

*Translated by Charles Bawden,  
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## THE TEARS OF THE REVEREND LAMA

*A Modern Short Story*

As the Bachelor of Divinity Lodon, who venerated his prayer-wheel and obeyed the Laws of the Discipline, because he saw the turning world as vain, was coming down the gully on this side of the Gandang lamasery, his robes mingling their red and yellow, the girl Tserenkhlan, also known as Yu Baihua, who had mastered the skill of fostering the sharp sword of passion, emerged from a muddy lane in the Chinese Western Pedlars quarter, flashing her eyes, black against white, and they met.

Yu Baihua had run out of opium and was on her way to pawn a gold ring and get a bit of spending money, when she chanced to see that she would run into the Bachelor of Divinity Lodon. She had marked him out some time ago as being a high cleric of mild manners and superficial nature, and quick as a flash she conceived a plan, and went up to the lama, and, putting on a show of distress mingled with confusion, she said: 'Pardon me, Your Reverence, pardon me, but my old mother is ill and likely to die. Would you be good enough to come to our place and recite some prayers?' The lama said: 'I am on my way to service in the Eastern Lamasery. I cannot manage it just now. Ask another lama to come.' But Yu Baihua pretended to be in despair, repeated her sad story, and put her case in every way she could.' He could not help seeing how upset she was, and thinking he might get a good fee he followed the girl towards her house in order to say some prayers.

There was ever so much mud in the five lanes of the Western Pedlars in the summer season, and not even ten thousand packets of incense could have overcome the stench. The Bachelor of Divinity Lodon covered his nose with his scarf and stalked along behind the girl.

Before long they went through a weather-beaten, white gate. The acrid stink of skins in the tanning-vats assailed them, and bits of fur and hair flying in the wind stuck to their clothes.

Passing through a narrow way between two tumbledown mud huts, they went into an east-facing cave-like building on the western side. The girl had the lama seat himself on a chair and went out, saying: 'I'll get some tea.' While she was out of the way, the lama looked around him. In the front part of the house there was a big bed. The bedclothes were stowed away tidily and covered with a spotted bedspread. In the rear part there was a small four-sided table covered with a white cloth, and on it a big clock and a few pictures.

The roof of the house was very low. When the Bachelor of Divinity Lodon stood upright his head almost touched it. A little window was pasted over with two layers of Chinese paper and decorated with patterns in red paper. It was still daytime, but it felt like twilight in the house. Someone had made a little hole in the corner of the window, no doubt so that they could see who was going in and out.

The girl soon came in again and gave him a cup of tea, and begged him to look mercifully on them and to heal her mother. The lama looked at the girl. Outside, in the sunlight, her face had looked weather-worn and colourless, but now that she had come inside her cheeks were gleaming red, and she shone as splendidly as the image of the Goddess Dar Ekh whom he worshipped every morning. At this the mist of worldly desire began to swirl up in his mind, and he said in gentle tones: 'Well, my dear, where is your mother?' Meanwhile the girl had got her mother to lie down and pretend to be ill, and she said: 'Here she is', and led the lama into the other room. An old woman was lying there, covered with a blanket. In the back part of the room could be seen a Buddha-statue in a frame, covered with the dust of ages. Two red candles were set on spikes before it, in Chinese fashion. We do not need to go into how the lama then recited the scriptures and recited his prayers. By the time he had finished his recitation, night had already fallen. The mother looked much restored, and confessed that it was due to the lama's help. The girl also pretended to profess her devotion to the lama. She chatted and laughed with him ever so pleasantly. Each time she flirted with her two black eyes, a fierce little flame sparked and flared in Lodon's heart. No sooner had the girl observed this than she said: 'Your Reverence, it has got late. Won't you stop and have a meal with us?' For one thing, the lama was a bit tired, and for another it was the usual thing for a lama to eat after reciting the scriptures, so he accepted at once and followed the girl into another building.

The girl called the cook and had the meal prepared, and while waiting on the lama she began to make up to him and get as cosy with him as she could.

They chatted about this and that, and the lama saw the world in a much more positive light, and within the space of an evening he forgot all about his four-section tent in the Duinkhar Quarter with its several framed Buddhas.

Then the girl said: 'It has got quite late. We have no conveyance to get you home, and besides that it is raining. Why don't you spend the night here and go home tomorrow?' The lama was a bit embarrassed, but as a matter of fact it was late, and it was raining, and it was quite jolly where he was, so he decided to spend the night there.

The girl was delighted, and made up the bed. After they had gone to their separate beds, it was only natural that the girl should give a slight cough now and again, and that the lama was not able to get to sleep. The lama wanted to try his luck with the girl, but as he had not had much experience of traffic with women, he rather fumbled it.

The lama could not bear it any longer, and he planned to go out on the pretext of making water and get into the girl's bed on the way back, and out he went. He soon came back and listened from outside. All was silence, and he opened the door. The girl called out: 'Half a minute, Your Reverence.' Unable to contain himself, he wetted his

forefinger and made a little hole in the window of the building. Looking in through this little hole he could see the girl taking off her underclothes on the blanket. She looked really pretty in the light of the lamp, and it made him excited. The lama's ideas about The Void had long since migrated to another world, and the Laws of the Discipline had by now fled to Lhasa. Up blazed the fire of lust, and he went in and slept with the girl.

From then on, nothing delighted the lama's heart more than the things of this world. He went straight home in the mornings, but would come back longing for evening, and several months went by, and a new little pathway opened between the Western Pedlars and the Gandang Terrace.

Now Yu Baihua was not really in love with Lodon, and as time went on she just exploited the generosity of the rich Bachelor of Divinity, while the unsated Lodon became ensnared in the noose of the world and infatuated by the girl, and to cut a long story short, gradually he capitalized his compound and house in Gandang and all things he had put by for taking the degree of Doctor, and fitted out a luxurious compound and house for Yu Baihua, and they began to live together in the secular district.

One day the Bachelor of Divinity Lodon came to the house, but when he tried to open the gate he found it locked. When he looked furtively in through a gap in the window, there was Yu Baihua in the embrace of a young layman. The lama realized that this was an old lover whom Yu Baihua had spoken of, and he flew into a temper and smashed the house-door open, and went in to beat him up, and kicked up a row. But the girl was not taken aback in the least, and she cursed him and scolded him, saying that she hated him, and she threw him out. The lama would have brought a case against her, but he had broken his religious vows, and there was nothing for it but to cling to the threshold of the house and lament:

'My dear, I love you.

Where shall I go now?

You can go with someone else,

But don't reject me.'

And he shed bitter worldly tears, which dropped from his eyes like rain.