

The kindliness of the tone was unmistakable. The old dame shrank neither from the speaker, nor the object of his pride. Instead, she hobbled closer to the coffin and helped her old eyes by running her hands over the sides and edges of it.

"Honey-comb joints," she muttered, "and nails all ready to be driven. I'll sleep well of the worms! Aye, it is a good son, a good son!" Her delight was sincere if grisly. Then a fear possessed her and her old tones cracked in voicing it.

"Is my son sure of the fit?"

The burly fellow burst into a guffaw of laughter.

"Mahlee," he cried to a girl of about sixteen who was seated in a doorway. "Our mother, here, is afraid of cramped knees in her new bed. Fetch a quilt and spread it within. We'll see that her legs have room."

The girl laughed, then shivered. As she arose, she appeared extraordinarily tall for a Chinese woman, and she was possessed of a baffling beauty. Yet, certainly the formula of loveliness prevailing from time immemorial in the Flowery Kingdom did not fit her in every item. "Eyebrows like the leaf of the willow, eyes like the kernel of an apricot, a mouth like a cherry, a face shaped like a melon seed," were phrases too regular to describe that which made her at once a charm and a puzzle. Yet one last simile—"a waist like a poplar and the willow in the wind"—poetic justice might have granted her, for from the waves of her black hair to the arch of her foot she was all lissomeness and undulation.

At the moment, only she of the three persons in the courtyard felt any grimness in the "fitt" of the coffin; only she felt its sardonic humour. And this discernment in her was of a piece with the ripple in her hair, the English stubbornness of her chin, and the blue in the iris of her eye, although for the most part she held her eyes half closed like a Buddha's. When she did that, the lids appeared quite plainly almond-shaped. It was

only
the S
scorn
of su
St
the c
old w
son.
ness.

"S
"A

back
appea

Th
ous s
ing lo

"G

Ya
old m
tooth

"G

Do yo
of an
tined

all thi
tleness

gods
rubbe
her fe

Ma
her g
in the

consum
that a
natur

such a
appro