

A Coat of Many Colors

Ke Leang lived in Canton. When he was a boy he worked in the rice fields on the low grounds near the city; and when he grew to be a man he was still working there. Although the work was hard and the pay small Ke Leang was well content, and every day gave thanks for having been born in China—it being directly under the eye of heaven—instead of in some remote part of the world where the people never hear of the teachings of Confucius, are ignorant of their duty toward one another, and live like savages.

Ke Leang was married. His wife had been adopted by his parents when she was a baby, for the special purpose of fitting her to be the wife of Ke Leang. Therefore Ke Leang had had the opportunity, which not all Chinamen have, of becoming acquainted with his wife before marrying her.

Ke Leang had loved her all his life, but even if he had not loved her he would have married her, for such was the wish of his parents, and Ke Leang always carried out the wishes of his parents. He had been taught that the duty of endeavoring to afford happiness to one's parents is the very highest of all duties.

One day a "red-headed" youth, who had come across the seas in a merchant ship, told Ke Leang that instead of continually looking backward and admiring one's parents and ancestors, a man should fix his mind on himself, think for himself, and so act that his parents, instead of wishing and requiring him to admire them, would wonder at and admire him.

"That is what we believe in the west," said the red-headed stranger, "and that is why we in the west progress and you in the east stand still."

Ke Leang pondered long over these words, and the next time he met the red-headed youth, he said:

"You are wrong. Where is there another country like China? Is not our empire the oldest under the heavens, and does not a bad empire fall and a good empire stand? Does not our history extend farther into the ages than that of any other country? Have we not the wisest philosophers, and what are all things worth in comparison with the truths which they have taught us? If we were to follow the advice of you foreigners, if our sons were to consider themselves wiser than their parents, the result would be anarchy and confusion all over the land."

And the red-headed youth answered "Stuff and nonsense! You know nothing about other countries, so how can you judge whether or not yours is the best? And what difference does it make to you whether your empire is the oldest or the youngest under the heavens when you yourself are poor and wretched? What good can all the old philosophers do you? They cannot even teach you to be discontented with your miserable existence and to strive for a better."

Ke Leang smiled cheerfully.

"They teach us to be contented," said he; "and if one is contented, one has true wisdom. Why should we be discontented when we know that all things happen according to the will of heaven, and that the doctrines of heaven are not selfish?"

The red-headed youth turned away.

"It is useless," thought he, "to attempt to influence the bigoted Chinese. They do not seem to perceive what is reasonable and what is unreasonable. However, like the rest of us, Ke Leang will never live up to the sentiments he expresses. We all like to talk and discuss our sentiments, but few, if any of us, see the propriety of acting them out."

Ke Leang went home and spoke to his father, who was sitting on his door-step with his grandson, Ke Leang's son, in his arms.

"Honored father," said Ke Leang, "we live upon the receipts of my daily labor, and that is so small that I can put nothing by with which, in case of my sickness, to maintain our family. I wish my son to become a scholar, yet if we have barely sufficient to live on, how can I provide for his education? I must find some work which will pay me better than digging in the rice-fields."

"Very well," said his father. "Only do not try to feel after a pin at the bottom of the ocean."

Thus you will see that, for all his philosophic replies to the red-headed youth, Ke Leang was no longer satisfied with his humble lot.

He was neither avaricious nor covetous, but he was no longer contented. Like Oliver Twist, he wanted more—not much, but more. His desires were moderate—just to save enough to buy a little farm in the

north country; just to be rich enough to afford a college training for his son.

He himself, as the son of a poor man, had received but a scanty education—a couple of years in a poor school, and then work in the rice-fields; but he was ambitious that his son should win honors as a scholar, should go to Peking, and glorify his ancestors by being appointed an officer of the government for in "heathen" China honors and distinction are given as the reward of learning and ability, and without regard to wealth or family influence.

Ku Yum, Ke Leang's wife, was very sad. She rocked her baby to sleep, and waited on Ke Leang's father and mother, but the sun had ceased to shine for her, for Ke Leang had gone far away over the big water, and many a moon must wax and wane before he could return. When some one asked Ku Yum why Ke Leang had gone far away, she would say, "To make a great fortune," and then she would smile and clap her hands, but most of the time she remembered only that Ke Leang was away, and she did not think about the great fortune.

Ke Leang's parents also grieved on account of their son's absence, but they did not murmur, for they had given him their blessing before he had started on his journey, and they were sure he would return, for so he had said; and when he had returned, he had said, "I will be home in a month."

Ke Yuen, Ke Leang's baby, was the only happy person belonging to the Ke household. It lay in its mother's lap on the floor, and laughed and crowed and grew fatter and rounder every day, and when its mother, weeping, said that perhaps its father would never come back, it kicked its chubby legs, laughed all the more, and did not care a grain of rice. And it was for its sake that father was an exile—such a hard-hearted Chinese baby!

Ke Yuen, besides being naturally a very cunning baby, with bright black eyes pointed at the corners, and a round, shaven head with just a little tuft of hair in the shape of a peach growing in the center, was made to look even more cunning by a coat formed of squares of thin, colored cloth; and on each of these squares was stamped the figure of a bird or flower or a man or an animal. It was veritably a coat of many colors and many designs, and had been made by Ke Leang himself, who had delighted in seeing his son roll round in it.

But the coat of many colors only served to remind Ku Yum that Ke Leang was far away. It was a very long time since she had received news from him, and Ke Leang's father and mother were weak and needed ginseng and chicken broth, and she had not that which would satisfy their needs.

So she took the coat of many colors and sold it. Then she bought the ginseng and some sticks of incense, and steeping the ginseng in hot water, gave it to the old people to drink. Also she lighted the sticks of incense before an image of Kuang Ing Huk, the Chinese goddess of mercy, and prayed to the spirit which she believed was in the spirit to help her husband to make his fortune quickly, that she might not have to wait too long for his home-coming.

Meanwhile Ke Leang was in San Francisco. While crossing the great Pacific he had fallen ill with what the Chinese call the "devil's fever," and on his arrival in America he was so sick and delirious that, instead of being set to work, he had to be taken care of by some of his countrymen. They were very kind, and by their careful nursing succeeded in preventing him from slipping into the "land of shades."

Before long he was well again and found work with a Chinese laundryman, who paid him fair wages. Every week Ke Leang was able to put by a little sum of money.

But a queer thing had happened to Ke Leang. He had lost his memory; that is, he had forgotten a part of his life.

He could remember his childhood and boyhood; he could remember his father and mother as they had appeared to him when he was a boy, and he could remember his wife, but not as his wife, only as a little girl. As to his baby, he had forgotten it altogether.

The men with whom he worked told him how he had been brought to San Francisco; they also told him that he was having a part of his wages deducted every week by his "boss," who was a member of the Chinese company that had been instrumental in bringing him over

More than that they could not tell him, not having seen or known Ke Leang until he had come among them.

Ke Leang himself was under the impression that his father and mother were dead, and that he had begun a new life in a new country. He saved because he saw other Chinamen saving, and because it was natural for him to do so. Once one of the men who worked by his side asked him if he had a wife in China, and Ke Leang had laughed at the idea and answered, "No."

The weeks and months went by; summer was over, winter had come. Ke Leang, who had taken a parcel of washing to one of the big mansions on Van Ness avenue, was returning to his laundry when he felt a hand on his shoulder and heard some one say:

"Why, Ke Leang, you rascal! Are you here, comfortably dressed and looking well fed, and your wife and child and mother and father almost dying of starvation in China? I left Canton about a month ago, and the last I heard from them was that they had had no tidings from you for over six months. What do you mean Ke? I didn't think you were such a bad fellow."

It was the red-headed youth whom Ke Leang had known in China; but Ke Leang failed to recognize him and answered, "I do not know you. What you say has no meaning. I have no wife or child."

The red-headed youth was amazed. "Come, this won't do!" he said, shaking Ke Leang roughly. "I believe in upholding the domestic virtues, and I'll not see you masquerading as a bachelor in America while Ku Yum breaks her heart in China. Come on, you reprobate Chinaman, and learn from me your duty! Ah, Ke Leang, there was a time when you were given to depicting the beauty of virtue. Alas, that base actions should thus contradict noble sentiments!"

Thus talking, half in jest and half in earnest, the red-headed youth hustled Ke Leang along the sidewalk until they came to a hotel. This the red-headed youth entered, drawing Ke Leang after him into a private room.

"Now, Ke Leang, what does this mean?" said he, seating himself.

"I do not know," replied Ke Leang. The answer was true. Ke Leang was bewildered; his head ached strangely. What did the red-headed youth who could talk like a Chinaman mean by questioning him concerning a wife and baby?

"You do not know!" repeated Ernest Macdonald. He gazed keenly and curiously into Ke Leang's face. "I could swear it is Ke Leang," he murmured. "Ke Leang, yet not Ke Leang. He has Ke Leang's halting walk and Ke Leang's features. Yet that mouth and that nose might belong to any Chinaman, and this fellow is paler and thinner than I remember Ke Leang to have been. He does not appear to be shamming when he says that he does not know me. These accidental likenesses deceive one so. I guess I will let the fellow off. Here, Yip Blas, San Fee, Chin Kim, whatever your name may be, good day! You must excuse me for kidnapping you, but I took you for an old friend of mine whose name was Ke Leang. I knew him in Canton, China. If ever you come across such a chap, send him to Dr. Ernest Macdonald at this hotel, and you will be rewarded."

"Ke Leang!" repeated Ke Leang, wondering. "I'm Ke Leang, and I come from Canton."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Ernest Macdonald. He understood at last. Then for half an hour he talked to Ke Leang, hoping to revive the dull memory by questions relative to Ke Leang's home and little stories of Ku Yum and Ke Yuen, but all in vain. Ke Leang could not remember and merely smiled politely and good-humoredly at the eager questions.

After a while Ernest Macdonald rose, went to a cupboard, and took therefrom Ke Yuen's coat of many colors.

"Here is something I found in a Canton store just before I came away," he said. "I liked the colors, and it reminded me of the coat your baby used to wear."

Ke Leang's dull eyes became animated as they rested on the bright garment. Without a word, Ernest Macdonald unfolded and spread it over his knees in such a way that the tracing or picture on each square was plainly visible to Ke Leang, who evinced signs of deep interest.

"Chinese bird," said he, pointing to the figure of a bird on a patch of green.

No answer from Ernest Macdonald. Ke Leang began to handle the coat curiously, to trace with his finger the strange designs he himself had wrought. Ernest Macdonald, doctor of medicine and student of human nature, watched him attentively.

Ke Leang was becoming excited. With his finger on a skillfully drawn

pig, he shouted, for the first time since he had entered the room speaking in English; "Me do that!"

Ernest Macdonald turned a lapel slightly and displayed a small landscape, in the center of which stood what were supposed to be the figures of a man, a woman and a child. Under the figures were written in Chinese characters the names, Ke Leang, Ku Yum and Ke Yuen.

A puzzled expression spread over Ke Leang's face as the picture met his gaze; then he looked at Ernest Macdonald as if seeking an explanation for some thought.

"Do you know what that is, Ke Leang?" he was quietly asked.

The figures bore just enough resemblance to human beings to be distinguished as such, but as Ke Leang's eyes again turned on them, the light of recognition played across his features, and with trembling fingers he touched the characters, saying aloud, "Ke Leang, Ku Yum and Ke Yuen."

As the last word fell from his lips, he snatched the coat up in his arms, and held it as if, instead of being an empty covering, it was indeed his boy, and the tears that could not fall from his eyes were in his voice as he repeated over and over again, "My son, my son, my Ke Yuen!"

So Ke Leang's memory came back to him, and he wrote to Ku Yum, sending her all his savings, and telling her to wait for his coming with patience and hope, for he had overcome a great evil, an evil which had threatened to separate them forever.

It was on the first day of the first month of the year that Ku Yum received the news. How very poor and troubled and sorrowful she had been for a long time past none will ever know, for Chinese women speak little of their troubles and griefs; but how very delightful and happy was she when she heard from her absent one is expressed in the following simple message:

To Ke Leang in America: Now that I know that thou art well, there's springtime in my heart. — From Ku Yum in China.

What Two Charleys Got

Winter comes early and stays late in the northern portions of Penobscot county, Maine; but most of the winter of 1900 had passed when Abel Cushman and his wife set off, with horse and sleigh, to visit Mrs. Cushman's brother, who lived about twenty miles away. They left their boy Charley, aged fourteen, to keep house and care for the cows, sheep and poultry at the barn. And in order that he might not be lonely, they had sent down to Oldtown for his cousin, Charley Stetson, to come up and stay with him.

Mrs. Cushman had cooked food enough for the boys during the week they would be alone. To save them from that mischievous idleness which creeps upon boys when they play all day long, Mr. Cushman set off a section of the woodpile for them to reduce to stove wood. It was a small section, however, hardly more than a cord; they would not be obliged to work on it more than an hour each day.

There was still much snow upon the ground, but on the fourth day after the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Cushman there came a rainstorm which laid the fields bare in spots, raised the brooks and flooded the pond behind the Cushman wood-lot till the water stood a foot deep on the winter ice.

As it chanced, this portion of the state lay near the snow-line; which means that not many miles to the northward there were sleet and snow instead of rain, while to the southward nearly all the snow had gone. Looking north and northwest, Mount Katahdin showed wholly white; to the south the hills lay bare and brown. The rain ceased and the sky cleared in part on the next afternoon. During the following evening, as the two Charleys were popping corn at the sitting-room fireplace, Charley Stetson thought that he heard a queer noise up the chimney.

"Sounds like geese," he said. "Lots of geese a long way off."

He continued hearing it as he shook the corn, and at last the two boys ran to the outside door to listen. Then, indeed, they heard geese in earnest. The sky, the fields, and the whole surrounding country appeared to be full of geese!

It was too dark to see them, however, and for a long time the two lads stood at the door, and listened to the clamor. For not only were flocks passing over, but other flocks appeared to be circling about, in confusion or alarm.

"Wild geese flying north," said Charley Cushman. "They fly every spring, but I never heard so many before." Neither had any one else, not even the oldest inhabitant, although this region is in the line of the great annual spring migration of

wild-geese from the southern coast northward to Hudson Bay.

But this season the unusual meteorological conditions must have been misleading. Finding the earth bare and small ponds sealed with ice, the flocks in advance turned back at the small lakes in alarm, or from lack of food; and when these retreating flocks met others coming up from the south great squalling prevailed. The captain ganders loudly abused one another. Somebody had blundered. Nobody, that is to say, no goose knew what to do; and it ended in many thousands of geese alighting in the fields and all along the streams and ponds on the snow-line.

The flocks were hungry and disturbed, and there was little to eat except grass roots in the fields. The uproar all night was tremendous; the two Charleys hardly closed their eyes, and daylight revealed the fields gray with wild geese. They were literally grubbing up the entire farm.

Mr. Cushman owned a gun, but he had taken good care to leave no ammunition in the house. The boys, unable to shoot the geese, attempted to drive them out of the fields. The flocks rose as they ran toward them and flew away to adjoining fields, but other flocks soon took their place.

During the afternoon, snow-squalls swept down from Katahdin and a cold wave came on; it was bitingly frosty and bleak. The next morning the temperature at Mattawamkeag was ten degrees below zero. All the open puddles of water froze solid. The geese probably had turned southward; there were few to be seen at daylight, but the boys heard a great

clamor at the pond, beyond the wood lot, and wrapping themselves up warm, they went through the woods to see what was going on.

Several hundred geese were on the pond, some flying about over it, others rising in the air, and still others flapping wildly on the surface of the ice; all were raising a prodigious clamor.

As the boys drew nearer they saw that many of the geese, although flapping powerfully, were unable to rise, and soon the truth of the situation was manifest. More than a hundred geese were frozen into the ice, where they had sat in the water, and could not extricate their legs. The cold wave had trapped them cruelly.

The boys attempted to seize one, but the fettered bird fought stoutly with beak and wings, squalling defiance. By coming up from behind, however, and catching the goose around the neck, they mastered it. But the boys could not pull the bird out of the ice.

"Let's put the lamb crate on the sled, yoke the steers and drive over there and get all of them. I will hold their necks and you chop them out, one at a time. We will put them in the crate, haul them home, and put them in the barn. And won't Uncle Abe stare when he gets home!"

They made two trips to the pond with the sled and lamb crate, and actually secured more than ninety wild geese, which they drew home and turned loose in the old barn—the greatest capture of the kind on record. That barn was a noisy place!

Mr. Cushman and his wife arrived home on the following day. Their surprise was genuine as well as agreeable. Baked geese figured prominently on the farmhouse table for some time, and half a dozen billowy beds and soft pillows form a lasting souvenir of the catch.

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