## XV. The Last Chance

W. Somerset Maugham

It was pathetically obvious that she had come to China to be married, and what made it almost tragic was that not a single man in the treaty port was ignorant of the fact. She was a big woman with an ungainly figure; her hands and feet were large; she had a large nose, indeed all her features were large; but her blue eyes were fine. She was perhaps a little too conscious of them. She was a blonde and she was thirty. In the daytime when she wore sensible boots, a short skirt, and a slouch hat, she was personable; but in the evening, in blue silk to enhance the colour of her eyes, in a frock cut by heaven knows what suburban dressmaker from the models in an illustrated paper, when she set herself out to be alluring she was an object that made you horribly ill-at-ease. She wished to be all things to all unmarried men. She listened brightly while one of them talked of shooting and she listened gaily when another talked of the freight on tea. She clapped her hands with girlish excitement when they discussed the races which were to be run next week. She was desperately fond of dancing, with a young American, and she  made him promise to take her to a baseball match; but dancing wasn’t the only thing she cared for (you can have too much of a good thing) and, with the elderly, but single, taipan of an important firm, what she simply loved was a game of golf. She was willing to be taught billiards by a young man who had lost his leg in the war and she gave her sprightly attention to the manager of a bank who told her what he thought of silver. She was not much interested in the Chinese, for that was a subject which was not very good form in the circles in which she found herself, but being a woman she could not help being revolted at the way in which Chinese women were treated.

“You know, they don’t have a word to say about who they’re going to marry,” she explained. “It’s all arranged by go-betweens and the man doesn’t even see the girl till he’s married her. There’s no romance or anything like that. And as far as love goes ...”

Words failed her. She was a thoroughly good-natured creature. She would have made any of those men, young or old, a perfectly good wife. And she knew it.