

Wicked Ah Hee

A Story Of Chinese Help

There were four in the family besides Jackie—to be sure Jackie was a host in himself, but he belonged to the juvenile fraternity, and so didn't count.

Then there was the servant-girl—Seraphina—a most remarkable misnomer, for she was not a seraph by any means; besides these two, who didn't count, there were Mr. and Mrs. Gallup, and Mrs. Gallup's sister Fanny, and Fanny's husband, Taddy—Taddy Loftis.

Fanny was a good woman with a sharp temper; Taddy was a cipher; Almira Gallup always spoke of him as "Fanny's husband," or "Taddy, poor fellow!" He wasn't to blame for being a cipher, you know—I suppose he was born so.

Seraphina "couldn't abide" him, and he couldn't abide Seraphina; he didn't mind being ruled by his wife, or his wife's sister, or even his wife's sister's husband, but to be "sassed" by a servant-girl was more than mortal man could endure.

They had many tiffs; in fact, they usually had about one a day, but the last one, which led to Seraphina's discharge, happened in this way:

Taddy came down with a very long face, Fanny's temper being rather sharper than usual that morning, and stalked through the kitchen without a word, although he knew that the seraph made quite a point of being bidden "good-morning."

After hunting fruitlessly through the wash-house, he returned.

"I'd like to know where that blacking-brush is!" he remarked, sourly.

"Thin, indade, ye'd bettther hunt and foind out," returned the seraph; "and is it me ye'd be after expectin' to go out and hunt it up?"

"Who was that man who was here last evening?" pursued Taddy.

"It was me cousin, and what's that ter *you*."

Seraphina discontinued pancake frying, placed her arms akimbo, and stood looking at Taddy as if ready for anything.

"Did he black his boots while he was here?" asked Mr. Loftis.

"Oh, me sowl! and is it me own cousin that ye'd accuse of bein' a thafe, ye miserable little spalpeen!" and the seraph seized the kettle of boiling water in a threatening manner.

"Put that down, you old virago!" cried Taddy.

“Sure’n I’ll put it down your throat!” shrieked she.

What followed, Taddy could never give a distinct account of: when he was rescued by his wife and Mr. Gallup, assisted by Mrs. Gallup and Jackie, who did the high yells for the occasion, he was found to be carved across the face with the carving-knife, and scalded over the hands with the boiling water from the tea-kettle, and scratched by Seraphina’s finger-nails. That young woman was leaning against the sink, still armed with the carving-knife and the finger-nails, and apparently eager to renew the fray.

Mr. Gallup gave her her discharge on the spot, when she bade him “come on” in such threatening tones that he deemed it wise to lock her into the kitchen, and go for a policeman, who speedily disarmed her, and escorted her to the police office.

The next day Mr. Gallup brought up Ah Hee.

He was a youthful heathen, sleek and neat, with an innocent, pensive face, which was strikingly in contrast to the expression of their late domestic tyrant.

He was obedient even to Taddy, whom he treated with a respectful tenderness, and who, in return, became his champion.

He was friendly with everyone in the house save Jackie; Jackie had a snub nose, freckles and sandy hair, and a pair of blue eyes, whose exceeding sharpness did no injustice to his character.

He looked at Ah Hee with the interest of a naturalist examining a new bug, and advised his mother to lock up her spoons every night herself.

Mrs. Gallup reproved Jackie, though she *did* lock up the spoons; and Mr. Gallup reproved Jackie, and all the family took Ah Hee’s part, and liked him all the better for his having an enemy in this annoyingly smart boy.

As time went on, they grew more and more attached to him. On one occasion he picked up a four-bit piece from the parlor carpet, and rushed in, all excitement, to restore it to its rightful owner. The fact that Taddy bestowed it upon him as a reward for his honesty seemed to affect him greatly, and he was observed to wipe a tear from his eye as he returned to the kitchen.

On two or three other occasions he gave signal proofs of his honesty, returning a pocket-knife to Mr. Gallup, and a gold cuff pin (plated, it is true, but how did he know?) to Mrs. Gallup; on both these occasions he seemed to be in breathless haste and great agitation. Still that incorrigible Jackie put his finger to his eye with an inquiry as to the greenness of that optic, and said, “Wait.”

One mild February morning, Mrs. Gallup, having succeeded in getting Jackie off to the Kindergarten, where he made four amiable teachers wretched for six hours every day, announced to her sister, Fanny Loftis, that she was going over to Aunt Samantha’s to lunch.

“You were not going anywhere, were you?” she inquired.

“I was not; but if I was, I should go,” responded Fanny, tartly.

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Gallup, dreamily, “how it would do to go off and leave Ah Hee alone in the house. I have such suspicions of these Chinese servants; though I *know* Ah Hee to be honest.”

“Of course! It would be perfectly safe!” replied Fanny. “But it doesn’t matter; I was not going out; I am going to do up my laces, and that will take me until you get back, I’ll warrant. Be sure and get home before Jackie does; I don’t want to be at that child’s mercy for two or three hours, I assure you.”

“Jackie shall not annoy you,” said Mrs. Gallup, with a lofty air of offended maternal affection which tickled Mrs. Loftis exceedingly, although she maintained her serious demeanor.

Mrs. Loftis met with many obstacles in her laundry-work; the starch was first too thick and then too thin, the fire did not burn well, the laces seemed possessed with the spirit of contrariness, and tore in every direction.

“This fire!” said she, giving it a vicious poke. “Where’s that Ah Hee, I wonder? He’s been upstairs long enough to make twenty beds. I suppose he *is* honest, but I left my purse out, and—”

She opened the door; at the same instant Hee opened the front door. Fanny’s perceptions were keen, and she darted after him.

“Stop!” she cried; “where are you going?”

Ah Hee paused an instant; turning his pensive, innocent countenance upon Mrs. Loftis, he replied: “Me no wait! You go helly!” and then he was off like the wind.

Fanny, however, was also fleet of foot, and, without waiting for hat or shawl, she pursued the flying angel. The wind blew with true San Francisco vigor, and they went on in a cloud of dust. Little knots of astonished spectators gathered here and there to look at them; one or two, more curious than the rest, joined in the chase, but were soon distanced, and obliged to give it up.

Had the Gallup residence been nearer the Chinese quarter, Ah Hee would have found no difficulty in making his escape; he would have plunged into the labyrinth on Jackson Street, where Fanny would not have dared to have followed him.

As it was, she drew nearer and nearer. Ah Hee redoubled his efforts, but in vain. Fate was against him. A sudden gust of wind bursting upon him from a side street made him falter for a moment, when a second gust lifted his long queue, and clapped it around Mrs. Loftis’s neck.

She knew how to take the goods the gods provided, and seized it with both hands, screaming, “Help! *Police!* THIEF!” at the top of her voice. She had had no time to scream until then.

Ah Hee made a grab to recover his property, but in his rage and excitement seized, instead of his queue, a long curl which hung from Mrs. Loftis's waterfall.

He gave a vigorous pull, his countenance indicative of anything but innocence, when off came the whole of Mrs. Loftis's head-rigging, revealing a bare, smooth scalp, with only a small knot on the crown, which stood erect, like the scalp-lock of an Indian chief; hair-pins dropped around like hailstones, and "rats" tumbled in every direction.

As she felt her chignon going, Fanny dropped the queue. She was too late to save the precious edifice, however, and gave a shriek of anger and despair as it slid off.

Ah Hee had stood motionless, dumbfounded by what he had done; but the shriek seemed to arouse him, and before the crowd which rapidly gathered could quite understand what had happened, he had made his escape, this time unpursued.

For some time after this episode in their domestic affairs the Gallup family remained without help, but at length Jackie, being more of a trial every day, Mrs. Gallup said they must try again, being sure this time to engage a heathen who was well recommended from his last place, and whose honesty, moreover, was vouched for by the employment agent.

With some difficulty, Mr. Gallup found a Chinaman who fulfilled all these acquirements. His name was Chin Luck. He was elderly; he wore leather goggles of huge dimensions; he was scrupulously neat; and he had a deferential air of wisdom about him that reminded one of Confucius.

He might have been the grandfather of a long line of virtuous children, judging from appearances. Moreover, he was an excellent and careful cook, and did *not* "spit in the griddle to see if it was hot"—one of the sins of which Ah Hee now stood accused.

Taddy was no longer the angelic youth's champion, and as for Jackie, he fairly reveled in taunts, stood knee-deep in "I told you so's," and had serious thoughts of rebelling against any more Kindergarten.

Chin Luck treated Jackie with paternal kindness, baking him little pies and cakes, and furnishing him with a cold lunch every day upon his return from school, although he would *not* tolerate him in the kitchen while he was cooking.

Jackie was evidently puzzled by the venerable pagan. He made no prophecies, gave no advice concerning the silver spoons, but preserved a mysterious silence which made Mrs. Gallup miserable.

Meanwhile nothing was heard of Ah Hee and the silver-mounted purse. The case had been [put] into the hands of a detective, who, like Jackie, was puzzled, and who, still like that precocious youth, preserved a mysterious silence which passed current for wisdom.

One Sunday morning, while all the family were at church save Mr. Gallup, who was not a church-goer, an incident happened which led to the peremptory discharge of the gentle Chin Luck.

It was five minutes to eleven when Mrs. Gallup, Jackie, Mrs. Loftis and Mr. Loftis left the house.

“Come, Fanny, hurry!” said Taddy, mildly.

“I shall do nothing of the sort!” responded Fanny.

“We are late now,” he remarked, faintly.

“Well get there during the first prayer. I don’t call *that* late,” said Fanny.

“We get a lickin’ ter school if *we’re* late,” volunteered Jackie.

“Hush, you vulgar little boy!” said Fanny; and then they started.

Chin Luck was perusing a volume of Chinese classics in the kitchen.

Jackie had an inexhaustible interest in Chin Luck’s reading; why he should begin at the end of the book, read the pages from the bottom up, and from the right to the left, instead of left to right as he did, was a series of facts which the smart youth could not understand.

Mr. Gallup was smoking, and reading “Buckle” in his “den” at the rear of the house; a window of this den looked upon the backyard; this window had inside blinds; the sun, shone in Mr. Gallup’s face, and he closed one of the blinds; he sat considerably to the left of it, but his head was in such a position that, whenever he looked up from his book (which was often, for Mr. Gallup masticated his mental food carefully before he swallowed it); when he looked up, as I was saying, his eye fell upon the dismal prospect of the cramped, dusty, unattractive hole, called by courtesy a backyard.

Upon one of these occasions, his eye caught a round, black object, which appeared and disappeared behind the shed, bobbing up and down like a rubber football.

Mr. Gallup looked at it with sleepy interest; in a few moments a pair of blue-clad shoulders appeared, then a pair of long, slim legs, and Mr. Gallup uttered, “Hi-ah!” in a suppressed whistle, when a well-grown Celestial stood upright on the shed. At first thought, Mr. Gallup took him to be Chin Luck—a vile libel upon that venerable gentleman—absorbed in his book! A second look, however, convinced him that it was altogether a more youthful heathen.

“The dickens!” said Mr. Gallup—(he *might* have used a more profane expression on a week-day)—“The dickens! “What’s he about?” and, with a mental order to himself to “keep dark,” he softly opened the door leading into an adjoining room, and pushed his chair into a secluded spot, from whence, with the aid of a convenient mirror, he could view all that the slim Pagan could attempt to do, within *his* borders, at least; his neighbors must look out for themselves!

The slim youth gazed about him only a moment, then, dropping upon his hands and knees, he began to crawl along the edge of the shed; reaching the end, he drew himself up, like a steel spring, and lightly vaulted over the intervening distance of six or eight feet to the next shed, where he again crawled along, with an easy, almost imperceptible motion, like a snake.

For a moment or two, Mr. Gallup, intently gazing into the mirror, lost sight of him; he was just rising from his chair, for the purpose of investigation, when the faint squeak of the window in the next room caused him to drop back with the least possible noise. Then, in the mirror, he saw the window slowly go up, saw the round, black head peer in for a moment, then enter, followed by the blue-clad shoulders and the slim legs.

He seemed in no doubt or uncertainty where to go; he spent no precious time in gazing about him, but walked up to an old table standing against the wall, and took from the drawer thereof a package, tolerably bulky, wrapped in a white table-napkin.

Mr. Gallup concluded that the time had come for action; as soon as the visitor's back was turned, he slipped lightly into the room behind him, keeping his bulky form between the slim youth and the window. Fortunately, the door was closed; Mr. Gallup fervently hoped that it was also locked.

Having secured the package wrapped in the napkin—the surprised owner could not imagine what it might be—the heathen turned to go, as silently as he came.

Mr. Gallup, however, proved an impediment; he rushed upon him, and seized him firmly by the collar; the slim youth kicked, bit, fought his best, not screaming at all, but uttering, under his breath, a few expressions, which his captor took for Chinese swearing, but all in vain; Mr. Gallup mastered him, tied him, secured an iron bar, which he had hidden in the folds of his blouse, and shoved him into a closet, locking the door; so silent was the struggle, that Chin Luck, down in the kitchen, read on undisturbed!

As soon as he recovered his breath, Mr. Gallup picked up from the floor and opened the package wrapped in the white napkin; what was his surprise to find one and one-half dozens of silver spoons, one dozen forks, marked "coin," a twenty-dollar gold piece, with a hole through it, which he recognized as his wife's property, and five silver napkin-rings of considerable value for their workmanship. Mr. Gallup was aghast! Chin Luck—

Then he heard the church-goers talking down in the hall, and called them up. Mrs. Gallup found something to be thankful for.

"What a mercy you didn't go to church!" she said. "And how did this silver get upstairs? Chin Luck must—"

"Let's see him!" said Mrs. Loftis, instinctively shaking her head, to make sure that her chignon was secure.

They closed and locked the window and both doors, although Mr. Gallup assured them that it was needless, the slim youth being securely tied.

When he opened the door and dragged him out, Mrs. Loftis, with one look and a suppressed yell, clutched him

“So it’s *you*, Ah Hee, is it?” she said.

“My name Ah Mog—no Ah Hee. Me no know Ah Hee! Allee same bad Chinaman, eh?”

At this assumption of virtuous indignation, Mr. Gallop laughed; nobody else seemed to see anything to laugh at, except Jackie, who laughed continually, from pure joy.

“Yes, it *is* Ah Hee!” said the smart boy. “I know him from that bullet-hole through his ear and that blue mark on his hand!”

“Yes, it *is* Ah Hee!” echoed Jackie’s mother. “I am certain of it!”

“Of course it is!” said Taddy.

“I don’t know—I most believe it *is* the scamp,” said Mr. Gallup.

“Me no Ah Hee!” said the slim youth, actually weeping. “Me Ah Mog! Me no bad Chinaman! Me come see Chin Luck—cousin! Me no stealee allee same spoon! Lemme go!”

“Not *much!*” said Fanny, with a hissing emphasis which must have made Ah He[e]-Mog’s blood curdle.

Jackie was sent after a policeman, who not only bore away the weeping Ah Hee-Mog, but also escorted Chin Luck to the City Prison; though that venerable gentleman, peering through his goggles, serenely assured everybody of his entire innocence and emphatically denied the cousinship claimed by the slim youth.

When the trial came on, a triumphant detective appeared with Mrs. Loftis’s silver-mounted purse and a witness, who pronounced the prisoner to be undoubtedly the same person who pawned the purse. Ah Hee, then, with touching repentance, confessed, pleaded youth, and was consigned to the Industrial School.

Chin Luck, impressed with the success of his confederate, also confessed and pleaded youth, stating with serene confidence that only thirteen Springs had passed over his innocent head.

That his story was not credited seemed to cause him pain and surprise, not unmingled with indignation.

The Gallups have broken up housekeeping, and state that they will board (in spite of all Jackie may do) until there is some improvement in the domestic service.

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