

## CHAPTER ONE

San Francisco  
October, 1893

For an hour, Lily Wang listened to Maggie Andrews' mystical rendition of Chopin's etudes. Her teacher, the famous Leander Sherman, showered Maggie with compliments for her deft mastery of rubato, her left hand keeping accurate time while her right hand teased dreamy rhythms out of the melody. After Sherman suddenly hurried away to another engagement, the two women moved to their favorite cozy nook, a tiny, second-floor room that looked down on the two-story parlor of Sherman House on Green Street. The time had come for Lily to dissect the tumults of Maggie's heart.

"Are you in love with him?" Lily Wang poured mild Soochow tea into both cups, then scrutinized Maggie's face for evidence of apprehension.

"I don't know." Frowning with confusion, Maggie used the soft four-toned rhythms of Mandarin, the language of the first twelve years of her life. "Since he loomed out of the fog last summer on that dreadful road to Carmel from Monterey, he's pursued me like... like a ghost."

"I thought you liked attention." Lily had barely tolerated Maggie's yearning for public acclaim during their teens together in Shanghai. To a well-educated young Chinese woman, to whom modest anonymity was the banner of feminine virtue, Maggie's behavior had seemed notorious. But Maggie's missionary father had always treated her like his first-born son. If she wanted his attention and respect, she had been forced to behave like a tom-boy.

Five inches short of six feet, Maggie wore a white, high-collared shirt-waist, maroon ankle-length skirt and black leather boots. She was a prototypical Mills College senior, almost ready to face the world, presumably as a pianist in Sherman's famous musical emporium. Thanks to his sponsorship and his success as an impresario, she had met several of the greatest performers of the age. Surely, after her coming graduation from Mills in June, 1894, her own stage career would be meteoric. Unfortunately for her sense of destiny, not to mention her peace of mind, she had recently met John Harrison. "You know me too well. I suppose you think I deserve all this discomfort."

“I would *never* wish discomfort for you, Maggie.” Lily wore a white poplin dress over an underskirt of green and white sateen. Under her high collar, she wore a lace choker. A straw skimmer with a green band around it added a few inches to her five foot-two inch height. Despite her diminutive size, she could focus the power of her whole being on anyone when it suited her. Now her eyes smoldered with luminous intensity as she gave her full attention to Maggie. “I think people generally get what they ask for -- if not what they deserve. Now, let’s look at the evidence. How often have you seen him?”

“Well..., after that first time in Carmel, I didn’t see him until school started again last month. You must remember? He tracked me down, insisted that I come out of class.” Maggie giggled at the memory. “He said he was a relative with urgent, sad news. I was embarrassed.”

“So he’s a liar and a dramatist. I don’t recall that you minded so much.”

“Maybe not; but now I can’t get him out of my mind.” Maggie shook her head and looked forlorn. “Oh, Lily, he’s so... vulnerable. I seem to want to take care of him. Is that love?”

“Perhaps; but that’s the wrong question. The issue is *should* you be in love with him? How often have you seen him since then?”

“Ten times, I suppose. Once, maybe twice every weekend.”

“He deserves no credit for that. Isn’t he a student at the new University of California at Berkeley? A walk to Mills College shouldn’t tire him much.”

“Are you kidding? He *never* gets tired. He thinks nothing of walking miles for fun. We’ve walked around piles of whalebones on the piers; we’ve walked around every mansion on Nob Hill; we’ve looked at every flower in Mister Lick’s conservatory in Golden Gate Park. My feet have been so sore that I envied the bathers at the Sutro baths.”

Lily frowned. She thought a man’s leisure interests spoke volumes about his sense of *decency*, an all-important goal that she believed to be under siege from the barbarism of American culture. “So how else did he entertain you?”

“We’ve laughed and cried at several of Mister Morosco’s melodramas at the Grand Opera House. He took me to see building preparations for next year’s Midwinter Exposition. And he’s dragged me to the kinetoscope parlor in the Chronicle building three times.”

“You actually *enjoyed* those peep shows?”

“Well....” Maggie suddenly felt defensive. “They’re a wonder, of course; but if it weren’t for the magic of the motion, I wouldn’t be very interested in wrestling or blacksmiths or trained bears.” For an instant, her mouth opened slightly and her eyes became misty. “He’s so muscular and tall; and those dark brown eyes...; I could just drown in them; and..... Oh *chih kuo ying chu!* (Fruit thrown at him *by women* would fill a coach) and....”

“I know he’s handsome,” Lily interrupted coldly. “As far as I’m concerned, that’s a strike against him. Most handsome men his age think the world is a theatrical production for their benefit. What about his family?” Lily still couldn’t understand the American passion for personal independence. In her view, too many young Americans translated the idea of liberty into license, a selfish search for personal satisfaction without regard to filial duties and obligations. She insisted that family must always come first.

“I know all about his family,” Maggie replied with enthusiasm. “Do you really want to hear the details?”

“Of course. Before your infatuation with that cowboy goes any further, we must examine his credentials.” For emphasis, she added in English, “Would you buy a poke from a pig?” In protest against Maggie’s misuse of Chinese aphorisms, *ch’eng-yu*, Lily massacred colloquial English, often deliberately.

Maggie rewarded Lily’s fractured slang with a delighted smile.

“Of course not,” Lily continued with triumphant logic. “We’re talking about your whole future, not just pokey pigs. Why should a dashing, irresponsible cowpoke...” Lily paused in mid-stride and asked, “Is that the same poke that pigs use? How does it relate to a slow-poke? What a miserable language...” then resumed. “Why should he be suitable for the exquisite daughter of Presbyterian missionaries? Also, remember Lin T’ai-chi’s prediction.”

The mere mention of Lin T’ai-chi chilled Maggie, whose sudden pallor evoked a glance of tender compassion from Lily. Both remembered their brief encounter in Shanghai with the famous Black Hat Tantric Buddhist lama in the spring of 1890. Lin’s mastery of *feng-shui* and the mysteries of *ch’i* had rewarded him with wealth, devoted followers and a vision of the harmonious relationship among God, nature and humanity. A week before their departure for San Francisco, Lin’s forecast had cast a pall over the trip.

“You are only seventeen, my beauty,” he had said to Maggie. “But you will soon spread your wings. You have only four years of childhood left before you take flight. Use those years like money in the bank. Near the end of that time, you will meet the father of your son, your *only* son. The father will bring you much grief. The son will be an eagle and the joy of your life.”

“Why will my husband bring me so much grief?” she had asked.

“Because he will lose control of the fire element in his nature. At first, the coals of his anger and passion will burn low. Then ambition will almost consume him and everyone around him.”

Resentfully, Maggie had stamped her foot. “Can’t my fate be averted? I’ve had *enough* grief from men!”

“Each of us has a destiny: spiritual lessons to be learned,” Lin had replied with calm tenderness. “For the sake of your son’s destiny, you may not deny your own, which will lead you into a world far beyond your imagination.”

Despite her pragmatic approach to life, Lily had no doubts about the accuracy of Lin’s predictions. Only by heeding his esoteric prescriptions could one hope to ease the burden of destiny. Lily had been stunned when Lin offered Maggie no such prescription. Now the least she could do was try to mitigate Maggie’s predestined anguish. At least if the devil were rich, it might be easier for her to bear suffering. “Is John Harrison likely to bring you so much grief? Now be good enough to help me find the answer.”

“Very well,” Maggie sighed. “I think his greatest loyalty is to his family and the family name.”

“That’s a good start,” murmured Lily.

“He comes from the James River Harrisons. He...”

“His people live on a river?”

“No, silly. The James River is a great river in Virginia. His first ancestor in America was a man named Richard Harrison. Three hundred years ago, he was the first mate of a ship, the *Bartholomew Gilberti*.”

Lily shook her head. She thought, *Worse and worse. Everyone knows that sailors are the dregs of humanity-- no roots, no past, no future, just their miserable existential lives aboard some dirty scow. What will I do with her?*

“Richard was the first white man to be killed by Indians on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.” Maggie felt strangely reassured by John’s roots. “In 1637 his son, Benjamin, received a royal grant of six hundred acres.”

“That’s promising,” said Lily. “Does your cowboy still own the land? Or do you plan to spend your life at sea, literally as well as figuratively?”

“Oh Lily! *Fu kwei fou yün!* (Wealth and position are like floating clouds). Weren’t we taught to renounce all worldly ambitions?”

“Don’t hurl *ch’eng-yu* at me!” Feeling personally responsible for Maggie’s fate, Lily tried to calm her nerves. “I have warned you repeatedly that our aphorisms are sloppy substitutes for thought. But you persist in memorizing them as if to validate your spurious Chinese identity.”

Maggie pouted. At the age of sixteen, after her parents were murdered by Boxers, she had joined Lily’s household as a sister. Hungry for family, she had cloaked herself with aphorisms, social customs and Confucian rules of relationships. Finally, to liberate her from her staged Chinese identity, Lily’s father had shipped them off to San Francisco for their college education. “I don’t care what you say. *Ch’eng-yu* are the distilled folk wisdom of China.”

“Nonsense!” Lily replied as she stood up and turned away to conceal her extreme irritation. Trembling slightly, her small fists clinched, she turned back to Maggie, sat down and lifted her teacup. “We expect such stupidity from our peasants and foreigners, especially Americans who have no culture and little heritage. You should know better; don’t lavish your jewels on a pig.”

“You mean ‘throw pearls before swine’,” Maggie corrected absently while she poured tea into Lily’s cup. “Why should I agree to your class-conscious prejudices? Who made you such an authority on your own culture?”

Lily gently grasped Maggie’s hands. “I may not know everything about China. But I understand *you* almost better than myself. You are much too tolerant and... indiscriminate. To you, the myth and whimsy of the Kitchen God are just as significant as the profound wisdom of Confucius.”

In a discussion like this one, Maggie always felt handicapped. Lily’s focus in college was philosophy. She had stuffed her brain full of pattern

sentences from Plato and Lao Tzu to Kant. “Don’t you think all those things are just diverse expressions of the Chinese soul?” Maggie asked.

“Perhaps.” Lily shook her head with impatience. She was normally amused by Maggie’s tangled anthropology. “The problem is that you fervently believe they *are* the culture of China. That’s like describing the noble heritage of my family by the color and thickness of the paint on our house in Shanghai.”

“I’m sorry, Lily.” Maggie knew better than to punctuate her ideas with aphorisms, especially around Lily, who could always see through her. She stared disconsolately out the window at a passing carriage. “You think I’m a failure as a Chinese woman?”

“*Hua she t’ien tzu.* (You’re a parody of a Chinese). You know a lot *about* China. But you’re *not* Chinese; and you never *will be*, no matter how hard you try.” Lily resolved to discipline her impatience with Maggie’s relentless caricature of China’s ineffable wisdom. “Be who and what you are, Maggie. Come out of your floating clouds and help me understand your problem.”

“Oh very well.... My cowboy, as you call him, no longer owns *Brandon*, their great estate in Virginia.”

“Why not? Did his family gamble it away?” Lily decided to throw obstacles in the way of Maggie’s liaison with her hot-headed young man.

“You must correct your thinking, Lily. John comes from an important family. Why, one of his ancestors, Robert Henry, was wagonmaster for General Nathaniel Greene, who commanded all American revolutionary troops in the South a hundred years ago.”

“A heritage of rebellion!” Lily could barely contain her dismay. If she were not a student of the *Yi Ching*, the Book of Changes, she would have despaired. But, like all Chinese, she knew that impoverished peasants could become emperors and vice versa. “I suppose his ancestors also fought for the South in your Civil War? Is that how they lost all their property?”

“John’s father, Nate... Nathaniel, *did* fight for the South.”

“Next you’ll tell me he was in the cavalry. They are always the worst--intrepid violators of women and the land, our two greatest treasures. It was only by Kuan Yin’s grace that my ancestors escaped from the harsh brutality of *our* famous cavalryman, Genghis Khan.”

“John’s father didn’t have to fight. He was well established in the cattle business here. Why, years before the war, he bought a great Carmel ranch called the Rancho Cañada de Segundo. He paid Lazar Soto five hundred dollars for four thousand acres.”

*Four thousand acres ?* Lily had some sense of the value of land now in the Carmel Valley; her father owned a house high on Jacks’ Peak in Monterey.

“In 1860, he bought the Portreo de San Carlos to bring his total ranch to nearly nine thousand acres.”

“So why did he leave such responsibilities to fight someone else’s war?” Lily was beginning to think the family might be afflicted with some genetic flaw. Was this a warrior family, all descended from the mythic Kuan Kung or, Heaven forbid, the evil Ts’ao Ts’ao?

“Out of his deep sense of loyalty to family, he went east and enlisted under a cavalry General named Jeb Stuart. He was in several great battles. Doesn’t that testify to the family’s sense of commitment?”

Lily considered the question. She searched her mental file for precedents from her personal guide to ethical behavior: *The Romances of the Three Kingdoms*. As a child, her education had started with tales of triumph and betrayal from that great epic. Like millions of her countrymen, in the book and in the operas that had flowed from its pages, she had discovered appropriate role-models for her own choices at periods of crisis. Grudgingly, she admitted, “A truly American family. So where is the father now that his son needs guidance?”

“The war ruined the family in Virginia and damaged Nate’s health. He died in his sleep four years ago.”

“And the mother?”

“She died one month after her husband.”

Lily nodded as if a great light had turned on in her mind. “So this cowboy is actually a great landowner whose roots lie deep in the history of the country. But why is his complexion so dark?”

“Lily, he met us at the end of a great cattle roundup after weeks in the sun.

“Does he have no breeding? I agree with your proverb, ‘Better unborn than unbred’. He should have a Mexican overseer for such hard work.”

“He *does* have an overseer: Ramon Cisneros. But Ramon could not guarantee the respect of over a hundred Mexican horsemen after his parents died. When he was only seventeen, John had to spend long days in the saddle.”

Lily’s expression softened. The fact of John’s wealth meant possible approval of the match. “He sounds like a man of the soil. I respect that. But do you?”

“Why?” The question caught Maggie by surprise. “Why shouldn’t I?”

Lily fixed her gaze on Maggie as if to read her very soul. “You are an impractical musician, Maggie. With your fascination with astrology and mythology, you think you need only change your perception to change the world. You....” Lily pursed her mouth in self-reproach for being so candid. “You’re an artist; you respect moral courage and scholarship. He’s certainly no scholar. He’s just a practical engineer whose life has taught him to value physical courage. I suspect he prefers order. You have always preferred the creative joys of a rich disorder. Half the time, your companions are spirits.”

What could Maggie say? She shook her head in silent protest.

“Don’t you dare shake your head in disagreement!” Lily exclaimed. “You’re like a beam of light, dancing through life on impulse and enthusiasm. You love dramatic surprises; you’ve designed your life to attract them, or create them. You see spiritual --no, *miraculous*--significance in your every chance meeting with a flower, an animal, even another human. You think nothing is accidental. You revel in ambiguity and whimsy. Does he?”

“No,” Maggie admitted dolefully. “He loves physics and mathematics and linkages and gears. Abstract ideas turn to stones in his mind.”

“And in his mouth, I dare say. Is he kind?”

“With me he is-- invariably. Anyone who loves horses and his vaqueros like John does *must* be the soul of kindness.”

Lily brooded. “How about music? Does he like your music?”

That question gave Maggie pause. Music was her life. She had learned to speak its language through hours of study and listening and practice. She had worked hard enough that she might become a fine concert pianist. Her voice, though yet untrained, could reach high-C. “I love anything by

Mozart and Beethoven and Chopin and Gabriel Faure's *Requiem* and Cesar Franck's *Symphony in D-minor* and Ravel's *Pavanne for A Dead Princess* and...."

"Enough! Everyone knows you're a hopeless romantic. What does he like?"

"Oh, Lily, he plays the guitar like an angel-- in the Spanish style with lots of fingering. And he sings beautifully: haunting Scottish and Irish ballads like *Shenandoah* and *Greensleeves* and *The Minstrel Boy* and...."

"Common trash for common people, I'm sure," Lily complained. "Frankly, you and John come from a different class. You're a middle class princess; he's a rich, working class peasant. You have almost nothing in common."

Maggie tossed her auburn hair petulantly. "What's your evidence?"

"Your own testimony. For God's sake, Maggie, look at the facts. Your life is theater and music. You love real opera; he loves Morosco's melodramas. You love the classics; he loves popular music...."

"I like popular, too," Maggie said defensively. "I just love that new Negro composer, Scott Joplin. Why, I play his rags all the time...."

Lily shook her head impatiently. "You must not delude yourself. Is there poetry in his soul?" Lily pleaded for something that might mitigate what seemed to be a confrontation destined for Maggie and John.

"I don't know. But he is the most *masculine* human I have ever met. Maybe that's why I like to... perform for him. He makes me feel... alive!"

Lily smiled. "And you are one of the most *feminine* humans I have ever met, despite your confusion about your power as a woman. In that sense, you *are* Chinese because you believe that relationships can solve all problems."

"That's true." Maggie frowned at an insight. "But I didn't have to learn that from the Chinese."

Lily nodded. "How does John approach problems?"

"Like an engineer, of course. Systems and procedures and...."

"...gears and linkages," Lily finished for her. "How do you feel about him?"

“*Kan ch'ai lieh huo* (dried firewood and a roaring fire)!” Maggie said with a sparkle in her eyes.

“Oh, Maggie, that’s pure lust! You know very well that will fade. With his cattle and his horses and land and money, his essence is the earth. He’s certainly a materialist.” Lily squinted her eyes as if to see a distant object. “And there’s something else in him. Hidden. Something... threatening beneath his lost little boy vulnerability.”

“You don’t think he cares for me?”

“He adores you! But such feelings always fade; marriage transforms them into something else. I think the demon of ambition drives John Harrison too much. Hasn’t he said that he must do something glorious?”

“Well, yes.” Maggie nervously twirled a strand of her hair into a curl. She wanted Lily’s blessing, not this litany of criticism and doom. “But isn’t that just a manner of speaking?”

“Perhaps. Things might be different if you knew more clearly what you want from life, from marriage. And I would be happier about your infatuation with this cowboy if you were more fully conscious of your own hunger for control and... power.”