

HAN SUYIN

THE
CLASSIC
LOVE STORY



A MANY-
SPLENDoured
THING

A Many-Splendoured Thing

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

Han Suyin

A Many-Splendoured
Thing

With an introduction by
The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Macdonald P.C.

THE SHERIDAN
BOOK COMPANY



This edition published in 1995 by
The Sheridan Book Company

First published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Ltd 1952

Arrow edition 1992

All rights reserved

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire

ISBN 1-85501-717-2

Contents

Introduction 7

Preface 12

Part 1: ONSET

- 1 Exodus from China 15
- 2 The Kingdom of God 20
- 3 Rich Man Poor Man 24
- 4 Gay Encounter 31
- 5 The Mind's Conjunction 36
- 6 Destiny's Puppy 40
- 7 Shanghailand 44
- 8 Unleashing Trouble 49
- 9 The Goldfish 55
- 10 Suzanne 60
- 11 Treasure Hunt 65
- 12 The Nets of Fate 75
- 13 Decision 80
- 14 Macao Week-End 84
- 15 The Proposal 91
- 16 The House of Wisdom 92

Part 2: PROGRESS

- 1 Return to Chungking 98
- 2 My Sister Suchen 105
- 3 Acedia 114
- 4 New East, Old West 122
- 5 Moment in Chungking 125
- 6 Hongkong Profiles 134
- 7 The Moon Feast 158
- 8 Mark 172
- 9 A Good Day 189
- 10 Amour Profane 195
- 11 All Chinese Together 210
- 12 The Squirrel Cage 215
- 13 Starting Points 221

Part 3: CRISIS

- 1 Let the Sea Roar 239**
- 2 The Little Town 245**
- 3 Between Sea and Land 258**
- 4 A Realm Dismantled 264**
- 5 Spring Is Come Home 272**
- 6 All Your Houses 283**
- 7 The Sea-Wet Rock 290**
- 8 How With this Rage 303**
- 9 Land of Morning Calm 313**
- 10 A Many-Splendoured Thing 328**

Part 4: CONCLUSION

- The End and the Beginning 331**

Introduction

Han Suyin, the author of this moving book, is a Chinese woman. Born in Peking, she was educated at a Chinese University and then toured Europe for two years. In 1938 she returned to China with her husband and lived in the interior during the Sino-Japanese war, where she wrote her first novel, *Destination Chungking*, in collaboration with an American woman missionary. It presented a vivid picture of Free China, of the sufferings of the Chinese people and of life in the old feudal provinces of Western China. In its last chapter Han Suyin foreshadowed prophetically the coming struggle between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists.

At the end of the war fate took her back to England. There, after the death of her husband—killed in the civil war now raging in earnest in China—she finished her medical studies and qualified with honours at London University. At the same time she supported herself and her child by supplementing her scholarship with the income from a job. She could not, however, stay long away from her own people, and soon left England again to plunge into the turmoil of contemporary Asia.

A Many-Splendoured Thing is about that post-war Asia, shaken from end to end by stupendous, revolutionary changes. Future historians will regard this mid-twentieth century upheaval in the largest and most populous continent on Earth as one of their grandest themes; and they will no doubt be able to assess it with the cool judgment of men observing great events in retrospect. For us who live in the middle of the earthquake it is more difficult to appreciate dispassionately and exactly its significance. Many petty and ludicrous prejudices on the part either of those who regard the whole upheaval as unnecessary, and who long for 'the good old days' in Asia, or else of those who so despise those days that they wish the new Asia to make a complete break with them and so to become entirely uprooted from its own historical past, are apt to blur clear vision. Yet the fundamental explanation

of what is happening is simple. The Feudalism which gradually, over centuries, disappeared from the Western world as a result of 'modern' material progress and intellectual evolution persisted virtually unaltered everywhere in Asia until the other day. Then Western practices and notions began to invade the East, following in the wake of the enterprising European traders, soldiers, administrators and missionaries who, by their superior material power, established themselves as rulers in large parts of Asia. Now these ideas have germinated: and a process which occurred gradually over a long period in Europe is being attempted with revolutionary haste in Asia. Feudalism is being swept away; and incidentally the 'Western Imperialism' which was either the last phase of the old feudalism or the first phase of the new liberalism—according to which way you look at it—is being swept away too.

That historic transformation is common to almost every country in Asia, although it takes different shapes in different countries and produces at present such varying regimes as Nehru's in India, Mao Tse Tung's in China, Soekarno's in Indonesia and others elsewhere. At the moment the great change is only in process of occurring. Its pace varies from place to place. The story of *A Many-Splendoured Thing* is set in two lands, one small and the other vast, which—though they lie side by side as close physical neighbours—are at the opposite extremities in this political process of change; first in Hongkong, which is a little-altered relic of 'Western Imperialism', with its good points and its bad; and then in China, where a full-blooded Communist society is now being rapidly established. One need only refer in passing to the fact that this new China is in danger of falling under a later Imperialism far more sinister than that of the liberalizing West—the harsh Russian tyranny which is the same cruel, reactionary influence whether it masquerades under the crown of a Tsar or the cap of a Commissar.

A vivid feature of Han Suyin's book is the contrast in her brilliant pictures of Hongkong and China. These two clashing settings make dramatic back-scenes for the stage on which her actors play their parts. In their conduct her characters—the Christian missionaries and old-school Chinese refugees from China, the enthusiastic young Chinese Communists and serene, imperturbable non-Communist elders inside China, the foreign observers of various types in Hongkong and, above all, the

Eurasian Suyin, and her English lover Mark—represent other clashes which disturb Asia today. These conflicts are the stuff of contemporary human history, and must be understood sympathetically by people in the West and the East alike if a world disaster is to be avoided.

Han Suyin describes them with deep intuition. They intrude constantly like a full orchestral accompaniment to the duet of Suyin's and Mark's intense and gracious, troubled but harmonious, ill-fated and yet triumphant love affair.

One conflict which Han Suyin describes is the internal one being waged in the hearts and minds of many intelligent Chinese, between their passionate, elemental desire to be associated with their own people, 'right or wrong', and their distaste for the excesses of the Communist Revolution; between their sympathy for the generous impulses which have prompted that Revolution, and their recognition of the intolerant cruelties which it has introduced; between their love for a multitude of their young fellow-countrymen who in China are devoting their enthusiasm to try to create a reformed and revitalized Chinese nation, and their doubt, to say the least, about the Chinese leaders who seem to be organizing mass misguidance of that enthusiasm; between their approval of the liberation from old bonds which the Communists have achieved for scores of millions of Chinese, and alarm that these same Communists now proceed to bind with new chains those whom they have freed from the old.

Although Suyin is an Eurasian she is mostly Chinese, and her reactions to events in China and to foreign criticism must be typical of countless educated Chinese both inside and outside China. Parts of her feel a compelling urge to return to China, to help her people in their struggle; but other parts bid her stay away, sympathetic yet aloof in Hongkong, watching events from that semi-detached observation tower. The account running through this book of her thoughts and feelings is of profound importance; for by reading it we foreigners understand better the motives which have led so many good, non-Communist Chinese to stay in China and associate themselves with the Communist effort. Such understanding will help when the time comes—as come it surely must—for reconciliation between China and the West. Although many of the individual Chinese concerned will then be dead—murdered by their Communist masters—large numbers still alive will probably retain

a similar frame of mind.

Another conflict hovering perpetually over the episodes of *A Many-Splendoured Thing* is that between the white races of the West and the coloured races of the East. No doubt various circumstances contribute to the unhappy antipathy which plays such a dominant part in Asian politics today, and which bedevils good relations between the peoples of the Occident and the Orient; but the chief cause is the recent rule by several European nations of various Asian peoples. 'Western Imperialism' brought many benefits to Asia which one day, in more dispassionate times, will be recognized with a measure of gratitude. Chief among them was perhaps that introduction of liberalizing ideas which are the very weapons for destroying Asian feudalism. But Western rule unfortunately also brought some evil consequences; and chief among them was the creation of a superiority complex among the whites and of an inferiority complex among the coloured peoples, neither of which was justified, each of which did untold damage to the characters of the two respective peoples, and both of which have for the time being made natural, unprejudiced and truly friendly relations between them extremely difficult.

I must not mis-use this note to moralize pompously on these themes; for it is a brief Introduction to Han Suyin's lovely story, not a protracted political treatise. In any case she writes with an insight far deeper than any that I command about these all-important problems of contemporary Asia and of relations between the East and the West. As she herself has said, 'European and American authors write with great beauty and perception about Asians. I write as an Asian, with all the pent-up emotions of my people. What I say will annoy many people who prefer the more conventional myths brought back by writers on the Orient. All I can say is that I try to tell the truth. Truth, like surgery, may hurt, but it cures.'

Something at least as drastic as a surgical operation is needed to create new, healing relations between the peoples of the West and the East. It is a change of heart, a complete abandonment of old superiority and inferiority complexes, a meeting together of the renewed nations of the East and the old nations of the West on a footing of equality, as glad, mutually devoted partners in the struggle of all Humanity to attain peace and enlightenment. Han Suyin's book should help to accomplish that.

Such vast matters form the ever-intrusive background of her story. In the foreground occurs the incident of Suyin's and Mark's love. It is best that I leave the author to tell that narrative in her own beautiful way—a tale of one of those perfect unions between a man and woman which is somehow doomed, and which yet possesses imperishable, deathless quality. Han Suyin writes it with a beauty of feeling and language, and with a passion and poetry and philosophy which need no comment beyond the homage of silence.

MALCOLM MACDONALD

Preface

April 1950

'Will you write a book about me?' asked Mark.

It was the hour after love. We lay in the long grass of the hill slope, in the abundant sun. Above us the sky stretched widely to an undefended horizon. Around us was granite rock, grass, bracken and small myrtle. Below the hill lay the wrinkled blue sea, all alone without a sail in the endless spring afternoon. We spoke quietly, detached from ourselves; careful, deliberate words. We spoke of things which at that moment no longer hurt to think about. Lucidly, we speculated on absence, separation from each other, and the splitting of our worlds into ever more irreconcilable fragments. Our voices were disembodied and calm, voices which we only achieved in the hour after love.

'I may write something about you,' I replied. 'But not now. Now I am too full of joy to do anything but to live, with the ever-present knowledge of you within me, filling me with gladness.' Perhaps if you leave me, and I grieve, or for some other good reason, I may write a book about you.'

'What other good reason would you have?' asked Mark.

'Food. I'd sell my love for food any day. The rice bowl is to me the most valid reason in the world for doing anything. A piece of one's soul to the multitudes in return for rice and wine does not seem to me a sacrilege. 賣肉餵生'

'If you wish to sell red hot passion, dear one,' said Mark, running his finger along my eyebrows, 'you must do it before you forget all about me, since you hate so much the embalming odour of memories.'

'That is why I'll do it. I shall exhum^{掘出} all my memories, for I was born irreverent. And I'll do it before the love of you recedes from me as surely as the sea's tide, leaving a sea-wet shore littered with meaningless fragments; before the merciless body smothers the hurt you will have done to me, and falsifies the emotion of the words that we used; before I have to scratch very hard, to make them bleed, the torpid scars of grief and ecstasy. I shall write how we loved in the fashion of all lovers,

and ~~strove~~ not to let the little things of existence destroy us. How they did, and how we forgot. Just like everyone else. For we are, no more nor less than anybody else, transient, imperfect lovers in a world of endless inconstancy.' ~~75 26~~

'What rhetoric,' said Mark. 'Do you really think, then, that other people get as much pleasure and happiness out of their bodies as we do? Do you really think that this love will not last for ever? I do not believe it.' And he looked round him for confirmation. But there was only myrtle and long grass and bracken, hill slope and sea, and ourselves all golden with lying in the sun.

'Dear love, even the paunchy, ugly people of this world believe they love as much as we do and for ever. It is the illusion of all lovers to think themselves unique and their words immortal.'

Mark said: 'It may be an illusion, but it is the only truth that you and I possess, therefore let us enjoy it while we can. For after all, my dear one, we may have only little time, so little time to love.'

And those words of his were the only true ones which we said on that afternoon.

Part 1: Onset

1: Exodus from China

March 1949

Mrs. Parrish pats her new silk ²⁴⁷~~frock~~ into place round her hips and her tongue clicks with approbation against her small white teeth.

'You are getting slimmer, there's no doubt about it now,' says Mrs. Thrale, crocheting away. 'Thanks to you, Doc.' she flashes at me.

'You were an answer to my prayer, Doc,' says Helen Parrish, twisting in front of the full-length mirror to inspect her back. Three weeks of dieting have produced admirable results. Her husband, Alf, is coming down from the Mission in Hankow. He may arrive in Hongkong any day. The communists are closing in from the north and from the east. Every city falls to them without resistance, whole armies surrender complete with general. Hankow will fall. Helen Parrish does not think that Alf will be able to stay in Hankow when the communists start taking over the school where he teaches. She and the children came to Hongkong four months ago. Here the abundant food, ice-cream, lack of exercise, have added twenty pounds to her bulk. She was quietly desperate about it until I arrived at Church Guest House in February, fresh from England, where I had completed my medical studies. For weeks I stood over her at meals, brandishing under her nose a written list of forbidden items. 'It's such a relief to know that you are going to stay at Church Guest House for a while,' she says. 'So nice to have a doctor at hand, when one's got children.'

Mary Fairfield knits, her pale lips shift against each other, counting the stitches. This morning, after long and earnest prayer, she has been told by God to go back to China, with the children.

'You'll be liberated by the communists,' says Helen Parrish, 'and I don't think that will be good for you or for the children.'

But to Mary Fairfield, as to many another missionary, China is the field, the chosen land for the spreading of the Word. In this hour of darkness and danger, salvation must be propagated more than ever before. 'My father and my mother were missionaries in China. I was born there, and spent my early childhood there. My children were born in China. Somehow I cannot imagine life without China.'

Mrs. Thrale, who does not knit, is also sad, but for other reasons. She is not a missionary of long standing. The Thrales had arrived from America a short while ago, and furnished a house; then their town was threatened and they left for Hong-kong. 'You should have seen the curtains in my bedroom. Yellow chintz, with a lily-of-the-valley pattern. I feel broken-hearted when I think about our house and all the furniture we had to sell. I feel sure that God means us to go back one day.'

Mrs. Jones is English. She belongs to the group that sit in Helen Parrish's bedroom, and knit, and talk. But she says very little when we are all together. I roomed with her during my first week at the Guest House, and we used to talk in whispers, at night, when we lay next to each other in our iron beds. That was before I moved to the basement. 'Henry and I don't agree about leaving China. He wants to stay.'

If he leaves he will have to resign from the Mission, and find a job in England. He has been away from home a long time, and does not know how to set about finding a job. Mrs. Jones is scared, there are no heroics about her. 'If Henry were a medical missionary the communists would let him get on with his work. But he is an evangelist. He prints and distributes religious tracts. They're bound to stop him before anyone else.'

In the first impulse to get away from the sweep of the advancing armies, many missionary families have come to Hongkong. Once here, their fears subside, and they want to go back. Very few want to return to America or to England. A good many are second-generation missionaries, with a China tradition in the family. The word of God was preached by their parents in the heathen land of China, and must the good earth now go back to the heathen? After so many years of toil, have they failed to make a Christian impression on the Chinese soul? 'I love China. I have always loved the Chinese people. China, my China,' they say. 'I just cannot understand so many people going over to the communists. Even among

16