

AUTUMNAL REVERIES

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Autumnal Reveries  
by  
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Translated by Patia Isaka and the Author

wears our years better?

No reason to depart from the original dramatic beginning.

AUTUMNAL REVERIES

X

"Now, Miss Lin," Madame Hua asked the young beautician,

① tell me the truth, be frank; which of us is the perennial, Between Ambassador lady and me, which one of us looks the more durable? Madame Wan, the Ambassador's lady or I? She was reclining

Madame Hua on a high-backed red velvet chaise-longue in her boudoir. when she put the question to the young beautician, Miss Lin, sat on a low pouffe at her feet, giving her a

chaise-longue is a "high-backed sofa" (original). Might omit to avoid too obvious a contrast to "low pouffe".

manicure, on her lap a box of small scissors of all sorts, eight of them.

"How could Madame ask such things!" Miss Lin protested, raising her head. "How can there be any comparison between Madame and Madame Wan?" she added with a snigger.

Too many italics words seem artificial

"Why, she's even been to our Soothing Fragrance Beauty Institute for surgery."

"Really?" Madame Hua sat up; she had just finished her facial and already her powder and rouge were smoothly applied, her eyebrows plucked to a fine line and pencilled all the way up to her temples. "Now when did that happen?"

"Well, and please don't tell anyone I said so, Madame," Miss Lin lowered her voice. "It was last spring, Dr. Chou was the one who gave her a face-lift, I'm not sure if something went wrong with the operation or if her skin was just no good to begin with, but her forehead's begun to sag again recently. Every time I go to give her a facial, she takes it out on me — the Ambassador's lady is

so hard to please!" Miss Lin shook her head and sighed, laughing. Madame Hua began to laugh, too. She leaned back on the chaise-longue, her head back, her eyes closed, and breathed a little sigh.

"~~It's~~ <sup>I'm</sup> not just ~~that I'm~~ <sup>in front of</sup> saying this ~~to~~ Madame."

Miss Lin laid down her scissors and lifted Madame Hua's right hand, her face filled with envy and admiration. "Of all the ladies I've seen in Taipei Madame's complexion has got to be the finest! I've never seen anything like it ~~before, that anybody could have~~ <sup>a</sup> skin with such <sup>a</sup> beautiful <sup>natural</sup> color!"

Madame Hua extended her left hand and studied it with satisfaction, eyes narrowed. The hand had already been manicured, her fingers, snowwhite as a handful of spring scallions, <sup>and</sup> tapering, pearl-sheened, were gracefully raised, on her ring finger a sea-green emerald, jade ring, of "What's so beautiful about it now . . ." she sighed, smiling.

"Madame certainly knows how to take care of herself! <sup>you</sup> ~~her~~ skin has stayed so delicate and soft." Miss Lin gingerly drew Madame Hua's right hand back to her knee.

"I haven't paid that much attention to it, really; there, look." She <sup>pursed her lips</sup> ~~pouted~~ in the direction of the French-style dressing-table, milk-white and gold-trimmed, <sup>arrayed</sup> ~~from~~ one end to the other <sup>with</sup> ~~a display of glass~~ bottles and jars

*of all shapes and hues.*  
 Irradiant with rainbow colors. "Those things there are  
 just for show — <sup>to me</sup> they were all sent from abroad by my  
 daughter; that girl <sup>never stops trying</sup> has tried hundred of ways <sup>make</sup> to get me to  
beautify myself."

"Madame is really fortunate to have such a devoted daughter."

"Devoted indeed! <sup>nonsense</sup> It's just <sup>"The other"</sup> one of her little-girl whims!" Madame Hua laughed. "That very day, in front of everybody, Madame Wan <sup>tried to</sup> had made fun of me, calling me 'the chic Grandma.' Why! if anyone's chic, it's her! Blue and green, <sup>blue and green</sup> painting on her eyeshadow like that — "

"Isn't she, though!" Miss Lin echoed. "I've had to massage her under the eyes over a hundred times every sitting, and she still wasn't pleased. She's got a bad case of the bags, you know; they'll show if she doesn't wear eyeshadow." She and Madame Hua broke out laughing again. Miss Lin held Madame Hua's daintily-manicured hand in hers, turning it this way and that as if she were appreciating a work of art. From the vanity box she pulled out a rack of twelve bottles of nail enamel in twelve different shades.

"What color dress will Madame wear today?"

"That one, there." Madame Hua pointed, <sup>On the bed was laid out</sup> a Manchu <sup>ch'i-pao \*</sup> gown <sup>with</sup> of Indian silk, black wavy designs on a royal blue background was spread on the bed.

\* Prefer either "gown" or ch'i-pao with footnote. Seems to me the word occurs often enough in the book to be introduced in transliteration for Chinese flavor. (See Renditions version of "Yui Hush-yen!")

*"Burgundy to go with tea!"*

"Royal blue, and ~~burgundy~~, what does Madame think?"

Miss Lin drew out a burgundy shade.

"I'm wearing jade today; I wonder, will it stand out?"

Madame Hua took the bottle of enamel and held it against the large emerald jade ring on her finger, *comparing the two.*

"This shade of red isn't flashy at all; it goes just perfect with jade."

"This will do, then." Madame Hua held out her right hand and leaned back on the chaise-longue again, her eyes closed, in repose.

*"Lotus" more correct + Chinese*  
 "Madame," *Lotus* Lily, her maid, came in, *and announced,* "Ambassador Wan's lady is just telephoning again to ask you to please hurry."

*she announced.* "Madame Ch'in and Madame Hsüeh are already there; Madame Wan says will Madame please come to the Wan *residence* ~~mansion~~ right away."

"I've never seen the like, *of it, what's the* ~~Such a~~ rush! She'll be the death of me yet!" Madame Hua laughed, her eyes still closed. "Go tell Madame Wan I'll ~~certainly~~ be there in half an hour — *er, Lotus* Lily — "

*Lotus* Lily stopped at the door and turned around. Madame Hua sat up and thought for a moment.

"If Madame Wan asks, just tell her I'm changing. Don't say Miss Lin is here."

"Very good, Ma'am," *Lotus* Lily replied with a smile, and went out.

Madame Hua<sup>a</sup> and Miss Lin exchanged a look and grinned. Miss Lin replaced <sup>all pairs of her</sup> the eight scissors in the box.

"Those mahjong fiends!" Madame Hua shook her head with a sigh and rose gracefully. "Every day they come to snatch me away, <sup>really,</sup> the way they pester <sup>me!</sup> it's driving me crazy."

Miss Lin hurried over to pick <sup>up</sup> the royal blue ~~silk~~ <sup>chi-p'ao</sup> Manchu gown <sup>up</sup> from the bed; holding it in both hands she brought it to Madame Hua and assisted her to dress.

"Miss Lin, Take a look at this! I'm not really pleased with it." Madame Hua sat down at the dressing-table, looking into the mirror, her head turning this way and that, <sup>and</sup> she frowned. <sup>"I was over at</sup> "I've just been to the Cent Joies Belles today. That Number Thirteen of mine got sick again; it's a new hairdresser who did <sup>my hair.</sup> this for me. He practically combed it to death!"

"Let me tease it a little, <sup>bit,</sup> and see if Madame likes it. <sup>better.</sup>"

Miss Lin selected a styling-comb from the dressing-table and began to comb Madame Hua's high-set Imperial Favorite <sup>style</sup> chignon. Madame Hua opened a jewel-case on the table; inside was arranged a set of emerald jade: a pair of pearl-size jade ear-pendants, a jade link-bracelet, <sup>and</sup> a phoenix-rampant brooch the size of a begonia leaf.

Madame Hua picked up the brooch; fingering the cool, smooth jade, she pinned it on the front of her gown; <sup>in</sup> the mirror ~~she saw~~ her hand <sup>was</sup> snowwhite against the royal blue silk, ~~in it~~ <sup>the</sup> a green luminous phoenix <sup>in</sup> her ~~spring-scillion~~ <sup>slender</sup> fingers, the finger-tips as red as drops of blood.

"Oh — <sup>there some</sup> are they there again?" Madame Hua asked, her eyes raised, ~~there was~~ a faint quiver in her voice, <sup>the</sup> ~~her~~ eyes squinting as ~~her~~ fingers ran through the hair on the upper part of her right temple.

"Only one or two strands," Miss Lin answered, her voice hushed. "I'll try and smooth it out for you; then it won't be noticeable."

With utmost care Miss Lin gave Madame Hua's hair several light brushstrokes. "Does that look all right now, Madame?"

Madame Hua leaned closer to the mirror; turning her head to one side she took a good long look at herself; <sup>then</sup> ~~finally~~, gently, she caressed the hair at her right temple.

"Well," she said at last, wistfully, "let's leave it at that. Thank you, Miss Lin."



\* \* \* \* \*

Madame Hua walked out into the garden; a breath of chill wind caught her head on, pulled <sup>ing</sup> her long autumn coat open. Immediately she fastened it and slipped on her pearl-gray silk gloves. In the garden, a fall of evening sun poured down on the lawn. Already the tips of the Korean grass were tinted brown; on the stone path leading to the main gate, a few fallen leaves whirled about, rustling in the wind. As Madame Hua walked along the path, all of a sudden a wave of cool fragrance assailed her. She looked back, <sup>and her eyes were greeted by,</sup> a sweep of ~~wide-open~~ <sup>flourishing</sup> "Handful-of-Snows" <sup>that</sup> leaped and tumbled by the east corner of the wall. She halted in spite of herself and hesitated a moment, as if she'd just thought of something; finally she turned and went over to the flowers. She stooped and inhaled deeply. ~~Those several dozen~~ <sup>s of</sup> waist-high chrysanthemums, <sup>great</sup> ~~one ball~~ <sup>of them,</sup> after another, clusters upon clusters, spewed forth crystal puffs as big as your fist, of a feathery white just like freshly-fallen snowflakes. She drew near to a big white mum and smelled it. Everybody says this is the superior white chrysanthemum in Taiwan; it's <sup>has</sup> even won a special award at the Flower Show in New Park; it's a little too delicate, though. They were planted

Isn't there some  
name for this  
kind of grass -  
Zossia (?)  
or something?

<sup>at first</sup>  
~~just~~ last year and almost all of them withered and died,  
 so she told the gardener to mulch them with chicken-  
 feather ashes all spring long, and then they came back to  
 life again. You'd never have thought they'd flourish so  
 magnificently, all at once! No wonder the last time  
 Pearl Wan was here, when these ~~A~~ "Handful-of-Snows" had  
 just begun to bud, she complained: "Madame Hua, are those  
 chrysanthemums of yours really that superior? You

can't <sup>you</sup> bear to part with one or two for me to practise <sup>use</sup> in  
 my flower-arranging? <sup>ments</sup>" So. Madame Wan is taking Japanese  
 lessons. Madame Wan is learning the tea ceremony.

And now Madame Wan is practising flower arranging! And

with a Kyoko-san, mind you. Pearl Wan — that woman,

what could she possibly understand about the tea ceremony?

<sup>and</sup> Flower arranging? Why, she's got <sup>herself a</sup> ~~an entire~~ houseful of  
 pots, jars, jugs, <sup>and</sup> cups — all <sup>bought in</sup> ~~direct from~~ Japan, she

said, Japanese goods are so well made, nowadays! Tokyo

has become unbelievably prosperous since the war! How

odd, the Japanese, these days <sup>why</sup>, even their looks have

changed for the better! As if she's terrified people

won't know Ambassador Wan has just been assigned to Japan.

Even when she walks, even when she pours tea, from a pot,

she has to bend over and hunch her shoulders, bowing up

and down, hands clasped, I vow, <sup>in her every movement she</sup> her whole body practically

↳ looking every inch the Nipponese wench.

(may omit?)

STET

*reminds you of a Nipponese wench.*  
 gives off the Japanese wench. Don't tell me I have to  
 surrender these really superior "Handful-of-Snows" to her  
<sup>to</sup> and be ravaged? Madame Hua plucked a double-calyx  
 chrysanthemum, the twin blossoms quivering in the wind.  
 But how well she knows Pearl Wan, that vain woman with a  
 tongue sharp enough to <sup>hurt</sup> kill anybody; if you give her a  
 flower the least little bit too small you can stake your  
<sup>be sure</sup> life on it she'll <sup>needle you for it.</sup> make fun of you, "Chic Grandma" indeed!  
<sup>become</sup> As if she hasn't turned into a proper grannie herself. *= grandmother*  
 Madame Hua stepped into the flower-grove and looked around;  
 in the center she noticed one or two especially abundant  
 stalks; she walked forward, brushing twigs and leaves  
 aside with her hand; under all those luxuriant blossoms  
 she was startled to find there lay many flowers that had  
 already rotted away and died. Some were withered and  
 blackened; white mold had grown on them, and one by one  
 they hung on the twigs like rotten dumplings; some had  
 just started to droop and their petals seemed to have  
 rusted yellow. A few of the rotted blossoms, spotted and  
 streaked, were covered with crawling "chrysanthemum tigers"  
 chewing at the flowers' hearts, from <sup>which</sup> the flowers' hearts  
 kept dripping a murky amber juice. A gust of wind whipped  
 by; mingled with the cool fragrance Madame Hua could smell  
 the rank, pungent odor of rotting plants; <sup>H</sup> her heart

gave a jolt; she vaguely remembered those few days; his room, too, was filled with a strange odor like this one; she watched over him at his bedside and saw the doctor stick a rubber tube into that cancerous tumor on his throat, swollen and shiny, all black, drawing pus from it day and night. On his bedside table, in that white porcelain gall-bladder vase, were stuck three white chrysanthemums, each the size of a ricebowl; she had picked them in the garden herself and placed them there. <sup>2</sup> Those hundred or more "Handful-of-Snows" <sup>in their garden</sup> were all famous species transplanted from the Mountain of Evening Glow Repose. That autumn people all said after the Japanese devils were all chased out the crabs in Yangch'eng Lake <sup>suddenly fattened,</sup> all <sup>and</sup> got fat at once, even the chrysanthemums in Nanking City blossomed more luxuriantly than ever. The day he led his army into the city of Nanking, in the streets old men and women wept and laughed, <sup>cheering and</sup> all wiping away their tears; the noise of firecrackers exploding all over the city was enough to deafen you. She bowed laughing, too, and said to him, "Welcome, <sup>home,</sup> General! <sup>triumphant regions</sup> Welcome to you and you lead your Troops in Triumph back to Court —"

He put his arm through hers; his military cape flared high out in the wind; the sword by his side shining and <sup>clanging</sup> ringing; his riding-boots with their white brass spurs clicked exultantly, <sup>holding her,</sup> he walked her into the garden;

he raised a cup of <sup>fiery</sup> heated wine and made a toast <sup>to her</sup> to her lips, his face all smiles, <sup>ing</sup> calling her; <sup>to</sup> in a low and gentle voice, Yün-hsiang —

At that instant, <sup>behind him</sup> ~~the~~ all around the garden those hundred or more full-blooming <sup>that filled the garden</sup> A-Handful-of-Snows all waved behind him like a snow sea <sup>in a sea of snow.</sup> of roaring, galloping white breakers. That autumn, people all said Even the chrysanthemums had blossomed more luxuriantly than ever —

\* \* \* \* \*

"Madame, the car's already brought round."

Madame Hua raised her head and saw Huang Yu-hsin the old gardener, standing on the stone path, white eyebrows, white at the temples, shivering, his back bent, and in his hand a bamboo broom for sweeping <sup>the</sup> fallen leaves. Madame Hua hesitated a moment and abstractedly picked another chrysanthemum; she stepped out of the flower-grove and walked towards the main gate, <sup>the</sup> a large bunch of white chrysanthemums glowing at her bosom.

"Huang Yu-hsin — " Madame Hua walked a few steps and stopped.

"Yes, Madame," Huang Yu-hsin replied, staying his broom.

"Go and trim those chrysanthemums a little; quite a few have wilted already."

↑ Seems to me a weak word to end on.  
The Chinese 已 是 is taken care of by the present participial form "have —". But maybe this is a trivial point & my ear is oversensitive!