

THE CHINESE WOMAN IN THE PAINTING

Synopsis

Prologue

Guangxi Province, South East China, August 24, 1907. Shushan, "the offering bearer", is still upset by what happened that morning when she was asked to fulfill the gift she inherited. The whole universe opened its doors to her. Now she knows that she belongs to this fluid energy that governs the cosmos and brings beings together.

First part

Paris, 2001. Mélisende and Guillaume spot each other in the Underground, then recognise each other when they meet again a few months later. The strong feelings they have for each other blend with a persistent sense of déjà vu.

Saint Guilhem-le-désert (South of France), May 2002. The young couple discovers a strange painting at a garage sale. It is a Chinese landscape depicting Yangshuo. The young woman has been spending some time there. Her boyfriend recognizes this place as well, although he has never set foot in Asia. Mélisende's gaze is caught in the details of the painting behind a pretty Chinese woman, only to focus on a couple standing in the background. Surprised, the young woman holds her nose to the painting. These two characters on the painting resemble them so much that you can't tell them apart! With one exception: they are much older than they are. Surprisingly, the old man is wearing the same watch as Guillaume, a unique creation. A calligraphy of a poem by Wang Wei, dating from the year 720, adds to the painting. It refers to nature, to life, to the eternal new beginning. Curious, the two lovers decide to have the painting expertised.

Montpellier, May 2002. Lisa, Mélisende's best friend, works in a museum. With the help of Luc, her colleague, she discovers that the

work is not signed, that it is about fifty years old, that it is, moreover, the central part of a triptych, and that it dissimulates a sketch used as a preparation study that is different from the final painting. Oddly enough, the characters are not placed in the same place.

Part Two

Beijing, 2002. Mélisende goes to Beijing as part of her work. Guillaume travels with her. They take the opportunity to elucidate the mysteries of the painting. Everyone agrees that the author is not Chinese, perhaps Vietnamese.

Yangshuo, 2002. Mélisende and Guillaume carry on their journey. As soon as they arrive in Yangshuo, the young man notices initials engraved on the stone of a pontoon. An M and an F followed by the year 1907. The same inscriptions as those on the back of his watch. Guillaume is irritated by all these coincidences and impressions of déjà vu that have haunted him since they arrived in Yangshuo. Mélisende also feels these troubling sensations. The young people ask a young painter who identifies the Chinese woman in the painting as a woman named Lian, who is now very old and lives nearby. Mélisende and Guillaume go to her home, and when they see her, she is overcome with emotion. In the course of the conversation, the old lady reveals to them that it was she who painted the painting, ordered by Madeleine and Ferdinand, the couple who look so much like them. She then takes them to a room where the French discover, amazed, the other two parts of the three-part work.

Yangshuo, 1961. Lian, then very young, meets Madeleine and Ferdinand. Seduced by her talent, they ordered the famous three-part work from her.

Sarlat, 1971. Madeleine and Ferdinand are in the twilight of their lives. The old woman explains that Lian willingly agreed to let Ferdinand do the sketches and the underlay on the sides of the three-part painting.

Montpellier, 2002. Back in France, Mélisende entrusts the final parts of the work to Lisa and Luc who discover that instead of an underlying drawing, the preparatory sketches turn out to be a long message hidden under the paint. Each part is marked by future dates in relation to the origin of the work: 2002 and 2099.

Saint-Guilhem le désert, 2002. Mélisende reads the confessions of Madeleine and Ferdinand and understands that they are none other than herself and Guillaume in another time, another life. Mélisende and Guillaume are appalled by this revelation which explains all the mysteries surrounding their meeting and the painting.

Part Three

Yangshuo, May 1961. Madeleine and Ferdinand tell their lives with Mélisende and Guillaume. Their childhood, their honeymoon in the colonies in Saigon then in China in Shanghai and Yangshuo, the two wars and finally their meeting with Shushan. Shushan who, to thank them for saving her husband, used the gift passed on by her grandmother, which enabled the three of them to merge their souls for a moment and to grasp the bonds that unite them from life to life.

New York, 2068. Tal is heartbroken. His grandparents have passed away. They had become her only family when she lost her parents, Mélisende and Guillaume, in a car accident in 2047. She comes out of the solicitor's office with paintings under her arm, an old USB key in one pocket, an old watch in the other. Back home, Tal starts reading the document. It is a letter from her grandparents. Memoirs. Such a well-kept secret.. She is now entrusted with a mission of the utmost importance. "You will succeed. You will not lose your memories along the way. I will help you to record them. I assure you that you will be able to relive all these moments..."

Fate will know what to do. She knows it: her grandparents will find each other again. In December 2099. She will be almost sixty years old. They will only be thirty-one. She will recognize them. They will probably only have a feeling of déjà vu when they meet her. In this way, every story they are allowed to live through will never be forgotten.

Epilogue

Yangshuo, 1907. Shushan is overwhelmed by what she saw when she grabbed the hands of Madeleine and Ferdinand in her own. She allowed their minds to merge, linking their respective energies to those of the universe. She sensed the love that their souls have been

devoting to each other for ages. She understood that hers remained linked to theirs and that they met each other when they made their way through the Earth. She felt the conviction that, much later, their grandchildren would surround them and that one of them, a daughter, would be none other than herself! This young man and his delicate wife, whose hands she was holding just a week ago, would thus become her own grandparents! An endless spiral. They will not recognize each other, unfortunately. They will feel the intuition of seeing each other for the second time, when their eyes, mirrors of their souls, will meet. And, undoubtedly, they will feel very deep feelings for each other, which will grow richer as time goes by. Feelings that will astonish them, as much by their strength as by their obviousness. A simple feeling of déjà vu...