

Ruben and Ivy Sên

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"In a Shantung Garden," "Mr. Wu," "Mr. and
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Had the date of the death of Sên King-lo, the father of Ruben and Ivy, as implied in "Mr. and Mrs. Sên," been adhered to strictly in this present novel, it would open considerably later than 1925. The author has preferred to ignore the dates of the previous story rather than to place this story in years of which she can know nothing. "Ruben and Ivy Sên" is not intended as a sequel to "Mr. and Mrs. Sên," though it grew out of the earlier story.

TO MONA FROM HER MOTHER

RUBEN AND IVY SÊN

CHAPTER I

THE servant who let him in one Tuesday in May knew that Whitmore had come to make Mrs. Sên an offer of marriage, and when the man let the peer out half an hour later, Jenkins had no doubt that his mistress had refused the offer.

How he knew, Jenkins could not have told you. It was years since Jenkins had listened at door ajar or keyhole—not since he'd been a very under footman. Mrs. Sên did not hobnob with her maid. Avenues of intimate information open to servants in many households simply did not exist in Mrs. Sên's homes. But Jenkins knew.

Every one had known that Lord Whitmore was going to propose to Ruby Sên. It had been patent for more than a year. And only three people had been at all doubtful of what Mrs. Sên would answer: the three who knew her best. Sir Charles Snow, his wife, and Ruben—Ruby's son—had wondered whether or not Mrs. Sên was going to marry Whitmore. Ivy had no doubt that her mother would. Society took it for granted, and, since Whitmore never had shown the slightest inclination to let any other woman lead him to the matrimonial altar, Society approved the prospective arrangement.

The Sên servants had had no doubt of what was coming, not even Tibbs, a recent acquisition below stairs, who had

only seen her mistress once and by luck, through the larder window.

When Jenkins had announced Whitmore in the morning-room the man had been as confident as the suitor. Half an hour after, when Jenkins let Lord Whitmore out, Jenkins had been as surprised as Whitmore, and very much more disappointed.

Jenkins had served Mrs. Sên for nearly ten years, and it was his uniform experience that when Mrs. Sên said a thing she meant it—and went on meaning it. When Jenkins closed the front door on Lord Whitmore's departure, Jenkins had given up the match.

John Whitmore had done nothing of the sort. He had never asked a woman to marry him before, and he had no intention of letting this one woman off from doing it. Give her time he'd have to, that was obvious. But he was going to make her marry him, and before very long. A man does not need to delay his wedding day needlessly at fifty. He cared everything for this one woman. He was determined to have her for his wife, and greatly as he wished it for himself, his determination was in no way selfish.

He was sure that their marriage would be almost as much for her happiness as for his own, and even more for her advantage, a satisfactory and comfortable settlement. It was all very well for her now, but she'd grow old some day like the rest of the world. It stood to reason her two children would marry. She'd be far happier with him ten or twenty years from now than she would alone. And in the meantime, whether she knew it or not, it would be a great advantage to Ruben and Ivy and a very great help to their mother, for the boy and girl to have a father—such a father as he'd be to them. He was very fond of little Ivy, and any man would be proud to have Ruben call him father.

When they learned that their mother had refused Lord

Whitmore—it was he himself, not Mrs. Sên, who told them and told the Snows that she had done so—Ivy was furious and bitterly disappointed, but Ruben was glad.

Lady Snow was disgusted, but she was not surprised; Ruby Sên never would surprise Emma Snow again. Emma always had known how apt Sir Charles' cousin was to take life's bit resolutely in her teeth. Once at least she had bolted with it. And in all their almost lifelong acquaintance, which from the first had been a sisterly intimacy, Emma only once had known Ruby to change her mind. Lady Snow had no hope that Mrs. Sên would change it now.

Sir Charles Snow was not surprised either, and he was glad in spite of his sincere liking and respect for Whitmore. He doubted if any second marriage could satisfy a woman who had been the wife of Sên King-lo. But he saw as clearly as Lady Snow the advantage to his cousin of marriage with Whitmore. He believed that the friendship and support of such a husband as John Whitmore would be a very great advantage and bulwark to Ruby in the difficult times he foresaw when Ruben and Ivy were a little older. He knew how such a marriage and stepfather would soothe Ivy. Sir Charles Snow was very sorry for her, and tried his manliest to love misplaced little Ivy as much as he pitied her. He tried to love her even half as much as he loved Ruben—and failed.

Snow in some half obscure way felt that the sacrifices Sên King-lo had made—the sacrifice of life itself and the heavier sacrifice of bitter exile—were in part justified, a little atoned for, by his wife's refusal to marry again.

When Ruby Gilbert, living there with them, had convulsed Washington by marrying a Chinese, Sir Charles Snow had disliked it even more than his wife had, and had opposed it strenuously. But he had opposed it from a sense of cousinly duty and not because he had much hope that his opposition

would have any effect. He had disliked it most for his girl cousin, but he had dreaded its consequences most for his friend Sên. He had been sure that its consequences would be disaster and that it was Sên who would pay. Lady Snow had not opposed it at all. She was ultra-practical and she had seen no reason to attempt the impossible.

Snow had proved right, as he often did. It was Sên King-lo who had paid and not the English girl whom he had married. Charles Snow and a wise old woman in Ho-nan and Kow Li, Mr. Sên's servant in Washington, who had a Chinese curio shop now in a side street near the British Museum, knew that Sên the Chinese had paid. No one else knew—unless Sên's widow did. Charles Snow often wondered whether his cousin Ruby ever had had even an inkling of what the marriage that her husband had kept so happy for her had cost Sên King-lo.

For Sên's sake Charles Snow, though it grieved him, had not exactly regretted Sên King-lo's death—fourteen years ago now—in Surrey. Emma Snow had liked Sên cordially; she had had to go on doing so even after the "abominable" marriage; but she had not been able to ignore—in her own cool head, for she never had voiced it—that King-lo's death had cleansed her kinswoman's social slate of a regrettable record. In her own way, lighter than Snow's but as sound, Lady Snow had been staunchly loyal to Ruby and King-lo and to the marriage that never had ceased to rasp her. But she had hated it from first to last. She had always felt it a detriment not only to herself but to her two children, Blanche and Dick, and had felt that it would have injured and compromised any social standing less secure than Charlie's and hers. And because she felt as she did about their cousin's Chinese marriage, Emma Snow's sunny, unflinching loyalty had been a braver thing than Sir Charles

Snow's. Lady Snow felt that Ruby had made a sorry sacrifice and had lost caste, had taken an appalling risk with criminal willfulness. Snow had had no doubt that the sacrifices, the smirch of caste, the ghastly risk, had been Sên's tenfold more than Ruby's.

Only one detriment remained to Ruby now in Lady Snow's opinion—Ivy. Mr. and Mrs. Sên had had two children, both living now with their mother in old Kensington. Ruben the elder was Saxon fair, a very charming boy. Ivy, two years younger than Ruben, was intensely Chinese in appearance, and a handful. Lady Snow loved Ruben and was proud of him; but she was ashamed of Ivy Sên, because of what the girl's unmistakably Chinese face told and emphasized. Emma Snow was clear-eyed enough to see that the Chinese-looking half-English girl was almost incredibly lovely; and the woman was too well experienced in social England to have any doubt that Ivy, rich, accomplished and quick, would be a social sensation and success. But Emma Snow could not forgive the girl her Chinese face, though Heaven knows she tried to. After all, Lady Snow was not responsible for an adamant prejudice that was also a wholesome common sense—something she was unable to shake off because it was stronger than she and part of her own not inconsiderable strength. Even that wise old diplomat, Charles Snow, who made no mistake about the greatness and fineness of the Chinese, who admired and loved them, and who held himself honored in his many Chinese friendships, winced at Ivy's slant black eyes, yellow skin and the pretty musical lilt of her up-and-down "courtyard" voice.

Whether Mrs. Sên regretted her only daughter's Chinese appearance, or was gratified that Ruben her son looked and seemed so English, not even her Cousin Charles knew, who knew her better than any one else, not even excepting Ruben.

But both Sir Charles and his wife knew that Mrs. Sên loved her children passionately and they believed, mistakenly, that she gave them an equal love.

Ruben Sên worshiped his mother; he gave her a tendance and fealty that a Western mother rarely wins. And not even Sir Charles Snow—always watching, because of a promise he had given dead Sên King-lo—suspected that there was one thing that Ruben Sên, even now, loved more passionately than he did his mother.

We are so used to ourselves, so accustomed to our own blemishes of mind and body that we carry them tranquilly enough until some sharp knock shows them to us vividly, somewhat as others see them. Little Ivy Sên was self-centered and self-satisfied, even for one of her sex. And though looking in the glass was one of her most favored pastimes at a very early age, she was ten or twelve before she once wondered why she looked so little like her mother, or realized in the least how queerly her face differed from all the other girls' faces! When she did realize it a looking glass tortured her. But she looked into it more than ever, obsessed by it much as lepers are!

Ivy Sên both loved and hated her mother, and Mrs. Sên knew it. She accepted her child's love gratefully; suffered her child's hatred and gave no sign. Ruby Sên did all that she could to lighten the cross that she knew Ivy carried. But there was one thing that she would not do for Ivy; she would not marry Lord Whitmore—or any other man.

CHAPTER II

THE day that Ivy came to her, appealing for her help to overcome "Mother's wicked obstinacy," and broke down and wept out what until now she had never told any one,

Lady Snow came nearer really caring for Chinese-faced Ivy than she ever had before, and much nearer than she could have believed possible.

"I could almost forgive her; I think I could," Ivy pleaded, "if she would marry him. Why doesn't she? There is every reason why she should—and not one single reason not to!"

"Forgive your mother! You have no right to say that, or to think it," Lady Snow said sternly—more sternly than she felt.

"You know that I have!" the girl insisted passionately. "How would you like to have a Chinese face? You'd loathe it, as I do. You do not like me; and I like you for it—for not liking me—not liking me because I look Chinese."

"Haven't I been good to you, Ivy?"

"Oh, yes," the girl's shrug of contempt was Eastern—a "courtyard" petulance—"as good as ever you could bring yourself to be. But you've had to *try*—had to *remember* to be kind to me every time. Every one is good to me. I'm rich and so is Mother, and she goes everywhere and knows every one worth knowing—that's why. I don't want people to be good to me. I could kill people when they pity me—and perhaps some day I will."

"No one pities you, child. No one could."

"You do!"

Emma Snow made no reply.

"Everybody pities me that has any sense. I have no doubt that my own mother does. She ought to. Ruben doesn't—he envies me. But Rue's mad. Cousin Charles never shows that he does, but of course he pities me too, for all his liking for Chinks. Every one *must* pity me who cares for me the least little bit—every one who isn't a lunatic like Ruben. I don't want people to be good to me. It's impudent of them, and it is not what I want. There is only one thing on earth I want. I want to be English!"

"You are half-English, Ivy," Lady Snow reminded her gently.

"*Half!*" All the agony of the sore old interracial tragedy was packed in the girl's one bitter word.

Emma Snow's heart ached for the girl and she said the most healing thing she could think of. "You are very beautiful, Ivy." She laid a caressing hand gently on Ivy's shoulder.

They were alone in Lady Snow's own sitting-room, she with a bit of embroidery she'd taken up desperately, as a refuge for her eyes, when Ivy's words had become dangerous. The girl was hunched on a stool at the other's knee in a willowy attitude that was pretty but not Western. Ivy was facing the other, and not so near that she could not look up at her very directly.

"I used to think so," Ivy Sên said sadly, "when I used to look in the glass years ago—saw how I looked, and didn't know what I looked *like*. But now I do know and my own face is the most repulsive sight I ever see. I dare say I'll be the rage—for one Season—when Mother presents me; but what sort of a rage? A joke! People will like to look at me and laugh and point me out to each other as the daughter of the English woman who married a Chinaman. 'Miss Sên the Society mongrel'; that's what they'll call me!"

"Ivy!"

"It's what I am. And it's what they'll call me. 'See! there she is—the mongrel beauty!' Oh, I'll be the rage all right! How would you like to hear Blanche called a mongrel? Do you think that Rupert Blake would have fallen in love with her, let alone married her, if she'd been a half-caste—and looked it!"

The woman's eyes filled with tears. She knew that her easygoing but socially exigent son-in-law certainly would not,

and she bent her eyes on her work, and hastily stitched a blue petal on a red rose.

"Ivy," she said slowly, "I want to help you—truly I do, dear. I want to persuade you to help yourself; it's the only way, your only way out. Accept it, Ivy, once for all and make the best of it. You don't like it; a great many girls would. Take the good of it, Ivy—there's lots of good, and good-luck too, in it—and put your foot on the rest of it—what you think the bad of it. Don't let it lame you. Really you shouldn't! Above everything else, don't let it make you bitter. Nothing spoils a girl like being bitter. Begin on little things. Don't say 'Chink,' dear. It isn't nice. Your cousin Charles won't even let me say 'Chinaman'; he broke me of it years ago. Say 'Chinese,' dear."

"Chinks!" the girl on the stool retorted viciously. "That's what they are. I loathe them. I am a Chink, Cousin Emma; and it won't wash off. Pretty! Oh, yes, I dare say I am pretty in an odious Chink way. But there isn't a girl in England who is English and looks English, that I wouldn't change places with to-morrow—now—this hour—and thank God for letting me do it."

"Hush, dear."

"I would! Have you seen our new kitchen maid? Her name is Tibbs, Ada Tibbs; she has a bad cast in one eye; she hasn't any eyebrows—scarcely any eyelashes. I nearly had a fit when I saw her. She has the most hideous face I have ever seen. But it is English! I would change places with Ada Tibbs, and be thankful and glad of the chance to."

"You wouldn't like it when you had," Lady Snow said gently.

"I'd like it better than being what I am—looking as I do."

"You don't know what you are saying, dear."

"I know what I am feeling."

Lady Snow sighed.

"Can't you make Mother do it? Can't you? She ought to. It wouldn't wash the Chinese off my face—nothing ever will do that—but it would whitewash it a little. Mother owes it to me. I could almost forgive her, if she would. And I want to love my mother! Can't Cousin Charles make her?"

Lady Snow shook her head slowly, folding away her needlework, smiling sadly. She was thinking of twenty years ago, when Sên King-lo and Ruby Gilbert had fallen in love, and had married.

"I have known your mother for more than thirty years, Ivy, and I never have known any one even once able to 'make' her do anything against her will. I can't quite see why you are so terribly anxious that your mother should marry Lord Whitmore. Your mother has about everything that a woman can have to make life comfortable and interesting and beautiful too—for her and for you and Ruben. She is enormously rich. She still is a beautiful woman. Her position is as secure and desirable as any woman's in England."

"Because her Chinese husband is dead!" the girl interjected.

"Listen to me, Ivy. Your father was a very great gentleman and I never knew a more charming man. Sir Charles loved and respected him. Sên King-lo was a great man, Ivy; a noble by birth, and entirely noble in nature."

"Don't! Don't tell me about him. I can't stand it."

Emma Snow's eyes fell at the tragedy in the girl's. "He loved you very dearly," she said sorrowfully. She was too bitterly sorry for Ivy Sên to reproach her beyond that.

"Don't!" the girl shuddered.

Lady Snow unfolded her needlework again, to steady her-

self with something mechanical and because she could think of nothing not quite hopeless to say.

"Why did Mother do it?" the passionate voice went on suddenly.

"Do what, dear?" But Emma Snow knew.

"Marry a Chinese man!"

"They loved each other very dearly."

"It was horrible!"

"You might not have thought that if you could have known him and seen how he was held, dear. I'll be honest with you, Ivy; we were not glad but it was impossible to feel that our cousin had married beneath her. Why are you so anxious to have a stepfather, Ivy? Most girls are not."

"I am—to have an English father—and to have an English name."

"But your mother changing her name wouldn't change yours."

"I'd see that it did! He'd be willing. I know he would. To be his daughter, and be called by his name, would make me seem a little more English. That's what I want, above everything on earth."

Lady Snow doubted if Ruby Sên would allow her children to discard their father's name—felt rather sure that Ruby would not—even if she did marry Whitmore. But there was no need to annoy the excited girl by telling her so, particularly as Emma was convinced that Mrs. Sên never would marry Lord Whitmore.

Perhaps Ivy suspected the other's thought for she demanded, "Do you know what I am going to do, the day I am twenty-one? I am going to call myself by some other name—some decent English name. And I shall marry the first Englishman that asks me the day after I'm of age and my own mistress, if any *Englishman* ever does—*any* Englishman—a footman, a sweep or a potman!"

Lady Snow laughed lightly though she could have cried more easily, and touched the other's face softly with her hand. "Don't be a goose, little one," was all she said. But Lady Snow's heart ached bitterly for Ivy Sên.

CHAPTER III

ON the surface Mrs. Sên lived pleasantly and calmly, as scores of such Englishwomen do—London, Surrey, moderate travel, ample means, good health, "troops of friends," not a worry; a radiant, if placid, life, peculiarly free from grave care or petty annoyances. At forty she was much more than good-looking and she had charm, the personal charm that had been hers from childhood, and the deeper charm of the woman who has accepted experience and has assimilated and used it wisely. Sir Charles Snow, probably her most trusted friend as well as her kinsman, often questioned if his cousin lived less smoothly in her hidden depths of being than on the untroubled surface. After fifteen years of identical questioning Snow had found no answer, reached no conclusion.

The rich widow was completely her own mistress; by her husband's gift wealthy in her own right, her fortune under her sole control, she the only guardian of their two children. To be sure, her husband had died as he had lived, a Chinese subject. By Chinese law—and international equity could not well have disputed it—all that Mr. Sên had left, including even his widow and their children, belonged to his family in Ho-nan. Whether or not those British-born children could have maintained British citizenship as against Chinese allegiance, had the Sêns in Ho-nan raised and pressed the point, Ruby, the dead Chinese man's widow, was indubitably a Chi-