The Wongs moved along the street in a body, Daddy first with Younger Brother in hand, and Mama arm-in-arm with her daughters, one on either side according to established habit. They had not gone many steps before they met one of Daddy's acquaintances, who addressed him familiarly by his first name.

"Brother Hong, seldom do I see your family and you together on a little expedition," said Daddy's friend.

"Yes, Uncle Bing; have you met my inferior woman?" Mama nodded, smiling ever so slightly, and remained absolutely silent.

Daddy continued, with beaming pride, "And this is my baby son!" He flourished his arms at the little figure by his side.

Uncle Bing complimented Daddy: "What a fine boy; what intelligent features! Here is a piece of money to buy some candy." He tucked a coin in Forgiveness' hand in accordance with customary practice. To be the baby of the family, and a boy at that, qualified one for the sole honor of receiving special gifts from one's parents or friends or relatives.

Daddy turned to the girls. "And these are my small daughters, Jade Precious Stone and Jade Snow. Address Uncle Bing!" Daddy commanded.

Jade Precious Stone and Jade Snow obediently complied with the expected courtesy: "Uncle Bing, have you had your dinner?"

"Thank you, I have. Brother Hong, your Thousand Gold [daughters] are certainly growing fast," replied Uncle Bing.

They made their farewells and continued on their way. As they passed an herb store a block farther, Daddy suddenly said, "Oh, I remember that I must see Brother Sing about a school matter. Take Forgiveness a minute and wait for me here. I shall be back right away." And he left Mama with the three children standing in the darkened street.

Mama exploded, "Your father always does that when we go out. That is why I dislike to accompany him. Once he left me, and in his absent-mindedness forgot to come back. So I walked on and on alone, and finally went to a foreign movie in the American section of town. When I returned home, I found he was consumed with anxiety, and had called upon our relatives to look for me. But still that hasn't improved him! As long as he assists in so many com-
munity affairs besides running his business, he is likely to be absentminded."

This evening, however, Daddy did not forget his family, and in
due course they went on together to the vacant store, which was
only five blocks from their present home, and on the same street.
Daddy opened a door, and his family descended a steep flight of
wooden stairs into a two-story basement, which was cold, damp,
pitch-dark, and smelled unpleasant. Daddy picked out their way
with the beam from a solitary flashlight.

In the eerie, lonely light, Jade Snow clutched Daddy's rough,
hardened hand, and saw that they were in a room which ran the
length of the narrow building. The dusty foundation walls were of
rough brick, and the unpainted rafters were hung with spider webs.
Jade Snow shivered, wondering how Daddy had found such a place
and why on earth he would want to look at it twice! She looked at
him. His face held no horror. In fact, as he talked now his expres-
sion was one of imagination and controlled excitement. He was
selling the place to them, but he was already sold himself.

"We can cut some windows here and here. This basement is
below street level, it is true, but it adjoins an empty lot which is
level with the floor down below. Therefore, we can get air and light
and some little sunshine by cutting small windows through this
wall which opens on the lot. Of course, we will always run the risk
of someone building next door, but we must trust the future to
God.

"Now on this upper floor," Daddy swept on, "we can erect parti-
tions for our rooms, and downstairs we can install our sewing ma-
chines for factory work. I have measured the place and have drawn
a tentative plan."

With his family clustered around, he directed the beam of his
flashlight onto a piece of cardboard on which he had drawn to
scale a plan of their future quarters, all neatly labeled with measure-
ments and names.

After studying the plan, Daddy began pacing off imaginary rooms
to show Mama how the measurements would work out. As they
talked about the kitchen, Jade Snow began to catch a little of
Daddy's enthusiasm, and to think of the cold expanse in terms of
working and living.

Daddy and Mama finished making some readjustments in Daddy's
plan. Mama kept saying that the rooms must follow a "central
unity."

As they made their way home, Daddy figured for Mama. "The
rent there will be about fifty dollars less than what we have been
paying. It will cost us about a thousand dollars to move from the
old place and to reinstall and rewire all our machinery. It will cost
us at least another thousand to partition and paint the place and to
install proper plumbing. Thus we will have to live there for some
years to recover our investment, but we shall be ahead after that."

In the following months, Daddy directed the renovation of the
basement. He hired some Negroes to chisel out part of the brick
walls for windows, and supervised the work of carpenters, plumbers,
electricians, and painters. Finally the Wongs moved into their new
quarters.

Daddy had asked Mama to choose the colors, which she did
without hesitation. The dirty cobwebs on the rafters and brick walls
had been replaced by fresh whitewash. The partitioned-off kitchen
was a warm red-brown with battleship linoleum on the floor. It was
fitted with a new sink and a beautiful, large, overhauled second-
hand stove—complete with oven, warming oven, and broiler, as well
as four burners—which Daddy had bought on McAllister Street for
six dollars. Never before had the Wongs had an oven.

The bedroom shared by Mama, Daddy, and Forgiveness, and the
dining-living room next to it were painted a bright watermelon
pink, with blue-green woodwork. Jade Snow and Jade Precious
Stone shared built-in bunk beds in a room with cream-colored walls
and brown linoleum floors. Older Brother had a study and adjoining
to himself, which he painted apple-green accented with
metallic silver. On his walls were tacked numerous bright-colored
banners with college names. Each bedroom had a window, and the
living-dining room had two.

Really the new home was not so bad as it had at first appeared.
But Jade Snow wondered how Daddy could foresee so clearly the
possibilities of a basement which had been unrented for years be-
cause it was rumored that someone had hanged himself there. The
rent was low because people said that the building was haunted.
But Daddy, who believed in none of the usual superstitions of the
Chinese, always said that anyone who believed in Jesus Christ could defy any ghost; and in accordance with his conviction he had once spent the night in a room where someone had hanged herself. He said that it was one of the nights he had slept best.

The part of the upper floor that was not taken up by living rooms was given over to a fenced-in office area, finishing machines and packing tables. The main production and bulk of the work, however, was done on the floor below, to which the bales of denim material were slid down a portable wooden chute through the sidewalk opening.

The manufacturing process now became, even more than it had been before, an inseparable part of Jade Snow's life. As much a part of home as her bedroom were the sewing machines she passed before she came to her bedroom door. She talked above the din of a factory full of motors and machines in operation, and practically breathed in rhythm to the running stitches. Daddy's garment manufacturing operations were so much a part of her that she never gave them conscious thought.

When a cutting order was received, Daddy laid his material smoothly down the length of the cutting table, layer on layer, usually piling up a stack of five dozen. Then he rolled out on top a heavy, brown paper stencil which was perforated in the outlines of the pattern. In his careful way he had managed to include in the stencil all the pockets, belt-loops, flies, trouser legs, and other necessary parts for the exact number of each size in the lot, as specified in the jobber's order. To Jade Snow this achievement seemed miraculous. Not only did Daddy end up with the correct number and faultless fit; he also saved as much material as possible. In cutting as in other activities, Daddy wasted nothing. Daddy always tried to save something. Daddy was one of a very few men who knew how to mark stencils so expertly; sometimes other cutters brought their patterns to consult with him.

After the stencil was laid, white tale was dusted over the holes of the outline. When the stencil was lifted, it was time to cut! The cutting machine was a roaring menace, its vertical blade vibrating, its gleaming edge sharpened even more keenly than Daddy's old-fashioned razor-blade. With his hand on the steering handle, Daddy guided the machine steadily and skillfully through the piled depths of the material. One wrong move would be multiplied by sixty pieces, and Daddy could neither economically nor morally afford that loss. After cutting, bundles of trouser parts with their trimmings were assembled by size and distributed to the seamstresses.

After preassembling by the seamstresses, it was Mama's job to pick up the semifinished overalls and run their main seam through her double-seaming machine, which joined two pieces of material by rolling in the raw edges completely and locking them with twin needles. The various bundles were then returned to the seamstresses for final hemming. Since all overalls had to pass through Mama's hands before completion, she was constantly lifting heavy bundles, but she never complained.

When the hemming was finished, the overalls were taken to the upper level for final finishing with buttonholes and bar-tack reinforcements. These expensive special machines were as necessary to complete one pair of pants as a thousand pairs, and for many years Daddy was burdened with the payments on them; somehow these had to be squeezed out of his earnings before he could feed and clothe his family.

Completed overalls were picked up by the "folders," who cut loose threads, examined the work for damage or incompletions, folded the overalls neatly, and tied them in bundles of a dozen each, preparatory for final pickup.

Pickup was a dramatic event during these basement factory days. The sidewalk entrance was flung open, and the various Wongs stationed themselves along the steep stairs. The overalls were ready, stacked according to their lots. Daddy would pick up a bundle from the stack, pass it to Mama, who would throw it to Jade Snow perched somewhere on the stairs, who would throw it up to Older Brother on the sidewalk. Older Brother, who could throw the farthest with unerring aim, would land the bundle in the truck.

From this family factory Daddy's overalls were sent to the jobber, who distributed them all over the United States to department stores and mail-order houses. Jade Snow often wondered where they all went, and sometimes she thought she recognized the overalls or jeans she saw on strangers or friends.

After the Wongs moved, Daddy's factory continued to be idle most of the year, even as he was faced with meeting the expenses of moving. He threw together all his funds for rent, utilities, pay-
ments on machinery. He went into debt. He borrowed from his jobber. And he stopped buying groceries.  

Jade Snow was barely eleven in this depression year of 1933.

Some of their relatives who had relied wholly on wages for income became unemployed and had to apply for government relief.

Daddy faced the grim times with Mama. They were exploring ways for more severe economy, and in their discussion, Mama said, “Jade Snow is old enough to take over my housework so that I can do as much sewing as possible. Perhaps you can go out and solicit odd work which I can do at home. It is time for our daughter to learn the meaning of money, the necessity for thrift, and how to keep house. I shall provide her with the money for groceries.

“But it is my desire not to apply for relief, even though we may need it. I do not want my children to experience getting anything without first working for it; for, they may become selfish, and a selfish person can wander the world over and still starve for lack of food. Selfishness often starts with a spirit of dependency; therefore I want my children to learn to cope with the world, and to understand that they get what they want only after working for it.”

Mama had spoken, and had spoken beyond her customary habit in both length and determination. When she gave her verdict on these rare occasions, Daddy silently accepted her judgment.

Almost overnight, the life of Jade Snow, heretofore characterized by gravity keyed to propriety, became weighted with the gravity which only anxiety over money can cause.

Now, every day after school she reported immediately to Mama, who gave her the usual fifty cents to purchase groceries for that evening’s dinner and tomorrow’s breakfast. Lunch was composed of leftovers. With prudent management, it was possible to get a small chicken for twenty cents, three bunches of Chinese greens for ten cents, three whole Rex sole or sand dab for ten cents, and about a half pound of pork for the remaining ten cents. The household staples, such as rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, and soap were bought by Daddy.

The small chicken would be cut up, bone and all, into pieces which could be handled by chopsticks, marinated like beef or pork with a standard seasoning of a tablespoon each of flour, soy sauce, sugar, and oil and then placed in a bowl for steaming. This dish would be saved for breakfast. The sole to be served at night would be fried with a little chopped fresh ginger root, which was used more frequently than garlic in the Chinese kitchen. Ginger root in this instance neutralized any fishy odor—no fish was ever cooked without it—but it was also indispensable as an herb for the relief of certain types of colds and stomach or intestinal upsets.

The pork was sliced thin and used to make soup stock in which the greens were cooked. The three bunches of greens made sufficient soup and vegetable for both dinner and breakfast. Together with generous bowls of rice this menu fed three adults and three children.

In shopping for groceries, Jade Snow soon learned which stores carried the best of a particular thing; and after scathing criticism from Mama, she learned how shiny a fresh fish should look and how firm it should feel; how solid a head of cabbage should be before it could be considered solid, how an old turnip looked as distinguished from a young one, how pink good pork was, how crisp a bean sprout should be, and how green a young onion. Jade Snow never tired to bargain, as Mama often did from Chinese habit, or to get more than her money’s worth by begging or flattery, as she heard fellow shoppers do, but under Mama’s watchful checking at home, she certainly had to get her money’s worth.

Most of the Chinese vegetables and condiments were purchased at the small general grocery stores, which were a clutter of canned goods on shelves, huge open baskets of vegetables along the wall, cured sausages, dried sea foods, and pressed ducks hanging overhead, jars of preserves and sauces here and there, sawdust on the floor, and always a fat cat watchful for mice. Mama said that they were much like the grocery stores in China.

The meat market was more American-looking with its long, refrigerated counters and white uniformed butchers. For fish, Jade Snow shopped at the stores which usually sold fish at counters in front and live poultry in the back. At the end of Chinatown, however, was one store which sold poultry without selling fish; it was Uncle Jan’s store.

Uncle Jan was called “Uncle” because he was Daddy’s good friend; also Mama had gone to school with his wife in China. He
was Jade Snow's friend too, and she never had to watch him to be sure she got a good chicken.

Uncle Jan never bothered to make an inviting window display; he had paper sacks piled there. But he had more business than any other poultry store—he supplied restaurants, and many Caucasians came to get their chickens from him. Uncle Jan sometimes sat at his counter taking telephone orders, or making entries in his books, but whenever a customer came in, he jumped to wait on him personally. He was a good salesman without apparent effort, for he loved people. He would ask you how you were cooking your chicken, how many you were feeding, and would give you exactly what you wanted at the most reasonable price in Chinatown. He would put his hand into one of the many cages which filled his store to the ceiling and pull out a loudly protesting chicken. By the feel of its breastbone he could tell you when it had been hatched.

When Jade Snow went to Uncle Jan's, he always smiled happily, showing a flash of gold-crowned teeth. A cigar hung perpetually from a corner of his mouth, a cigar which he chewed but didn't smoke. Here and there on the white tile floor, Jade Snow could see little black wads of chewed tobacco. Uncle Jan inevitably asked, "How is your father? He is always working so hard. But so do we all nowadays, with many mouths to feed. And your mother? I still think of her as 'the little one' from habit, for that is what I used to call her in China." After Jade Snow had murmured replies, he might continue, "Why don't you get some squabs instead of chicken today? They are fat and tender."

Jade Snow would be doubtful, "Mama said chicken."

Uncle Jan would grin and wave his hand, "You tell your mother that I want you to have squabs for dinner."

Jade Snow would ask cautiously, "But the price?"

"Don't even think about the price; I will figure it correctly for you."

While live white squabs were killed and dressed by his wife or employees, Uncle Jan would continue his conversation. He never left Jade Snow waiting alone in his store.

"And what about the oldest sister and your other sisters and brothers? Is the little one growing fast? And what about you? Are you being a good scholar? I always have admired the way your

father has taken his stand on educating his daughters. He is a scholar while we are just businessmen."

As she left, Uncle Jan would call out with the usual courtesy, "Tell your mother that she is welcome to visit us at our home any time she is free."

And Jade Snow would reply, "Thank you, and you feel free to visit us too." She always felt a warm glow after talking to Uncle Jan. At American Thanksgiving, for some years now, they had served turkeys given to them by him, for he had a standing agreement with Daddy that if Daddy would help him sell turkeys on the rush day before Thanksgiving, he would receive as a gift as large a fowl as he desired.

By four in the afternoon Jade Snow had usually completed her shopping and rushed home, where Mama would have started dinner preparations. The rice always received first attention. "Get your rice on the stove first," Mama said, "and if it is cooked well, the other accompaniments are secondary. But if the rice is underdone or improperly cooked, the most delicious meat or vegetables cannot make up for it. The reputation of a good cook begins with good rice."

They had only half an hour to prepare dinner, then only twenty minutes for the meal, before it was time for Jade Snow to grab her Chinese books and be off to the Chinese school with Jade Precious Stone. Returning home at eight o'clock, Jade Snow first washed the dinner dishes and then washed the rice for the next morning's breakfast. To wash rice correctly is the first step in cooking rice correctly, and it is considered one of the principal accomplishments or requirements of any Chinese female. When Jade Snow was six, Daddy had stood her on a stool at the kitchen sink in order to teach her himself this most important step, so that he could be personally satisfied that she had a sure foundation.

First, she dipped out the required amount of raw polished white rice from the rice barrel. In their household, the barrel held a hundred pounds of rice, and an abalone shell was the measure. This shell had been used in the family for years; Mama said it was older than Jade Snow. Its luster was dulled, but infallibly, one-and-one-half measurefuls would insure enough rice for one meal (a little more for dinner; a little less for breakfast; and two measures when
there was company). The rice was scooped into a heavy aluminum
pot with a tight cover, and was washed in the pot.

It was first dampened with a little water, then rubbed for a while
with both hands (if you were a child like Jade Snow) or with one
hand (if you were a grownup). White starch would come off the
rice and bleed into the water. You rinsed after the thorough first
rubbing of about a hundred strokes. Then rub, scrub, and rinse
again. Rub, scrub, and rinse again. Then rinse, rinse, rinse. Three
scrubbings; six rinsings; these were the minimum treatments. When
the water came out clear, the rice had been thoroughly cleaned.

Now it was ready for cooking water. Cold water was added until
it reached one of Daddy's first knuckle joints above the level of the
rice. Jade Snow usually allowed on her fingers a knuckle and a half.
Then she checked the quantity of water by tilting the pot gently
so that the rice remained undisturbed on the bottom. In this posi-
tion, the knuckle-or-so of water, if allowed to flow to the edge of
the tilted pot, would reach to the diameter of the rice on the bot-
tom of the pot.

The cooking of rice was not less important than the washing.
The pot, with its lid tightly in place, was set over a burner with
the flame turned high until the water began to bubble and boil
over. Then the burner was turned very low, and the steaming rice
water was gradually absorbed. Daddy said that this was a most
delicately stage in the cooking and that one should never lift the
cover of the pot to peer at its contents. Instead, one should give
the rice the full benefit of its steam and only by observation of
the escaping steam should one conclude how nearly done the rice
was. At the first bubbling stage, the steam rose straight up, strongly.
At the completion of cooking, the steam curled ever so gently around
the edges of the lid.

If by carelessness one forgot to turn down the flame when
the water boiled, the rice would scorch. At times, this could happen in
the best of families, but Daddy had a remedy. He would place a
little saucer or Chinese teacup full of cold water in the pot on top
of the rice to absorb the scorched taste.

Ideally, however, the rice would be cooked just right in about a
half hour, into tender, smooth, snowy, fluffy, separate morsels.
Under no circumstances did one stir or drain or rinse. Of course,
this formula for faultless rice which would be beyond reproach of
the most critical future mother-in-law depended entirely on the kind
of rice which was chosen. During the prolonged waterfront strike
in San Francisco, when it was not possible to obtain imported
Chinese rice, Daddy bought the only available substitute—blunt-
gained California rice. Despite the most careful efforts of Daddy
and Mama by turn to coax, treat, and nurse this rice through wash-
ning and cooking, the result was a sticky, yellowish mass. The Wongs
ate bread for the period of this strike.

Clearly Jade Snow's shopping list never included a few pounds
of rice. Choosing a season's supply (about five hundred pounds)
required the combined wits of both Daddy and Mama. Where rice
was concerned, Daddy was perhaps more opinionated than many
other Chinese, because his father used to own a rice store among
his other businesses in China, and he had grown up among rice-
husking activities.

When the Wongs were dipping into their last fifty pounds of rice
in the rice barrel, it was a signal for Daddy to go to his favorite
rice dealer, who imported his merchandise from China.

"Fellow Villager, we wish to choose our new supply of rice. May
we have some samples of your current stock?" Daddy would ask.

"Good morning, Mr. Wong," the proprietor would reply, "I
know you like the firmer type. I have a shipment of such rice,
which is whole and smooth, and absorbs very little water. It is also
comparatively free of foreign matter."

"That is very important," Daddy would answer, "for our last
supply contained an abnormal amount of husks and gravel par-
cicles. It would be best if you would let me take home some samples
to discuss them with my woman before I order."

The half dozen or more sample packets which the rice dealer
supplied were wrapped in squares of cotton material, blue lined
with bright pink. Each was labeled with type and price. Once home,
Daddy and Mama sat down at their round dining table and care-
fully opened the little parcels, spreading them out in orderly rows.

Daddy put on his glasses and pointed out to Mama the sample
recommended by the rice dealer. "This new import is supposed to
take little water and be quite free from grit and husks."

Mama studied it a minute and then pointed to another sample.
“However, the grains of this type are formed more perfectly and have a nice shiny fat look on the surface, which shows it is from fresher stock. Rice cooked from these grains will have the firmer texture which we like.”

Then she added, “But it costs fifty cents more for each fifty-pound sack. Perhaps we should get the type the rice dealer recommended.”

Daddy, who had previously decided on the kind the rice dealer recommended, was suddenly aroused, “What is more important than the rice which we eat twice a day and which is our main food? It is what we are, or we are what it is. Better to have what we want at whatever price, and economize on something else. It is decided—we shall have this most expensive type.”

And so Daddy returned the samples and ordered the kind selected. Soon several hundred pounds of rice in its fifty-pound sacks was delivered and stacked in a corner of the store.

Now to the Wong children, this delivery by no means ended the story of buying rice. For the rice came from China packed in double thickness straw-mat sacks, the open ends hand-sewn with strong hemp twine; as reinforcement, double strips of flexible cane about three-eighths of an inch wide, were wound around the sacks. From each sack of rice Daddy opened to fill the rice barrel, he, who wasted nothing, carefully untied the cane, straightened it out, and saved it to make switches for whipping disobedient or improper children, because Daddy firmly believed that severe whipping was the most effective means of bringing up creditable daughters and illustrious sons.

So it was no wonder that the Wong children always watched a delivery of new rice with sad eyes and heavy hearts. It was also no wonder that Little Brother Forgiveness, who as a son dared to be more articulate than his older sisters, would plead unhappily with Daddy when he saw him come home with new rice samples, “Daddy, please don’t buy any more rice!”

8

THE TASTE OF INDEPENDENCE

In Chinese school, Jade Snow had now passed beyond the vocabulary stage to the study of essays, which she was required to memorize both by oral recitation and writing. The correct spelling of a word could not be hazarded from the sound, but depended on one's remembering the exact look of a character, including the location of the finest dot.

The only subject which permitted students to exercise their imaginations and to demonstrate their knowledge of the language was composition. Once a week they were given a subject title, such as “The Value of Learning,” or “The Necessity of Good Habits,” and the class hummed with anticipation as the words were written on the blackboard. They worked first on a rough draft, and afterward copied the draft with fine brushes onto the squares of a tablet page, which they submitted for correction.