

An Unexpected Match (Prologue)

At a lost for new ideas, I decided to steal a plot from one of the Chinese dramas I watch with my wife. Of course I will spin the narrative in a way that I will make the story my own. I can't understand the audio lines, but I have become very good at reading the English subtitles. So in my head, the actors seem like they are really speaking English. We watch all kinds of movies together. She doesn't like monster movies or science fiction. Action movies and love stories in English are OK. I really like these Chinese dramas. The cinematography is spectacular. Lots of movies from the Qing Dynasty.

Here are pictures of the three prominent actors and some scenes to describe what I mean. Here are the names I chose for my characters.

Mae Ying



Lin Zexu



Zatian



Mae Ying was sent away at the age of five to live with her grandmother because her father, after consulting a fortune teller, thought she was a jinx and would hurt his career.

Lin Zexu, I will just call him Lin, is a prominent high court official. Zatian is heir to a rich established state, but is not favored by his father because he has a medical condition the prevents him from a military position. Lin is a close friend of Mae Ying's grandmother. Mae Ying has just turned 16. Just like in

other cultures, a coming out ceremony is common and necessary. In the Mexican culture it is called a Quincinera (15th birthday celebration). In American culture, I think the girl is called a debutante. Mae Ying doesn't follow traditional rules, but is persuaded by her grandmother to go through with it.

Scenic pictures from the movie



An Unexpected Match
(Chapter 1)

Reluctantly, Mae Ying agrees to go through with her “Coming Out Party”. An unexpected guest was Lin Zexu. Normally, a person of his high status would not attend. Since he was a long time friend of Mae Ying’s grandmother, he was there. He could not notice how beautiful she had become and how grown up she looked. He put those thoughts away. In his mind, he was much too old for her. He had been married before, but his wife had died unexpectedly of a virus. He was too busy with court duties to think about marriage again.

Mae Ying was looking forward to seeing her mother. She had not seen her since her father had sent her away. A certain amount of resentment of her mother was still present. How could a mother let her five year old daughter be abandoned? Of course her father would be there. A person she was not looking forward to seeing. When her father saw how she had grown into such a stunning beauty, his thoughts were not for her. He was thinking about who he could match her up with to promote his career.

The meeting with her father did not go over well. The first insult to her was her mother was not present. Her father made some excuse about how sick her mother was and not able to make the trip. In her place was her father’s concubine.

You are the last person I wanted to come and to bring your hussy instead of my mother is doubly unpleasant. Her father raised his hand to slap her. Go ahead and beat me in front of all these guests. It wouldn’t hurt any more than the day you sent me away. He lowered his arm and said, apparently you have not been brought up properly. We will see about your discipline when you come back to the capital. I won’t go back to the capital with you. My place is here with my grandmother. You will do as you are told.

All this had been witnessed by Lin. He admired her spirit. This was a girl he would keep an eye on.

Zatian was also present at her party. He had a high standing and was an arrogant sort. He approached Mae Ying, and as he did he pulled out a long knife. Mae Ying's maid stepped in front. She was adept at Kung Fu and was her mistress's protector. How dare you pull a knife on my mistress. You misunderstand. I am merely giving her a gift for her future protection. Mae Ying motioned for her to step aside. Zatian presented the blade and she took it. Thank you sir, a most unusual gift, but one that I will certainly cherish and appreciate.

Later that evening, her grandmother, once again, urged her to go back to the capital. You need to experience more of the world than what you have had here. But I like it here. I don't want you to leave either, but I think it is in your best interest to go. If my father thinks I will aid his career, he is in for a rude awakening.

Mae Ying was distraught by what was in store for her. She sought refuge on her small boat drifting along a slowly flowing river near her home. It was the one place she felt relaxed and could think. She started drinking wine to relax herself.

Author's note: Something I do myself and it usually works.

Not known by her, Lin was in the vicinity facing a serious matter. Lin was promoting a tax reform that would aid the common folks. Others from the capital opposed this. It would cut into their already wealthy hordes. His cousin was one of them. He had surrounded Lin with his own entourage of guards. He was forcing him to sign a paper stating that he was promoting something that would harm the Emperor. I have already written the form. All you need is to place your thumbprint on the paper. And what if I refuse? I would not hesitate to kill you now. OK, death it is. Lin's own soldiers emerged from the river armed to the teeth. It didn't take long before his cousin was defeated and Lin took his life.

Mae Ying had wakened from her alcohol induced slumber. Standing on the boat's edge she witnessed the killing events. Still groggy from her drink, she

lost her balance and fell into the water. She had never learned to swim. Down she went not able to tread water. Before she passed out, she viewed a person reaching down to grab her hand. When she awoke, she was in a bed in a safe place. A physician had just checked her out. Lin approached her bed. It seems you fell into the water. Did you see anything before that? He was checking to see if she had witnessed his killing of his cousin. No, my mind was still worried about my forced trip to the capital. My servant jumped in and pulled you out. You owe him your life. His servant appeared and confirmed that he did indeed pull off the deed. Her memory was still foggy, but his form did not look like what she remembered. She shrugged it off as confusion while she was under water.

After she recovered sufficiently to travel, her and her maid set off for the capital with her Uncle Ping leading. As she moved along, they sort of fell behind. Shall we go faster. No need, what's the danger, just keep going slow. When they rounded a bend, there was another carriage up ahead.

Zaitan was in it. He was pointing his crossbow at her. Master, why are you scaring Mae Ying? I can see that she is not scared. Mae Ying instructed her maid to ignore him and just ride past. As they did, Zaitan shot his arrow near the horses hooves startling it. It bolted and as they went past Zaitan's carriage their wheels collided. Zaitan's carriage was disabled. Mae Ying's carriage was out of control. He watched as Mae Ying jumped from the carriage seat on the top of the horse. She pulled out the blade that Zaitan had given her and she stabbed it right into the horse's neck killing it instantly. The carriage came to a halt. By this time, her uncle had circled back and approached asking if she was OK.

Zaitan, the arrogant guy that he was, complained that Mae Ying had broken his carriage. She was furious. She still had the blade in her hand. It is you who have caused all this with your arrow shot. You are lucky I don't give you the same fate as my horse. Zaitan, being the heir to the powerful Marquis's estate, was not used to anyone talking to him that way. He started to open his mouth. Mae Ying told him to shut up. Uncle, please take me away.

Zaitan, instead of being furious back, was dumbfounded that he had met a woman of such independence. He was used to woman fawning over him. Someone who he must work to pursue is more enticing. Always wanting what you can't easily have. He must encounter her more in the future.

She finally arrived in Beijing. Her mother rushed out to greet her. She grabbed her hand, but Mae Ying pulled her hand back. As far as she was concerned, her grandmother was her "real" mother and this woman was not. Mae Ying could not have realized the anguish her mother had endured over the years for letting her daughter go. She would soon learn the stress that her father had caused her. For now, she kept her distance and didn't even call her Mom. She addressed her as Madame.

An Unexpected Match (Chapter 2)

Mae Ying found the atmosphere at her father's home just as she expected it would be. The daughter of her father's concubine was spoiled and had always been #1 in the household. She immediately started bossing Mae Ying around. Who are you to tell me what to do? I am the "real" daughter here and you will treat me as such. Lan took a step back. She had not expected someone with this strong personality. Her aggressiveness instead turned to humiliation. Lan's mother witnessed the exchange. Later that night, they both plotted on how to put Mae Ying in her place. Just like her father, they were both in for a rude awakening. May Ying was not the timid 16 year old they had expected. They should have realized there was something special about her. Even her arrival to the home had an unexpected surprise. Since Mae Ying's horse had been killed and Zaitan reluctantly admitted it was his doing that caused the mishap, he offered to accompany her and deliver her to her home. When his carriage arrived, Mae Ying's father fell all over himself not having expected such a high status person to adorn his doorstep. As he was fawning all over, the last thing he expected was to see his daughter step out of Zaitan's prestigious carriage.

Zatian's status got elevated even higher. He was appointed to school the crown prince. In case you are not aware of Qing Dynasty protocol, the crown prince is the eldest son of the Emperor and destined to succeed him. In this case, the crown prince was only eight years old. Even at that young age, he was way beyond his years and extremely smart. Also aware of plots and schemes to elicit his favor. Zatian was one of the few he trusted.

Lan



Lan's mother concocted an evil scheme. She thought that if she could accelerate Mae Ying's mother's illness, after she passed away, her status would be elevated to first madam. Then Lan could trump Mae Ying's position.

Mae Ying's mother was taking a traditional Chinese herb to counteract her sickness. Together, Lan and her mother came up with, what she thought was an ingenious plan. Lan instructed her maid to add a second herb to the medicine. This combination would cause Mae Ying's health to worsen. Seeing her mother getting worse, Mae Ying approached Lin and asked for his assistance. He knew of a prominent physician in the capitol. He granted Mae Ying this favor. The physician examined Mae Ying's mother. Then he asked to test her medicine. He uncovered the plot. Mae Ying's father was furious. He threatened the maid. Feared of being be-headed herself, she gave up Lan as the culprit. Of course Lan's mother, protecting her daughter, denied that Lan had anything to do with it. Mae Ying saw right through her. Mae Ying's father, instead of doing the right thing, gave excuses, saying it was all a miss-understanding. Instead of instigating the severe punishment of death normally given, he banned Lan's mother to an isolated room not

allowing her to have any visitors. Lan was devastated. Her mother took the rap for her saying she had nothing to do with it.

So the stage was set for infighting that would go on for all of Mae Ying's life in the Capitol.

The New Year was approaching. Each year back in the town with her grandmother, a special fireworks show was conducted. It was called the steel dragon shower fireworks. It produced an effect like you would see in a steel mill with brightly showers of sparks flying out in every direction. It had never been done in the capital. Lin overheard Mae Ying lamenting about missing this unique show. Being a Grand Secretary, he had the Emperor's ear. This year the realm had received an excess amount of taxes due to high productivity. He mentioned to the Emperor that it would please the palace officials and the common folk alike if he added this special steel dragon shower fireworks to the regular display. The Emperor liked the idea. Anything that made him more highly respected appealed to him.

Lin never mentioned to Mae Ying that it was he who had promoted this. Lin had never thought about marriage again for a long time. His mother was always pushing him to accept one of the many high society woman. His thought now was that would only cause him more stress. If he married a more common woman like Mae Ying, that would not be an issue. He was slowly warming to the idea, but he kept his feelings to himself.

Mae Ying was thrilled that her favorite fireworks would be on display today. She had secured a position on a floating boat near the launching platform. Lin had seen her on the boat as the fireworks began. The display was going well until an errant shot landed near where she was watching. Startled by the nearness, she lost her balance and fell overboard. Once again, she found herself underwater not able to reach the surface. Lin did not hesitate. He dove into the water and reached down and grabbed her hand. Just like before, he pulled her to safety. Later, while resting in her bed with a physician checking her, Lin made his way to her side. The memory of his face was clear enough this time. It matched the man who had saved her that day in her home town. It was you! What? It was you who pulled me from

the water last time, not your servant. Lin did not try to hide it. I was trying to save you from an unpleasant inquiry.

Most people watching the steel steel dragon fireworks show did not notice the rescue of Mae Ying. One who did notice was Zatian. He saw Lin dive into the water and pull Mae Ying to safety. Why did he spring into action so quickly? And why would someone as high in status as the Grand Secretary endanger himself for a somewhat commoner. A shred of jealousy crept into his mind.

An Unexpected Match (Chapter 3)

The Mid-Summer Games:

Each year a shooting competition took place. It was a chance for all to show off their skills. Shooting an arrow at stationery and moving target while mounted on horseback was a challenging sport. Both Zatian and Lin were there. Zatian, due to his medical condition, was not very athletic, but he had other interests. Mae Ying was going to participate. Lin had other worries on his mind. His mother had set up a match for him with a very beautiful qualified candidate. Qual Ling was a beautiful maiden with a strong personality. Qual Ling





His mother had said that she was a perfect match for him. Qual Ling was also interested in marrying someone of his high intelligence and status. Lin had to come up with some way to dissuade her. He had already set his sights on Mae Ying. Qual Ling, in the interest of making the competition more exciting, introduced some betting. She encouraged the wealthy attendees to contribute some prize money to be given to the winner. The catch was, whomever won must donate the winnings to help the needy.

Her and Lin were the first contestants to participate. She was an expert marksman. After their run, both her and Lin hit all 5 targets. Another round was expected since no one won yet. The second round produced the same result. During the third round, Lin purposely missed several targets. Qual Ling knew he missed on purpose. This drew a bout of anger from her. She never wanted anyone to concede to her on purpose. She threw down her bow and stormed off. The onlookers wanted to see more show. They encouraged Mae Ying to give it a try. No one knew that she had mastered that technique at a young age. When the match was over, she had won. She never missed a single target. Did Lin miss on purpose again? It didn't matter if he did. This ordeal accomplished just what Lin had hoped. There was no way Qual Ling would continue her pursuit of a marriage proposal. Instead, for some reason, she took a fancy to Zatian. At the moment, he had no interest in anyone else besides Mae Ying. This aloofness made Qual Ling even more determined to pursue him.

There was one more man interested in Mae Ying. It was non other than Lin's nephew, Chen. In fact, at first it was she who was interested in him.



One of the more discrete ways to tell someone you liked them was to fly a kite and meet at a predetermined place. Mae Ying had arraigned such a meeting. Lin caught wind of it and immediately discouraged Chen. There was a dark secret between them. Chen's father had been a notorious bandit. That in itself would have prevented him from having any kind of status in the capital. Lin had kind of adopted Chen and took him under his wing. He pointed out that a marriage proposal would include an extensive background check and his past would be revealed. He had worked hard to gain some status. He had taken third place in the annual scholarship competition. Not something easily done. This warning was enough to cause him worry. He had intended to meet with Mae Ying, but he backed down. Mae Ying was on a bridge flying her kite and saw Chen turn and walk away. This hurt her pride, but she took it in stride reasoning that she was too young to marry anyway. This event would play a profound effect on the three of them in the future.



During the time Mae Ying had been at her father's home, she witnessed the agony her mother had endured all this time. Even though she still resented her mother not fighting harder to keep her, she saw the evidence of an unhappy life. Besides Lan and her mother, her father was an arrogant selfish man. She waited until her and her mother were alone in the mansion. Why don't you divorced him? You could return to our home town and live a life of peace. If I did that, it would ruin you and your brother's chances of success in the capital. You shouldn't worry about us. You have suffered long enough. Still her mother saw no way out.

Another situation of note is that Lin's mentor was the Senior Grand Secretary. He had tutored Lin ever since he was a little boy. Lin owed him a lot, but he had found out that his mentor was corrupt. This is common in every government and kingdom. Everyone backstabbing each other to elevate their own status. Same goes true for the Emperor's harem and even among the high society ladies. Each one spreading gossip about the other. This put him in a tight spot. How should he proceed? Unless he had hard evidence against him, any mention of it would only crash and burn his own career. He needed to proceed cautiously.

An Unexpected Match (Chapter 4)

In spite of the correction to Mae Ying's mother's medicine, her condition was too advanced for the change to make much of a difference. She called Mae Ying to her side. My biggest regret is that I didn't fight harder with your father to keep you here in our home. I know I don't have much time left. I only have one request. I want to be buried back in our home town. My father would never allow that. I know that, so after I am gone, I want you to file this paper. I will divorced him after I am gone. You just have to figure out how to force him to sign it.

It wasn't long after their conversation that she passed away. Mae Ying told her father of her request to be buried. He said, no way! That would cause me too much embarrassment. Still only concerned for his own image never

concerned for Mae Ying or her mother's feelings. Not as much embarrassment as me suing you for her death. You and your concubine accelerated her sickness. Are you aware of the consequences of your action? Someone suing their father would receive 40 lashes. I am willing to take the punishment. Her father called, what he thought of as her bluff. It was no bluff. She filed the papers with the royal court. Lin had warned her of this rule of law. Non-the-less, she went ahead with it anyway. Lin told her of an old law that may help her. If you beat a drum in the public square, you can get a hearing from the local judge.

She followed through with his advice. As she beat the drum, the judge declared that she had no authority to request a hearing. She publicly announced her grievances. The judge was about to shut her down when the public watching started chanting "Justice, justice". The judge, not shielded from public scrutiny himself, caved in. She won her appeal without receiving a single hit.

Her father, further embarrassed by her public display, had no other recourse than to sign the divorce paper. Even though Mae Ying had resented her mother in the past, she finally understood what she had endured. Her mother's death hit her harder than she would have thought.

Lan came to her after the death. I am sorry for everything that happened. Mae Ying was not unaware of Lan's situation. She had been subjected to low status being the daughter of a concubine and her future was really in doubt now that her mother was no longer in the residence. Mae Ying told her, I can't forgive you for all that you and your mother did to my mother, but I understand your position. You are my half sister and I don't want strife to be a continuing divide between us. As you may know, I have ventured out into the business world. After all, my family are primarily merchants. I plan on opening a restaurant serving only women. If you want, I can make you a partner. Lan did not expect this treatment from Mae Ying. She almost fell to her knees to kowtow to her. You don't need to do that. Let's go forward as real sisters from now on.

Lin decided to declare his feelings toward Mae Ying. It wasn't the best time to do this, but he wanted to let her know. When he told her, he didn't expect this reaction. She told him that her mother had just died and she had to adhere to the customs. She would be in mourning for at least three years. Besides she said, someone of your status would also take on several concubines and I don't want to have to compete for your affection. Any other high status person would have been offended by this rejection. He had many maidens vying for his attention. He was not of that sort. He said, other women are of no interest to me, only you. He just told her to think about it and he would wait for her decision and give her time. Mae Ying looked upon him in a new light. Rather than be offended, he considered her feelings. This was unexpected and a surprise to her.

Still, she had other plans for the time being and marriage was not one of her top priorities.

She threw herself into her business enterprises and put thoughts of marriage on the back burner. Her and Lan opened their restaurant and it immediately became a hit among the high society ladies.

Due to his position, Lin had access to all the historical records. He started an investigation. What he learned was that his mentor, Zhao, was indeed corrupt. He had associated with an ancient sect that always tried to undermine the Emperor. This alone would constitute enough evidence to accuse his mentor. He was more interested in unraveling any current plots. He thought remnants of the sect had been wiped out years ago. It seems their presence was still around. This is the danger he wanted to uncover.

Lin was waiting patiently for Mae Ying's feelings for him to change. He went out of his way to bump into her every chance he could. She was not immune to his presence either. As time went on, she started to consider his proposal. One evening, he had been invited to a dinner party at her father's home. After drinking lots of wine, her father suggested that he not return home. We have an extra room adjacent to our main house, you are welcome



to stay the night there. Lin took him up on his offer. Mae Ying was restless and took a stroll outside in the fresh air. As she walked by, Lin unexpectedly opened the door to the room. In all propriety, Mae Ying should have just keep walking. Lin said he had trouble sleeping and was enjoying some high quality tea. Would you care to join me? The allure was just too much for her. She did enter his room. Unfortunately, one of the maids happened to be outside dumping some trash and saw her enter. Rumors were rampant in the capital, and soon news of their encounter was wide spread.

An Unexpected Match
(Chapter 5)

Lin realized that the only way to curb the gossip that could ruin Mae Ying's reputation was to propose marriage. Enough time had passed after her mother's death that she decided it was time to accept. It was traditional for the suitor to send gifts to the bride's family along with the proposal request. Mae Ying's father was ecstatic. Having someone like Lin as a relative was beyond his wildest dreams. Of course he accepted. Mae Ying told Lin that he must also ask her grandmother. This would not be a problem since she had known Lin a long time and respected his character. The wedding was a huge event. More lavish than any before.



Their happiness was short lived. Zhao had suggested to the emperor that Lin was the most suitable leader to battle the insurgents threatening the realm. Lin saw through his suggestion. He was getting to close to the truth. In fact, the very insurgents were part of Zhao's secret legions. Getting Lin killed in battle would kill two birds with one stone.

He left shortly after the wedding.

Mae Ying, not one to adhere to convention, decided to follow him to the combat center where he was deployed. Zatian was at first devastated when he learned of Mae Ying's wedding. Even though he had vowed to marry no one other than her, he realized his pursuit of her was a fantasy only he dreamed of. Before the marriage, he had visited her. He told her of his feelings for her. She she told him that she considered him a close friend and more like a brother. This appeased him somewhat.

He still kept a watch on her movements. When his watchers told him she had left the city, he decided to follow her.

Lin was already engaged in battle. His troops were outnumbered and he was losing ground. Back at the headquarters, he was surprised when Mae Ying showed up. What are you doing here? This area is fraught with danger. You should have remained in the capital. I can't sleep not knowing if you are OK or not. Lin gave up on sending her back knowing when she made up her mind there was no negotiation.

Unexpectedly Zatian also showed up. What are you doing here? I thought you might need some help. He had brought a regiment with him. After his father passed away, he had inherited the title of leader. Lin welcomed the reinforcements, but they were still at a disadvantage. He gave Mae Ying an important task to do. You need to go back to the capital and plead with the Emperor to send more troops. She reluctantly agreed knowing that this was necessary in order to save her husband and friend. She rode quickly back. Her maid and protector accompanied her. She asked for audience to speak to the Emperor. Zhao tried to stop her. The Emperor overheard her plea. Let her pass. When he learned of the peril Lin and the soldiers were in he was

furious with Zhao. Zhao had been giving him false reports of the battle and even complained that sending more soldiers would endanger the capital itself. The Emperor immediately sent reinforcements. He imprisoned Zhao to wait for further investigation

Meanwhile, Lin and Zatian were in fierce combat. Lin was an expert swordsman, but Zatian, because of his health issues, was never able to wield a sword. Instead, he was an expert marksman and provided long range support. His aid kept supplying him with loaded rifles which he used with exacting precision. Zatian was finally overwhelmed and fired his last bullet. His guardian stepped in at the last minute to shield his body. That was to no avail. Lin was witness to Zatian's last valiant move as he tried to use his meager dagger as a last defense resort.



When it looked like even Lin was going to lose his life, the Emperor's combat army arrived just in the nick of time. Lin was saved, but he still received a dangerous wound. Weakened as he was, he managed to carry Zatian's body on his back out of the fray of the continuing battle.

Zatian was given the highest honors in death. His father always belittled him due to his weak condition, but if his father had seen his courage, he would have been proud.

With the Emperor's army, the insurgents were quickly defeated. Mae Ying tended to Lin's wounds and also lamented at Zatian's passing.

It was time to return to the capital. Lin visited the room where Zhao was imprisoned. He had supplied additional evidence of Zhao's betrayal to the Emperor. This sealed Zhao's fate. He was to be executed. Lin questioned him on why he had chosen this path. Zhao said, I remember when I first took you on as a student. I knew you were brilliant. I did not know that this same brilliance would be my undoing. I always respected you for your integrity. Where did you go wrong? Not everyone can refuse riches when offered. I got caught up in the rampant corruption of the times. It was too late to turn back. The secret guild that you uncovered had secured evidence against me and blackmailed me for their own means. Lin still had some respect for his mentor. As he left the prison room, he laid a scabbard with a knife inside on the table. As he left, he heard the distinct grunt of someone impaling themselves. He had left Zhao with a method to avoid the public execution that would have furthered his shame.

Lin was promoted and took over Zhao's position. Mae Ying, being the wife of such a high official, was invited to the monthly tea session all the elite wives attended. A couple of the wives were jealous of Mae Ying's beauty and thought she was too young to have such high status. They had heard the rumors of her encounter with Lin before the wedding. They were going to use that knowledge to knock her down a peg or two. They were in for a surprise of their own. Mae Ying, being a part owner of her own women's tea restaurant, knew more about what was going on than any of them could imagine. The servants at her restaurant overheard all of the gossip ladies spout when they thought men were not around. So information was more valuable than the money she made. It didn't take long before the topic of Mae Ying's indiscretion came up. Rather than sit there and take it, she thought offense was better than defense. So where did you hear that? Maybe it was from the waitresses at my restaurant. Whether that is true or not cannot be verified. But more than one source said that both of your husbands were frequent visitors to the Peony Tea House. This is a well known brothel establishment. Both women objected. That can't be true! Whether it is true or not, these kinds of rumors can be harmful. I think it is better to keep our talk to things of propriety. Don't you? They both shut up. The madam, who was the obvious overseer of the group, respected Mae Ying for not backing

down. I think Mae Ying has a good point. The rumor mill quickly shut down. No one dared opposed her after that.

Epilogue

I took many of the plots from the Chinese drama “A Splendid Match”, but shortened and changed many to fit my short story format. My wife and I watched all 40 episodes at 45 minutes each so you can see I couldn’t cover lots of the events that occurred. These Chinese dramas, or soap operas I call them, are very well done. Audio is in Mandarin, but the subtitles are in English. The cinematography is fantastic. The actors are great. The depiction of life during the Qing Dynasty is fairly accurate. How would I know? Because I was there. They even made a statue of me.

See the resemblance?
Author Terry



The End