experience of breaking bread with the Wongs. It was a thoroughly happy and relaxed time for everyone as they sat feasting on delicious stuffed-melon soup, Peking duck, steamed thousand-layer buns, and tasty crisp greens.

The whole day had been remarkable, but most remarkable of all was the fact that for the first time since her break with her parents, Mama and Daddy had granted her a measure of recognition and acceptance. For the first time they had met on common ground with her American associates. It was a sign that they were at last tolerant of her effort to search for her own pattern of life.

EARLY ONE MORNING, FOURTH OLDER SISTER, STILL IN HER bathrobe, burst into the room that Jade Snow and Jade Precious Stone shared. Before their surprised eyes she flashed a large diamond ring and excitedly announced that she was engaged!

Later she told this news to Daddy, and made an appointment for Prosperous State, her beloved, to come and call. Then Daddy returned the visit to his father, who was well established in the Chinese community in San Francisco. According to Fourth Older Sister, at one time he had been the mayor of Canton in China. Jade Snow was not told all the details, but the negotiations carried on directly between the two fathers resulted in a mutual agreement as to the number of special bridal cakes and roast pigs that the groom's family would supply. These small cakes and sections of roast pork would be delivered in packages among family friends to serve as announcement of the wedding.
When everything had been satisfactorily arranged, Prosperous State came to the Wong home with a five-pound box of chocolates from his family in order to “sweeten” relations with their future in-laws.

Of course, the arrangements did not exactly follow the old-fashioned Chinese marriage etiquette. From Mama and Daddy, Jade Snow had already learned that when they lived in China, a young woman would not be personally courted by her future husband. Marriage was a family affair, arranged by a matchmaker between parents of both families. The eligible young girl was inspected by the matchmaker, who might or might not be accompanied by the boy’s parents. There were such considerations as the size of her feet, and whether or not her long, hanging braids of silky hair swayed from side to side when she walked. By bargaining, the matchmaker determined such essential details as the size of the trousseau, the amount of jewelry, the number of wedding announcement cakes, the quantity of roast pig, and the sum of “good luck” money that the groom’s family was willing to give the bride’s parents to repay them for taking away the daughter whom they had raised. The Chinese considered it much less embarrassing to have the matchmaker or middleman reconcile differences, in marriage plans as well as in other business negotiations.

In old China, the wedding date for a Chinese wedding was decided by a professional master of necromancy and astrology, so that the nuptial activities would harmonize with spiritual forces and heavenly constellations.

Besides this general pattern of approach to a Chinese marriage, numerous other fine points must be observed, the variations depending largely on local customs. In the village of Jade Snow’s parents, the bride always hid in her room and waited aloud for days to show the public her grief at leaving her parental home. Afterward, while relatives and friends from near and far gathered to make merry and feast for days, the bride, grieving, silent, and later veiled, played a role characterized by passivity and delicacy.

The weddings of American-Chinese young women followed modifications of this pattern. Although Daddy had sometimes acted as matchmaker for young people who were too shy or too proper to find their own mates, he had never been able to arrange a marriage for any of his own quite independent children. Jade Snow’s other older sisters, as well as Fourth Older Sister, had met their husbands without Daddy’s or a matchmaker’s help.

Jade Snow was just now getting better acquainted with her Fourth Older Sister, since they had lived apart so much of their lives. In living with Oldest Sister, Fourth Older Sister had had more freedom in social activities than Daddy would have allowed her. She also differed from her younger sister in her love of fun and parties; she delighted in colorful clothes which set off her neat figure, and now she was perpetually bubbling over with happiness. Jade Snow looked upon this older sister with awe-struck eyes. She was the center of the largest wedding yet held in the Wong family. For one thing, she planned an American church wedding at the Chinese Methodist chapel. The family was persuaded to make great preparations, including engraved invitations American-style, custom-made bridesmaids’ gowns and white bridal attire, and all the excitement and ceremonies of a traditional American church ritual. In furious activity, the Wongs bustled around, rehearsed their roles, and on the appointed day appeared before the public gathering with the bride in white satin, the bridesmaids in blue and pink lace with matching flower coronets, and Daddy in a rented tuxedo. With carefully measured steps the bridal party proceeded to the altar to the strains of the Lohengrin wedding march. While cameras flashed busily, crowds of relatives and friends witnessed Fourth Older Sister’s marriage to Prosperous State in a Protestant ceremony, and sent the bride off in a limousine amid a shower of rice.

But the wedding celebration was by no means over.

Jade Snow, the maid of honor, and Jade Precious Stone, bridesmaid, were driven across San Francisco Bay bridge to Fourth Older Sister’s future home with her in-laws in Berkeley. As attendants of the bride, the younger sisters were allowed to peer into her new life, but Daddy and Mama and the rest of the family did not enjoy this privilege. In fact, after the wedding day, the bride was not permitted to see her family again for three days, when she might return home for a short visit. Fourth Older Sister was no longer a Wong daughter; she was a member of Prosperous State Lee’s family. At her new home, the bride changed from her American wedding dress and veil to a modern ankle-length Chinese wedding gown of
apple-green satin, and a knee-length, front-buttoned black satin coat, all handmade and hand-bound, embroidered with rainbow-colored blossoms, birds, and butterflies. Prosperous State still wore his American bridegroom attire, and with his Chinese-dressed bride knelt at his father's and mother's feet in their living room. The young couple had poured ceremonial tea, and now with bowed heads they offered it to the seated parents. Before witnesses, it was a gesture of deference and a promise of filial submission. In return, the new mother-in-law rewarded Fourth Older Sister with some handsome gold and jade jewelry and some money wrapped in red paper as a good-luck start toward their next egg.

Jade Snow, silently watching her sister's bowed back, reacted mentally against the kneeling. She remembered Daddy's teaching that she was never to kneel before anyone but God. What a novel discovery! There were other Chinese more old-fashioned than Daddy in their observance of Chinese traditions! What if someday her own in-laws were to ask her to kneel? She must think about this new problem.

After the tea ceremony, they witnessed the cutting of a decidedly American, many-tiered, white-frosted wedding cake. “They” included all of Prosperous State's family and close friends, who were enjoying everything immensely. They, as part of the merrymaking, had also organized a few traditional Chinese stunts to tease the bride, while the bride according to convention remained demure and apprehensively docile. Between the sheets of the bridal bed they were now putting peanuts, oranges, Chinese dates, and lichee nuts. These were all fruits or seeds, symbolic of new life, and introduced the theme of fertility. But what an unedifying sight it made for the new bride!

After everyone had had his share of giggles at the bride's expense, the guests relaxed for a while to look at the wedding presents, which included such modern American household conveniences as electric toasters, percolators, and waffle irons. Wedding presents were always sent to the groom. According to some customs, the bride would be on hand to witness the opening of their presents in the company of relatives and close friends. But she was not allowed to open them. After being passed around, the presents reached her last for examination and she was required to retie each one with red cord for good luck.

Then they strolled through the garden in the pleasant afternoon sun, while Prosperous State took kodachrome movies of the colorfully dressed women. Now he was “Older Brother Prosperous State” to Jade Snow, and like Older Sister, she addressed his parents as “Mother-in-law” and “Father-in-law.”

By six o'clock, it was time to return to San Francisco for the evening's festivities. The wedding banquet was held on the top floor of Chinatown's famous oldest restaurant, which was architecturally patterned after the tea houses in China. The stairway spiraled up three stories and ended abruptly in a lobby. Here on this evening a Chinese orchestra was seated comfortably. Every time a guest arrived, the music was punctuated by huge brass cymbals which clanged to announce him. From this lobby, two large halls branched off, one on either side. The larger one to the right was reserved for men, while one to the left and back was for the women and children. The bridal party and their immediate families, irrespective of sex, banqueted in the men's dining hall.

As the guests arrived, someone checked off their names on a long red master list. Invitations to this occasion, which were separate from the wedding invitations, had been engraved in gold on red cards and delivered by messenger. The guest responded first by sending the wedding gift. If he were head of a household, he was entitled to bring his entire family to the banquet after he sent his gift. He sent a more handsome gift if he had a large family to bring. After his gift was received, the groom's family sent him another gold engraved red card, with one large simple square character of acceptance, “Thanks.” The Chinese bride never had to write thank-you notes.

The bride in her Chinese costume stood on exhibition near the lobby, and from a tray of filled cups she offered tea to arriving guests. It was only a gesture, as the guest seldom drank the tea. If he or she were married, however, he responded to this gesture by leaving on the tea tray some good-luck money wrapped in red paper. If he were single, leaving good-luck money was not obligatory.

Approximately three hundred and fifty guests were invited for six o'clock. But no Chinese banquet was expected to begin on time or even within an hour of the given time. This evening it was past nine-thirty before the food appeared on the table. Some of Older
Sister's American friends who had come on time without knowing the Chinese custom were almost starved. But the Chinese guests had eaten a light snack at home. During the period of waiting, friends chatted, as many of them met only on these festive occasions, children played tag, and the guests generally conducted themselves as Americans would after dinner. At the round tables set for ten, everyone sat on stools. Thus in a minimum space, a large number of people could be comfortably accommodated.

Shortly before the food was served there were speeches by an official representing the Chinese consulate and by other representatives from various civic organizations and family associations to which the father-in-law belonged. All expressed about the same sentiments in different words and dialects, such as: Jade Ornament and Prosperous State were wonderfully matched. . . . The speaker was happy to be included in Mr. Lee's hospitality. . . . He hoped that in another year they would all be together again to celebrate Mr. Lee's first grandchild. . . . This particular party might seem a little out of tempo with the general mourning which all patriotic Chinese then shared over China's conflict with Japan, but let it be known that to justify this extravagance during China's hour of need, Mr. Lee was making a most generous donation to the funds for China war relief.

After these speeches, the food began to arrive in quantities. There was much too much to eat, including mushrooms from China, uncountable plump ducks, delicate sea-food soups, whole squabs and chickens cooked in different styles, lobsters and prawns with vegetables in new disguises.

But the bride did not eat at her own banquet. In the first place, she was not expected to do so. In the second place, she was kept too busy. While the guests were dining, Mother-in-law, Jade Snow, and Jade Precious Stone accompanied Older Sister around to each table, carrying a tray containing more cups of tea. The guests again made a gesture of drinking the proffered tea, and again the married ones left red packets of good-luck money on the tray. The little party made the rounds in the men's dining room and then in the women's dining room. The male guests were dressed in ordinary American business suits, but the women were much more colorful, mostly in Chinese dress, and their children wore their gayest costumes, both Chinese and American. Pausing in the doorway, Jade Snow heard a din of conversation and laughter, and saw the room alive with beautiful sheens and vibrant colors. Velvets and damasks in reds, pinks, fuchsias, pale greens, royal blues; embroidered satins in blending shades—all were favorites with Chinese women. Moreover, the guests were glittering with Chinese gold jewelry set with precious opals and jades, or more modern designs with rubies and diamonds. The poorest Chinese woman might wear coarse cottons, but she always treasured some bit of real, precious, handwrought jewelry of twenty-four carat pure gold set with high quality gems.

After this round of tea offering and the collection of good-luck money, Older Sister changed into different dresses about every twenty minutes in order to show her extensive trousseau. So that none would have hurt feelings, she wore all the jewelry given to her as wedding presents. Consequently, both arms were covered with bracelets, and a chain around her neck was laden with rings. Her chest was covered with a shining array of brooches and pendants.

The bridegroom's duties were much fewer. With his brother, father, and an escort, carrying trays of whisky instead of tea, he went to each table and drank with the men. Prosperous State had wisely put apple cider in his own glass, for it was a known fact that many bridegrooms passed out cold on their wedding night after sipping whisky with the guests at more than a hundred tables.

Then the newly-united parents, Mama, Daddy, Father-in-law, Mother-in-law, went around to toast and thank each table of guests for honoring the occasion with their presence.

In less than an hour after the food was served, the guests finished their dinner and began to leave. The hosts stood at the head of the stairs, thanking the guests for coming, while the guests thanked the hosts in return. At a Chinese banquet, all the conversation took place before dinner, and after dinner everyone immediately put on his coat and hat, bade farewell, and departed.

Jade Snow, although keenly interested, did not really feel like a participant in the evening's festivities. She was more like a critical spectator. The guests enjoyed themselves, but appeared to take
more interest in the food than in the bride. They were entitled to attend the banquet as long as their wedding present had been sent to the bridegroom and accepted by his family. But hardly anyone talked to the bride; they all talked to the parents. They congratulated the Lees on their newly acquired daughter-in-law, but they did not wish the bride happiness. The bride was merely a sort of decorative, noneating, nondrinking, nonspeaking accessory to the wedding celebration.

As the Wongs walked home after it was over, Jade Snow expressed her wonder to Mama and Daddy, and recounted some of the events which had occurred at Older Sister’s new home earlier that afternoon, events which puzzled and troubled her.

Daddy replied, “Chinese legendary symbolism has been passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation until the origins and true meanings have become lost. Superstition combined with economic reasons account for many of the formalities you witnessed today, but because most Chinese do not analyze or question symbols, they are blind followers of tradition. Only those who have become Christians have the courage to question forms of action.”

While Jade Snow tried to digest this philosophical explanation, Mama added, “If you think from what you have seen today that the bride is not recognized sufficiently by Chinese custom and is excessively teased, you should know how she is treated in China. Teasing the bride does not stop with putting things in her marriage bed. She is shut up in her bedroom with the chaperone who has been hired to accompany her, and then long strings of bursting firecrackers are thrown into her room to jump and explode uncontrollably. I have seen the chaperone burned so severely in trying to protect the bride that she had to be carried away on a stretcher!”

Mystified, her daughter asked, “But why do they abuse the bride so?”

Mama answered, “As your father explained to you, they do not interpret it according to our ideas. The loud noise is supposed to scare away the evil spirits. Therefore firecrackers are enthusiastically thrown into the bridal room to drive all evil from the new couple’s life, not to abuse the bride. What new wife would want to start her marriage without being sure that the evil spirits were frightened away?”

“Of course, there is probably another practical purpose also. It is to prepare the bride for her new role of submission. She has married to serve her mother-in-law first and then her husband. Her personality will be completely submerged. Husband and wife are strictly decorous and formal in public, always deferring to the parents or grandparents. There must be no intimate whispers or exchange of laughter, much less the holding of hands, beyond their bedroom door.”

Daddy offered further explanation: “In our village, the bridegroom is accompanied by an older man who advises and escorts him. This friend must be a mature man of superior intellect and wisdom, a close friend whom the family chooses to honor by this request. He helps the young man with his toilet, including the arrangement of his long queue, and all the while he quietly advises the bridegroom on his married responsibilities. Because the bride does not eat in public, this friend sees to it that when the couple retire to their room after the festivities, a tray of food and drink is brought in to them. The bridal bed is usually a huge, handsome piece of furniture, with posters and an all-enveloping drop curtain. The new husband and wife retreat behind their curtain in privacy after being blessed by the adviser friend. There the husband is finally alone with his bride to become acquainted with her, and he affectionately feeds her from their own special tray.”

Mama added a final word: “However much you may complain about our Chinese ‘blind marriage’ tradition, just remember that we never hear of divorces in China, and that our Chinese family affairs have been conducted in an orderly fashion for centuries, increasing rather than diminishing the family strength. Women are brought up knowing what to expect, and knowing that their marriage to a suitable man will be assured by their parents. They take a long, patient view of life, and if they are uncomfortable as brides, they know that they will one day be mothers of sons, and one day be mothers-in-law. Then they will be able to sit back in comfort to enjoy the position they have earned which no one can deny them.”