced a great sheet of writing on flimsy paper, but this he retained while he launched into a protest against having to keep the girl. Had it not dawned on me, he wanted to know, that after she became my property he was entitled to payment for her keep over what might be a long period? The Liu family was an ancient and respected one. His daughter could not be given in marriage to just anyone. So it might be years before he found her a suitable husband, because men of standing do not marry paupers.

In the end I held the document and he departed with fervent expressions of gratitude and esteem; and also with fifty dollars in good silver.

For an hour perhaps, after he had gone, I sat in my room, checking over a stack of invoices that our Tientsin agent had brought me the night before. I then donned my hat to go to the agency for a conference; but when I threw open the door and stepped briskly out, with what should I collide in the corridor but the aforesaid small bit of merchandise, meeting my astonished eyes with the aforesaid unblinking stare.

My exclamations were in English, but I got around in time to Chinese. "What are you doing here? What do you want?" I shouted. "My father sent me back here," she replied in a small, meek voice. "He ordered me to stay and serve the foreign excellency. You have paid him money; he has given me to you; I am yours."

"But where is this father of yours?" I demanded. "Gone," said she, in the same small voice. "Where, I don't know." I did more exclaiming in English before I ordered her into the room and closed the door on the gathering throng of inn underlings. "But he promised to keep you until you were married," I then expostulated.

"He thought I'd be better off in the foreign excellency's hands. Besides, it's not in the document," she hastened to say in a more assured voice. And she was right. I had not tried to read the thing; but now, while she stood at ease by the table, I sat down and plowed painfully through it.

The whole long rigmarole did no more than acknowledge payment for one female person, surnamed Liu, with the "small name" of Hsiang Ch'ung—meaning Fragrant Worm, or Sweet Bug, or Scented Insect as you like—for whose future I was responsible.

"Hsiang Ch'ung," I repeated, as I tossed the paper aside. "But that's only a baby name, a pet name. What is your real name?" "I've been given no other," said she, and then added coyly, dropping her eyes for the first time in my experience: "If I had a proper name, I couldn't tell you. According to our customs, it is wrong for a bride to tell her man her girlhood name."

The master will perhaps give me a foreign name. I shall like that. I began. "You heard me yesterday when I said that I could not take care of a girl. What do you suppose I am going to do with a half-grown girl in Peking, where I live alone with five servants, all men? And right now, what could I do with you here? Where can I put you to sleep?"

The large eyes left my face to wander over my shoulder to the broad bed on which my blankets were still spread, where they rested with approval. "That's not a small bed," said she wistfully. "In your country isn't it the custom for man and wife to sleep together?"

"I'll tell you now, and I don't want to have to tell you again," I cried. "That I have not bought you as a wife. We foreigners don't marry children. I'm nearly old enough to be your father and you're not as big as one of our girls at eleven or twelve. If I wanted to marry I'd marry a grown woman. Talk no more nonsense."

Her head dropped at this and she turned half away, but I saw that her eyes were filling with tears. I made some angry exclamation and raised her wet face and whispered: "Please, foreign excellency, don't reject me because I'm small and thin. Don't turn me out. Let me be your servant until I grow bigger. Let me have just a little food and I'll grow quickly and get fat."

"Gosh!" said I, as I grabbed a hand towel to wipe away the tears, and a layer of grime with them, and that ended it.

The initial assumptions of my house "boy" and the other servants were as irritating as the Sweet Insect's own aspirations and the Tientsin agent's advice; but by dint of much violent language I had my view of the situation accepted, and the girl was installed in a small vacant room across a court from my quarters and far removed from the servants. Clothes were purchased, bathing was enjoined, vermin were expelled, hair oil was tabooed, and the girl was inducted into the elementary mysteries of a foreign household.

As soon as my accumulated work permitted, I began to look about for a school—the easy solution that I had had in the back of my mind all along. I encountered snags at once. Sweet Worm knew about three characters of her written language. Her place was in the infant class, but she was sixteen and all but mature, so no school had a place for her. Besides, it was late spring, the end of a term, and all schools were closing. Nothing could be done until fall, so the only thing to do was to keep the youngster busy and tackle the problem again in the autumn.

I broke the news to her that she was to be useful, and she received it with glee. The "boy" was her mentor. He was a kindly, patient grandfather of fifty-odd and he humored her by allotting her tasks that had to do with me—my room, my clothes, and my meals—so she was an apt pupil.

Fragrant Worm swept and dusted my room, pressed my clothes, and waited at the table; and she did it all with an intelligence and an eagerness that were major items in my interest in her. In two months she was major-domo and the boy's nose was out of joint. She elected herself warden of my petty cash and began to thwart the staff in a score of age-old perquisites.

The food bill fell to an absurdly low figure, the laundry bill was halved, a superfluous coolie disappeared, and an unheard of credit came into her accounts—an appreciable return upon the sale of bottles, empty cans, old clothes, and the like.

With this perfect service and devotion went a manner toward me that was coy, shy, and sweetly docile. I was much too simply minded to see omens of trouble in any of these developments. I was just fatuously pleased. I did not even notice that, in keeping with her promise, the young woman was filling out and blooming on unlimited good food. Once or twice she got out to explore the town and made an intensive study of the foreign women she saw.

"Please, excellency, look," she said, holding me up one afternoon in the court; "these clothes are now too tight."

I looked and saw that she was indeed bulging. "True," said I. "You'd better get some new ones. How much do you want?"

She named a very modest sum, and a day or so later when I came home for lunch I fairly tottered at the vision that presented itself in the dining-room doorway.

"Why, sweet Worm," I exclaimed, "you've made yourself positively beautiful!"

She reddened and the large eyes filled and glittered with pleasure. She had had her hair bobbed and fluffed up somehow, and the new clothes were on the lines of the Chinese schoolgirl costume—a white linen jacket, a pale blue wash skirt, and white cotton stockings.

I patted her shoulders as I passed her, which was a mistake, I suppose, for she looked up at me with the pleading look in her eyes that I've often seen in a dog's, and she whispered huskily, "Excellency, I've grown more than half an inch."

I had sense enough to take alarm at this and I became very gruff and distant for a time. "Excellency, I've grown more than half an inch," she said. "I had sense enough to take alarm at this and I became very gruff and distant for a time. I could not keep to myself, of course. I could not have done it if I had wanted to, for I

often had guests in for meals and I there was no hiding the Fragrant Worm. Indeed, I made a point of telling everyone about her from the start, and one of the persons who got the fullest reports of the Bug's quaint doings and sayings was Molly.

We weren't actually engaged then, but we were working up to it pretty fast, so I wanted no misunderstanding stories of the way the Fragrant Bug looked out for my cash; and she often said, "The poor child!" when I told her how she was trying to improve her clothes and appearance, and how she went about town studying foreign women.

She never showed any irritation but once, and that was when I suggested that her father—his professor of physics in the university, you know—might help me get the girl into a school in the fall.

"Bosh!" she cried explosively. "Piffle! School? Really, William Jones, you're not the ingenious boy you're sometimes thought to be. Children go to school to prepare for life. Are you too blind to see that young lady's whole trouble is that she's overprepared? School! Honestly—but what's the use?"

It was shortly after that I gave the party. Bachelors eat around a lot in Peking, and they have to give a few dinners every year to make it look as though they were trying to square things. I planned to give a dinner at home and then take the mob to one of the hotels to dance. I think there were eighteen invited, Molly's father and mother were to get there in their roadster, but I was to go for Molly—early, so that we could be back before the others got to the house and she could have a look at the table and put her O.K. on it.

It was on the way up that night that the question of marriage arose, and we stopped for what seemed a few minutes in a dark place under the Italian Legation wall to reach an agreement and clinch it, as you might say.

When we got to the house all the others had, of course, arrived and the boy and the Fragrant Worm were doing out cocktails. Molly slipped into the dining room to have a look at the table.

Then I found an excuse for slipping after her. I caught her just around the corner, and I was tightening my hold and silencing protests in the only effectual way when who should barge in, coming from the living room with a tray full of empty glasses, but the Sweet Bug. She stopped dead in the open doorway, in full view of the whole company, from whom Molly and I were concealed, stared at us a second, and then tossed the tray, glasses and all, on to the neatly set table and bolted through into the kitchen with a wail that made my back hair rise. Almost instantly the boy appeared with a frightened look on his face.

"Where did she go?" I demanded. "Across the court to her room," he said. Molly gave me a vigorous shove. "Quick!" she cried tensely. "Where?" I asked stupidly. "After her, of course!" she snapped. "You know the Chinese."

I got the idea and charged past the boy, through the kitchen into the court; but he and Molly were close on my heels. The girl's door was bolted on the inside and she had pushed a table against it, but Chinese doors are flimsy and we fairly pulled it to pieces.

We were just in time. She had looped a rope over one of the low beams and tied the end around her neck. As I rushed forward she kicked the chair away, but I caught her before the rope was taut. There was some screaming and kicking and the boy undid the knot.

"Now get out and leave me with her," ordered Molly, with a determined tilt to her jaw. "Tell them that she was taken suddenly ill."

I went back to find the guests standing about, looking perplexed and uncomfortable; but I got them settled again, and in a very few minutes Molly, to my surprise, reappeared, looking wise and serene, and we went in to dinner. To my still greater surprise the Sweet Bug herself turned up with the soup, a little pale and red-eyed. The women murmured their sympathy and those who could speak some Chinese asked her how she felt. She replied that it was nothing. "Just a sudden sharp pain in the nether belly," she explained glibly.

"How did you do it, darling?" I asked Molly a couple of hours later when I was driving her to the hotel for the dance. "And such quick work, too?"

"I'm surprised that you don't first want to know what was wrong with her," she declared. "Do you mean I meant to be a cynical laugh. I'm glad you don't pretend to be that dumb, anyway. But you still can't guess how I got her quiet."

"What?" I asked in alarm. "Another man," she replied coolly. "Who?" I demanded. "That isn't settled yet," she replied; "but to go to a foreigner; falling that, a general, or a banker, or—and quite rightly, too—that you owe her nothing less, since you don't want her yourself and since you took it upon yourself to transport her from one mode of life into another. You owe her—"

"I owe her?" I explained. "I like that! Is that the way all women reason? What would have become of her if I hadn't picked her up and brought her here? She'd have had a hideous life."

"Of course she would," said Molly in a tone that meant that she was condescending to reason with the child mind; "but that would have been simply her fate, so now you're responsible for the fulfillment of it at the new pace you've set for her. That's her argument, and I must say that I think she's right."

ly covers this, so your Fragrant Worm now becomes the white woman's burden."

And forget it I did. It was three o'clock when I rolled home. Some time in the early morning I heard voices and a little bustle in the courtyard, but I rolled over and slept again. It was after nine when I got around to breakfast, and I was about to ask the boy, who served the meal for the first time in many weeks, what the Fragrant Worm was doing, when the telephone rang. It was Molly. We made plans for the afternoon, and then she said:

"I rang up earlier than I should have, after such a late night, because I was afraid you'd miss Hsiang Ch'ung and be worried. I wanted you to know that she's here with me, bag and baggage. She's going to stay here for a while, too. My plans for her? Never mind about that. You bungled your responsibility and it's mine now."

We were married late in October, and the worst of the commotion was over when Molly got me away from the crowd to have a look at the wedding presents, which everyone had seen but me. By all odds the showiest thing of the lot was a huge old French clock of the kind that mandarins used to buy from the early Canton traders to present at court, with pounds of gold and jewels all over it. Propped against it was the card of General Shang Tuelang, the bandit adventurer who had then lately made himself satrap of the Suiyuan district and the Mongol frontier.

"Why, Molly, how does this high-binder happen to be favoring us?" I asked. "This looks like palace loot and it's worth a small fortune."

"Oh, he's an old friend of the family," she said lightly. "Fifteen years ago papa happened to encounter him when his head was badly lacerated and hid him away. He functioned as our house coolie for ten months when I was a little girl and then got back to his gang and so on. He's always trying to do us favors. He did me one not so long ago, though he thinks I did him one. Then, his wife happens to be a friend of mine."

"Which one?" I asked. "Number one or number ten?" "To be exact she's number four and the latest," Molly replied with a mysterious half smile, "and the one who rules the whole roost, I'm told. You'll see her by and by and understand why." And so I did.

At the bag-end of the reception I saw a big car roll up outside, with six uniformed ruffians on the running board, loaded down with cartridge belts and Mauser pistols, and out of that bus got a stalwart Chinese potentate in gorgeous satins, and a little woman. She wore a sable coat and diamond pendants dangled from her ears. I heard some one say that they were General Shang and his wife, but I was called away just then and didn't see their entrance. Their arrival had completely out of my mind, in fact, and I was rummaging for a cigarette for a smokeless guest, when a light hand fell on my arm and a familiar voice said in Chinese, "Excellency, I have a word to say to you."

I swung around and found myself facing the burly general, standing at attention and displaying fine teeth in a genial smile. Between us was the little person of the big diamond pendants. I believe I staggered and that she clutched my arm to steady me, for I found myself looking into the still liquid but now very merry and self-assured eyes of the Fragrant Worm. I mumbled some kind of feeble response to the very correct felicitations that the amiable big brute was voicing, and was then eaten up with impatience to separate her from him for a moment and put some questions. I thought of the wedding presents and piloted them together. Then, while he was engrossed in passing what I suppose was a bandit's expert judgment on the loot, I got her a little aside.

"Are you happy? Do you love him, Sweet Bug?" I asked in a whisper. She laughed shortly at a question which no Chinese would have asked, and then pretended indignation.

"What sort of talk is this?" she demanded. "Where are your manners? Of course I love him! Didn't I tell you he was my man, and isn't it the ancient rule in China for a woman to love her man? But honestly, she went on in a softer whisper, "my fate is ruled by good stars, not to mention good friends. He's really a splendid fellow. He's just like you foreigners, excellency, only better. He can laugh at everything as you do, even himself."

"He's not afraid. He's fierce. When he wants something he goes after it in a straight line, just like you, people."

"But with women, excellency, he's different. He's not so soft and stupid." —By Rodney Gilbert from Liberty.

"The Mountain Times," bearing the caption "Special Prosperity Edition," has been revived at Howard with E. F. Sheetz as editor and publisher and L. F. Sheetz, associate editor and advertising solicitor. The paper came out last Friday, an eight page six column sheet, and contains a number of articles tending to prove that prosperity is on the way, but we are of the opinion that the publishers will have a hard time convincing the man who hasn't a cent in his pocket and no job in sight that such is the case.

The Detroit News, in its rotogravure section of Sunday, March 1st, contained a large picture of E. Lloyd Tyson, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Tyson, of Tyrone, and well known by many Centre county people, who has attained considerable fame as broadcaster from radio station WWJ, in Detroit.

—We do your job work right.

FARM NOTES. —Asparagus seed germinates very slowly. It is usually two to six weeks from time of planting until the plants appear above the ground. As a result it is often difficult to control weeds. For this reason and also because there is quite a variation in the young crowns it is advisable to sow the seed in a small plot and transplant the crowns when one year old into the permanent location. The seed bed should be worked early in the spring to germinate as many weed seeds as possible. These will be killed in the final preparation of the plot for seeding. Asparagus germinates very slowly at 68 degrees.

—Do not fail to take good care of your rhubarb plants all season as well as in the spring when you are making use of the tender stems for sauces and pies. After the first few cuttings of rhubarb stems, many gardeners neglect this crop until the following spring.

Harvest of the rhubarb crop should be completed in from six to eight weeks' time. After this period has passed, allow the leaves to remain.

Stir the earth around the plants at least once a week in order that the weeds may be controlled, and that the leaves may store plenty of plant food in the roots without weed competition. By so doing, the plants are aided in producing a large crop of tender stems the next year. Keep the seed stalks broken off all summer. If these are allowed to develop, the plants food will go to seed production rather than into the roots where it is desired.

Disgusted with the number of punctures he was having, Ted Miller, of Portland, Oregon, rigged an apparatus on his car that picked up nails and sharp bits of metal before they damaged his rubber. Electromagnets were attached on either side of the front bumper and connected with the car's generator. He found that when traveling at a speed of twenty-five miles an hour the magnets picked up objects as large as nails from the car's path. As soon as the motor was stopped the metal particles would fall off.

Green feeds must be provided for the laying hens. During the summer months it is a comparatively easy matter to furnish succulent feeds from the fields. During the winter greens must also be provided; hence artificial methods of producing greens must be used.

Sprouting oats affords an easy method of providing green feeds to poultry. Mechanical oat sprouters have been developed.

—Do not reduce grain feed for cows in the flush of production even though prices paid for milk may be lower. It is better to weed out the poor cows in the herd and continue to feed the good ones up to production. This practice reduces milk costs.

—Use the best fertilizer for your garden soil. For light soils with little manure, use a 4-8-4 mixture; on heavier soils with plenty of manure, apply a 4-12-4, and for unusually fertile soils with abundant manure, use superphosphate. For one-quarter of an acre, or about 100 by 100 feet, apply about 300 pounds.

—If you order trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials early from a reliable nurseryman, you can specify date of delivery. Then the shipment will arrive exactly when you want to take care of the materials.

—Early hatching of chicks and proper handling of the pullets will bring them into laying condition next fall during the months of high priced eggs, say poultrymen of the Pennsylvania State College.

—Litters farrowed between January 1 and June 30 can be nominated for the 1931 Keystone Ton Litter Club. See your county agent about the arrangements. Ton litter methods aid in producing pork economically.

—Efficient potato growers have found it helpful to have a sufficient supply of lime and blue stone on hand before the spraying season opens. Plan to have a surplus instead of a shortage.

—Nearly all the forest tree seedlings grown in the State nurseries have been allotted, according to Penn State foresters. The late applications for some species, including Scotch pine and Norway spruce, will be held over until the spring of 1932. There still is a small supply of white pine, red pine, pitch pine, and black locust.

—Raise calves from only the very best cows. It is better to veal all calves unless their blood inheritance makes it possible for them to develop into good cows.

—Dig large holes for plant material. It is a common practice to make the holes one foot wider and deeper than the roots of the material to be planted.

—Avoid trouble by carefully regulating the temperature and moisture conditions for early plants. Water only on clear days and in the morning. Too frequent, light applications of water cause damping off. Extremely high or low temperatures are dangerous.

—Come to the Watchman office for your printing jobs.