Little World

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Abstract

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THE first nine years of my life were spent in a big walled house in China. Since we were considered to be of the upper class, my grandparents never allowed me outside to play with other children. The only friends I knew were my cousins and some children of our rank; the only playground, My Little World.

Swinging in a hammock between two apple trees, I munch contentedly on an over-sized apple. It is the largest of all the apples on the trees, because I picked it. I fight hard with both hands trying to get a good bite and to keep the juice from running down my neck. Above me in the branches, little birds, green, red, and blue, are having their usual picnic, yelling and screaming while playing follow-the-leader. At a distance, the crying of crows occasionally breaks through the air. Rabbits, white and gray, hop quietly around me, thinking that I do not notice them. I take a last bite at my apple. With part of it still hanging on my lips, I clumsily throw the seed at a white rabbit and almost fall off my hammock. All the rabbits suddenly disappear, even the birds above me. “Oh! What’s the matter with them anyway? I am only playing! . . . . No! It’s much too quiet . . . . Something must be wrong!” I scream as I roll off my hammock and run with all my might toward my pigeon coop. “That eagle! If he ever gets hold of another one of my pigeons, I’ll . . . . OH! All the running for nothing! I forgot to let them out this morning.” I flop down on my knees and pant, exhausted by the sudden fifty-yard dash.

Now away from the apple tree area, I can see my whole private garden and playground. The area fifty yards to the right and left of me is full of fruit trees—oranges, peaches, cherries and grapes. I like apples best, though. Beyond this area is our vegetable garden, which is not visible from here. I don’t know what kinds of vegetables we have. Anyway, I
hate vegetables! Surrounding this hundred-square-yard garden is our private "great wall", one foot thick, and twelve feet tall, built with red bricks and mud. "I wish my cousins would come over to play with me tonight. I know some places in here where they would never find me."

"Ah-King! Ah-King!" My grandma's voice becomes demanding when I don't answer. "Oh," I think, "don't tell me I have to take a bath now!"

"Here—here I am, Granny. Do I have to take a bath now?"

"Of course! You've played enough! And why don't you answer me when I call?"

"I—I—didn't hear you," I lie. "I—I—don't want you to wash me. After all, I'm already six."

"Well, if you don't want me to wash you, I'll ask Ling-Tin." (One of our maids).

"Oh, no, you don't! I don't want that bruiser to skin me alive!"

We walk through a little pathway with tea-leaf hedges, then through a big moth-eaten squeaky round door. "That door always gives me away when I try to hide. One of these days I'm going to burn it down."

We enter our large square patio covered with colored tiles, red and yellow, forming all kinds of geometric designs. Our L-shaped, forty-five room, three-story home towers over the patio. The roof is covered with gray tiles, almost like giant fish scales.

"I want to feed the gold fish, Granny," I request half-heartedly, as we walk by our oval pond in the middle of the patio.

"Now don't be silly! Your water will get cold!"

The fish pond is full of balloon-like gold fish with bulging eyes, swimming around so jerkily with their huge parachute tails. A rock garden emerges five feet above the bluish-green water. Little steps, hundreds of them, wind around the mossy rocks leading from the water to the top. There are little rope bridges connecting some cliffs where steps could not be constructed, and even little tunnels connecting places where an obstruction occurred. Miniature coolies carrying
great loads on their backs climb slowly up the steps. Every hundred or so steps, there is a little resting place sheltered by a small weeping-willow tree. Stone chairs and spring water are available here for the tired and thirsty climbers. “Oh, I wish I could make myself small enough to play on these!”

While I am still looking at the rock garden, Grandma seizes my arm and drags me over the foot-high doorsill into a large gloomy room. The only light in the room comes from the door and through the holes of the carved flower patterns above the door. Every time I walk into this room, I think I am walking into the mouth of a large dragon. Scrolls of all sizes hang neatly on the twenty-foot-tall walls. Famous writings, personalities, and sceneries are on these scrolls. Grandma often tells me many fascinating tales about some of the characters. For example, that one always gives me the creeps: a very thickly-beared man dressed in an old-fashioned gown, with the meanest look in his eyes, getting ready to chop somebody’s head off with his long knife. “He is really not a mean man,” Grandma says. “He is only the body-guard of some feudal lord.” Dark maroon-stained tables, tall enough for me to play hide-and-go-seek, stand in the middle of the room, with huge massive chairs lined up on the sides of them. These tables and chairs are all hand-carved. The tops and the legs are glued together. There isn’t a single nail or screw in them, but they are strong. Otherwise, they would have been broken long ago with me around. Most of the forty-five rooms in this three-story castle are similarly furnished, except for the bedrooms. Grandma drags me up three flights of stairs into Mom’s bedroom—as usual, dark and gloomy, a perfect setting to get my skin rubbed off! Grandma pulls open the rough bamboo drapes, distorting the beautiful black tiger painted on them, and lets a little sun-light come through four round windows. Now I can see distinctly the great big bed, three feet high—it even has a few steps on the side for small boys like me to climb in. I never use them. I just get a good running start and dive into the bed. A huge mosquito net hangs lazily on the four carved posts. The red, shining silk
quilt, embroidered with two large dragons fighting for a fire ball, lies neatly on the bed. The dresser on the side of it is stained black. Taking a closer look at it, I can see it is beautifully carved all around with country scenes, and with the noses of the cows used as knobs. What I like most is the mirror. It makes me look fat and skinny when I move from side to side. Grandma undresses me and carries me into the round wooden tub bound together by bamboo slips. "Ouch! The water is too hot!" She just presses me into the sitting position without saying a word — splatter — splatter —
"Can I go and feed the fishes after this?"
"No! We are going to have supper!"
Oh, well! That was a good try anyway!

— Kuang Chung Wong, Sc. Sr.

Songs

April,
Its spent blossoms
Blown in drifts on the lawn,
Lifts its many promised fingers
To May.
The wind,
A singing girl,
Runs barefoot in warm fields
Of heavy-headed tarnished grain
That waits.
Autumn,
Bony fingers
Groping the jewelled air,
Clutches at a sliver of moon
And dies.
Brittle
Dry grass is swayed
By a sharp, winter scythe
In haste to harvest empty husks
For Spring.

— James Wickcliff, Sc. Grad.