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# 面纱

## *The Painted Veil*

[英] 威廉·萨默塞特·毛姆 著

*William Somerset Maugham*



世界图书出版公司

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William Somerset Maugham

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## CHAPTER 1

SHE gave a startled cry.

'What's the matter?' he asked.

Notwithstanding the darkness of the shuttered room he saw her face on a sudden distraught with terror.

'Some one just tried the door.'

'Well, perhaps it was the amah, or one of the boys.'

'They never come at this time. They know I always sleep after tiffin.'

'Who else could it be?'

'Walter,' she whispered, her lips trembling.

She pointed to his shoes. He tried to put them on, but his nervousness, for her alarm was affecting him, made him clumsy, and besides, they were on the tight side. With a faint gasp of impatience she gave him a shoe horn. She slipped into a kimono and in her bare feet went over to her dressing-table. Her hair was shingled and with a comb she had repaired its disorder before he had laced his second shoe. She handed him his coat.

'How shall I get out?'

'You'd better wait a bit. I'll look out and see that it's all right.'

'It can't possibly be Walter. He doesn't leave the laboratory till five.'

'Who is it then?'

They spoke in whispers now. She was quaking. It occurred to him that in an emergency she would lose her head and on a sudden he felt



angry with her. If it wasn't safe why the devil had she said it was? She caught her breath and put her hand on his arm. He followed the direction of her glance. They stood facing the windows that led out on the verandah. They were shuttered and the shutters were bolted. They saw the white china knob of the handle slowly turn. They had heard no one walk along the verandah. It was terrifying to see that silent motion. A minute passed and there was no sound. Then, with the ghastliness of the supernatural, in the same stealthy, noiseless, and horrifying manner, they saw the white china knob of the handle at the other window turn also. It was so frightening that Kitty, her nerves failing her, opened her mouth to scream; but, seeing what she was going to do, he swiftly put his hand over it and her cry was smothered in his fingers.

Silence. She leaned against him, her knees shaking, and he was afraid she would faint. Frowning, his jaw set, he carried her to the bed and sat her down upon it. She was as white as the sheet and notwithstanding his tan his cheeks were pale too. He stood by her side looking with fascinated gaze at the china knob. They did not speak. Then he saw that she was crying.

'For God's sake don't do that,' he whispered irritably. 'If we're in for it we're in for it. We shall just have to brazen it out.'

She looked for her handkerchief and knowing what she wanted he gave her her bag.

'Where's your topee?'

'I left it downstairs.'

'Oh, my God!'

'I say, you must pull yourself together. It's a hundred to one it wasn't Walter. Why on earth should he come back at this hour? He never does come home in the middle of the day, does he?'

'Never.'

'I'll bet you anything you like it was the amah.'

She gave him the shadow of a smile. His rich, caressing voice reassured her and she took his hand and affectionately pressed it. He gave her a moment to collect herself.

'Look here, we can't stay here for ever,' he said then. 'Do you feel up to going out on the verandah and having a look?'

'I don't think I can stand.'

'Have you got any brandy in here?'

She shook her head. A frown for an instant darkened his brow, he was growing impatient, he did not quite know what to do. Suddenly she clutched his hand more tightly.

'Suppose he's waiting there?'

He forced his lips to smile and his voice retained the gentle, persuasive tone the effect of which he was so fully conscious of.

'That's not very likely. Have a little pluck, Kitty. How can it possibly be your husband? If he'd come in and seen a strange topee in the hall and come upstairs and found your room locked, surely he would have made some sort of row. It must have been one of the servants. Only a Chinese would turn a handle in that way.'

She did feel more herself now.

'It's not very pleasant even if it was only the amah.'

'She can be squared and if necessary, I'll put the fear of God into her. There are not many advantages in being a government official, but you may as well get what you can out of it.'

He must be right. She stood up and turning to him stretched out her arms: he took her in his and kissed her on the lips. It was such rapture that it was pain. She adored him. He released her and she went to the window. She slid back the bolt and opening the shutter a little looked out. There was not a soul. She slipped on to the verandah, looked into her

husband's dressing-room and then into her own sitting-room. Both were empty. She went back to the bedroom and beckoned to him.

'Nobody.'

'I believe the whole thing was an optical delusion.'

'Don't laugh. I was terrified. Go into my sitting-room and sit down. I'll put on my stockings and some shoes.'

## CHAPTER 2

HE did as she bade and in five minutes she joined him. He was smoking a cigarette.

'I say, could I have a brandy and soda?'

'Yes, I'll ring.'

'I don't think it would hurt you by the look of things.'

They waited in silence for the boy to answer. She gave the order.

'Ring up the laboratory and ask if Walter is there,' she said then.

'They won't know your voice.'

He took up the receiver and asked for the number. He inquired whether Dr. Fane was in. He put down the receiver.

'He hasn't been in since tiffin,' he told her. 'Ask the boy whether he has been here.'

'I daren't. It'll look so funny if he has and I didn't see him.'

The boy brought the drinks and Townsend helped himself. When he offered her some she shook her head.

'What's to be done if it was Walter?' she asked.

'Perhaps he wouldn't care.'

'Walter?'

Her tone was incredulous.

'It's always struck me he was rather shy. Some men can't bear scenes, you know. He's got sense enough to know that there's nothing to be gained by making a scandal. I don't believe for a minute it was Walter, but even if it was, my impression is that he'll do nothing. I think he'll ignore it.'

She reflected for a moment.

'He's awfully in love with me.'

'Well, that's all to the good. You'll get round him.'

He gave her that charming smile of his which she had always found so irresistible. It was a slow smile which started in his clear blue eyes and travelled by perceptible degrees to his shapely mouth. He had small white even teeth. It was a very sensual smile and it made her heart melt in her body.

'I don't very much care,' she said, with a flash of gaiety. 'It was worth it.'

'It was my fault.'

'Why did you come? I was amazed to see you.'

'I couldn't resist it.'

'You dear.'

She leaned a little towards him, her dark and shining eyes gazing passionately into his, her mouth a little open with desire, and he put his arms round her. She abandoned herself with a sigh of ecstasy to their shelter.

'You know you can always count on me,' he said.

'I'm so happy with you. I wish I could make you as happy as you make me.'

'You're not frightened any more?'

'I hate Walter,' she answered.

He did not quite know what to say to this, so he kissed her. Her face was very soft against his.

But he took her wrist on which was a little gold watch and looked at the time.

'Do you know what I must do now?'

'Bolt?' she smiled.

He nodded. For one instant she clung to him more closely, but she felt his desire to go, and she released him.

'It's shameful the way you neglect your work. Be off with you.'

He could never resist the temptation to flirt.

'You seem in a devil of a hurry to get rid of me,' he said lightly.

'You know that I hate to let you go.'

Her answer was low and deep and serious. He gave a flattered laugh.

'Don't worry your pretty little head about our mysterious visitor. I'm quite sure it was the amah. And if there's any trouble I guarantee to get you out of it.'

'Have you had a lot of experience?'

His smile was amused and complacent.

'No, but I flatter myself that I've got a head screwed on my shoulders.'

## CHAPTER 3

SHE went out on to the verandah and watched him leave the house. He waved his hand to her. It gave her a little thrill as she looked at him; he was forty-one, but he had the lithe figure and the springing step of a boy.

The verandah was in shadow; and lazily, her heart at ease with satisfied love, she lingered. Their house stood in the Happy Valley, on the side of the hill, for they could not afford to live on the more eligible but expensive Peak. But her abstracted gaze scarcely noticed the blue sea and the crowded shipping in the harbour. She could think only of her lover.

Of course it was stupid to behave as they had done that afternoon, but if he wanted her how could she be prudent? He had come two or three times after tiffin, when in the heat of the day no one thought of stirring out, and not even the boys had seen him come and go. It was very difficult at Hong Kong. She hated the Chinese city and it made her nervous to go into the filthy little house off the Victoria Road in which they were in the habit of meeting. It was a curio dealer's; and the Chinese who were sitting about stared at her unpleasantly; she hated the ingratiating smile of the old man who took her to the back of the shop and then up a dark flight of stairs. The room into which he led her was frowsy and the large wooden bed against the wall made her shudder.

'This is dreadfully sordid, isn't it?' she said to Charlie the first time she met him there.

'It was till you came in,' he answered.

Of course the moment he took her in his arms she forgot everything.

Oh, how hateful it was that she wasn't free, that they both weren't free! She didn't like his wife. Kitty's wandering thoughts dwelt now for a moment on Dorothy Townsend. How unfortunate to be called Dorothy! It dated you. She was thirty-eight at least. But Charlie never spoke of her. Of course he didn't care for her; she bored him to death. But he was a gentleman. Kitty smiled with affectionate irony: it was just like him, silly old thing; he might be unfaithful to her, but he

would never allow a word in disparagement of her to cross his lips. She was a tallish woman, taller than Kitty, neither stout nor thin, with a good deal of pale brown hair; she could never have been pretty with anything but the prettiness of youth; her features were good enough without being remarkable and her blue eyes were cold. She had a skin that you would never look at twice and no colour in her cheeks. And she dressed like – well, like what she was, the wife of the Assistant Colonial Secretary at Hong Kong. Kitty smiled and gave her shoulders a faint shrug.

Of course no one could deny that Dorothy Townsend had a pleasant voice. She was a wonderful mother, Charlie always said that of her, and she was what Kitty's mother called a gentlewoman. But Kitty did not like her. She did not like her casual manner; and the politeness with which she treated you when you went there, to tea or dinner, was exasperating because you could not but feel how little interest she took in you. The fact was, Kitty supposed, that she cared for nothing but her children: there were two boys at school in England, and another boy of six whom she was going to take home next year. Her face was a mask. She smiled and in her pleasant, well-mannered way said the things that were expected of her; but for all her cordiality held you at a distance. She had a few intimate friends in the Colony and they greatly admired her. Kitty wondered whether Mrs. Townsend thought her a little common. She flushed. After all there was no reason for her to put on airs. It was true that her father had been a Colonial Governor and of course it was very grand while it lasted – every one stood up when you entered a room and men took off their hats to you as you passed in your car – but what could be more insignificant than a Colonial Governor when he had retired? Dorothy Townsend's father lived on a pension in a small house at Earl's Court. Kitty's mother would think it

a dreadful bore if she asked her to call. Kitty's father, Bernard Garstin, was a K. C. and there was no reason why he should not be made a judge one of these days. Anyhow they lived in South Kensington.

## CHAPTER 4

KITTY, coming to Hong Kong on her marriage, had found it hard to reconcile herself to the fact that her social position was determined by her husband's occupation. Of course every one had been very kind and for two or three months they had gone out to parties almost every night; when they dined at Government House the Governor took her in as a bride; but she had understood quickly that as the wife of the Government bacteriologist she was of no particular consequence. It made her angry.

'It's too absurd,' she told her husband. 'Why, there's hardly any one here that one would bother about for five minutes at home. Mother wouldn't dream of asking any of them to dine at our house.'

'You mustn't let it worry you,' he answered. 'It doesn't really matter, you know.'

'Of course it doesn't matter, it only shows how stupid they are, but it is rather funny when you think of all the people who used to come to our house at home that here we should be treated like dirt.'

'From a social standpoint the man of science does not exist,' he smiled.

She knew that now, but she had not known it when she married him.

'I don't know that it exactly amuses me to be taken in to dinner by the agent of the P. and O.,' she said, laughing in order that what she



said might not seem snobbish.

Perhaps he saw the reproach behind her lightness of manner, for he took her hand and shyly pressed it.

'I'm awfully sorry, Kitty dear, but don't let it vex you.'

'Oh, I'm not going to let it do that.'

## CHAPTER 5

IT couldn't have been Walter that afternoon. It must have been one of the servants and after all they didn't matter. Chinese servants knew everything anyway. But they held their tongues.

Her heart beat a little faster as she remembered the way in which that white china knob slowly turned. They mustn't take risks like that again. It was better to go to the curio shop. No one who saw her go in would think anything of it, and they were absolutely safe there. The owner of the shop knew who Charlie was and he was not such a fool as to put up the back of the Assistant Colonial Secretary. What did anything matter really but that Charlie loved her?

She turned away from the verandah and went back into her sitting-room. She threw herself down on the sofa and stretched out her hand to get a cigarette. Her eye caught sight of a note lying on the top of a book. She opened it. It was written in pencil.

*Dear Kitty,*

*Here is the book you wanted. I was just going to send it when I met Dr. Fane and he said he'd bring it round himself as he was passing the house.*

*V.H.*