

For

MEIRA
CHAND

THE PAINTED CAGE

Marshall Cavendish
Editions



MEIRA CHAND

She reached the great gates at the road, where she found a rikisha. Soon the shouts of the multitude of vendors and the rancid odours were left behind. Within moments she saw the green of the Bluff before a setting sun and knew, as much as she hated it, that there was no escape now from its insular life ... All that Japan might have taught her seemed suddenly shut like a door in her face.

In Yokohama, Japan, on a bright, cold morning in January 1897, Amy Redmore stands trial for the murder of her husband Reggie, ex-secretary of the Yokohama United Club. Marriage to a feckless, dissolute, older man has brought Amy from the rolling hills of Somerset, England to Japan. Along the way, disturbing truths about Reggie are brought to light: his illegitimate child by his mistress and his habitual consumption of arsenic in doses great enough to kill most normal men.

They settle down in Yokohama's expatriate district, where the Westerners live in segregated splendour and Reggie is lost nightly to the temptations of the town's notorious pleasure quarter. Living a separate life from Reggie, Amy finds freedom in art, sensuality and a new boldness, but this self-discovery will ultimately betray her with devastating consequences, and Amy will pay a terrible price for wisdom.

Based on a true story, *The Painted Cage* is Meira Chand's powerful, vividly wrought and gorgeously written masterpiece of one woman's downfall at the hands of chance and a stubbornly insular society.

visit our website at:
www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

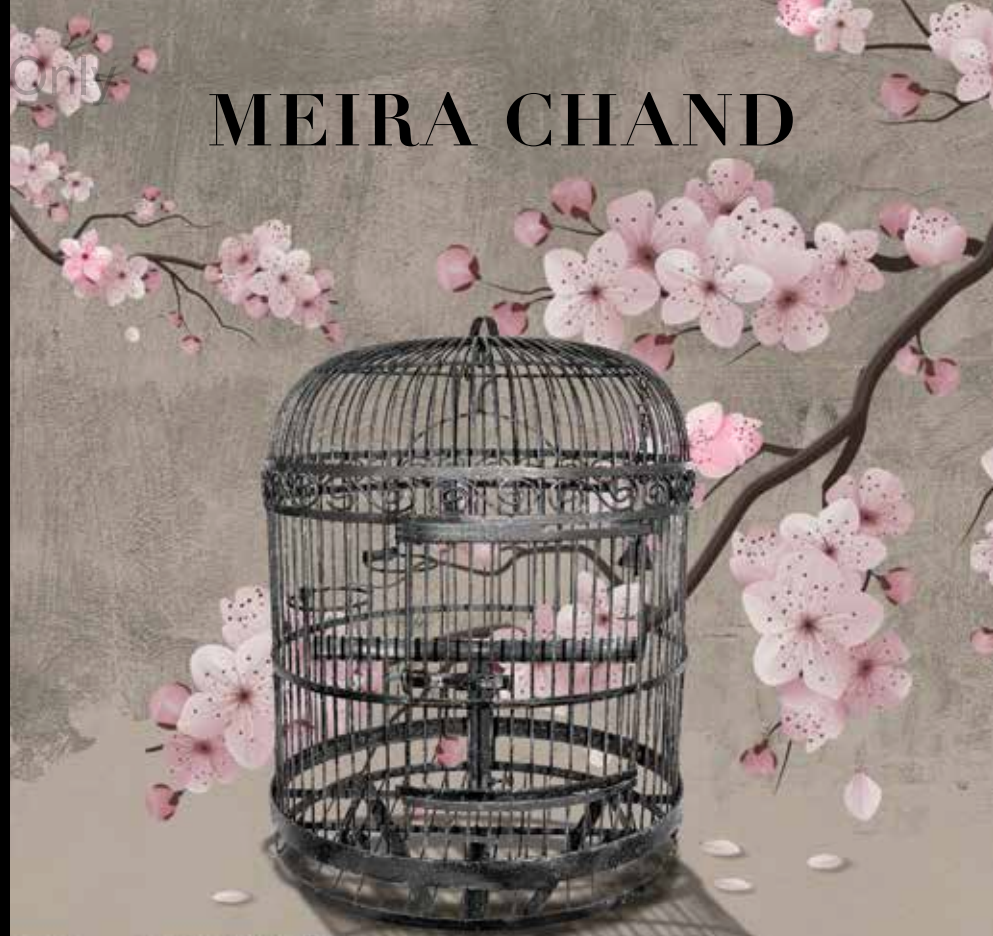
 Marshall Cavendish
Editions

FICTION

ISBN 978-981-4828-81-9



9 789814 828819



THE
PAINTED
CAGE

YOKOHAMA, 5 JANUARY 1897

The clerk of the court, Mr Moss, stood up.

‘The indictment is as follows: “Robert Charles Russell, the Crown Prosecutor in Japan for our Lady Queen, presents and charges that Amy Jane Redmore on the twenty-second day of October in the year of our Lord 1896 feloniously wilfully and of her malice aforesight did kill and murder Reginald Percy Redmore against the peace of our Lady, the Queen, her crown and dignity.”’

‘I am not guilty,’ the prisoner said in a clear voice.

Then she sat down.

They had come at nine-thirty that morning for her, two warders with a *rikisha*. The day was bright and cold. A wind from the sea cut across the Bluff, there was no warmth in the sun. They set off in procession slowly, one warder in front, the other behind. It was easier to run than walk with a *rikisha*. Amy watched the stress upon the runner’s shoulders beneath his short cotton coat. He shivered in the wind, his feet bare in rough straw sandals. He was a thin fellow with a consumptive cough, yet he might live longer than she. The brutal simplicity of his life now seemed a thing to

envy. Amy smoothed down a pleat of her skirt, her clothes were those of mourning. The oilskin hood of the *rikisha* was up, she could not see much of the road. People stopped and stared. She had no wish to see their faces. The Native Town was quiet, the deadness of the New Year holidays still thick upon the trade, but in the Foreign Settlement all was life; a ship with the mail was soon to dock and called loudly from the bay. Amy Redmore was pulled slowly down to the post office end of Main Street.

She concentrated on her face, so that it might be as a Japanese face, a smooth wall before emotion. This was how she must be throughout the next weeks, devoid of expression. Cruel eyes would search her now, they would knead her for cracks from which to squeeze out the soft, naked grubs of truth. Their truth. She drew back in the darkness of the hood then, under the rickety oilskin ribs that reminded her of bat's wings.

Outside the British Consulate a crowd stood about in serious conversation. Such a lack of hilarity was unusual for Yokohama; gravity was the aftermath of earthquakes or typhoons. On this Tuesday morning at five minutes to ten talk stopped as Amy Redmore vacated her *rikisha*. Her face was calm, she took no notice of these first eyes that sought already to sum her up, in voyeurism or condemnation. She looked down at her hands and composed her face to show only determination. Inside the Consulate the court room was small and filled to overflowing. All standing room was taken, the entrance hall was blocked. The room had normally little light or air and the thick brown curtains, dusty as moles, made the place oppressive. Smells of old paper and righteousness seeped beneath the odour of bodies. Wood gleamed with the polish of years, cool as sentences witnessed. There was hardly a face Amy did not know, but now

they were all strangers. This must be a play, she thought, or a dream to wake from; there was that sense of waiting for a curtain to rise, on fantasy or reality.

Jack Easley, her defence lawyer, came and spoke encouragement. Robert Russell hurried in and out in wig and gown, full of the importance of the prosecution and a piety lent by the Crown. Soon Judge Bowman, in red robes lined with ermine, strode in with Mr Moss. The mouths and eyes before Amy stilled. What they had been waiting for now begun. She felt she might already be dead, that this was some eternal post-mortem in hell that would never end. She watched as Mr Moss stood up and prepared to read the indictment.

Afterwards there was a rustle of silk, a cough, a whisper as people settled. The sun caught a monocle, a gold watch chain and the bald head of old Mr Porter. The women were turned out in a subdued kind of splendour, mostly in mauves and greys, clinging to those twilight shades. Amy Redmore had never seen them so determined to prove sobriety, even Lettice Dunn in navy blue with a demure lace collar. The morals of Yokohama would now be on view as far away as London. She was like the leak in a foolproof pot through which the sour stench of the brew was smelled. Their upturned faces recoiled from her. They were out, one and all, to save their own skins and the Great British Reputation. And those who were her keepers, strutting about in the robes and wigs of archaic fantasy, they had long wished to clean up the morals of Yokohama's younger set. They would make an example of her to stretch across the world. In spite of a plethora of missionaries, God felt far from Yokohama. Robert Russell's voice now filled the court like a slit of cold light in a corridor.

‘The prisoner married the deceased in 1888. The deceased was then in government service in the Straits Settlements. In 1890 he resigned his appointment on account of ill health and came to Yokohama where he was appointed secretary of the Yokohama United Club, a post he held until the time of his death. Since their arrival here two children have been born to them, a boy and a girl. In March last year Jessica Mary Flack came out from England as nursery governess to take charge of the children. Of these people the household consisted. The servants were: Rachel Greer, a Eurasian girl who was Mrs Redmore’s lady’s maid. Hanayue Asa, a Japanese girl and housemaid. Ah Kwong, a young Chinese boy. Yazana, the cook; a coolie of no name; a *betto* or groom, Kuroyanagi Junyu; and a small boy, also of no name, who assisted in the stable.

‘From the time of their arrival in Yokohama, Dr Charles was their family doctor and regular medical attendant until the time of Mr Redmore’s death on 22 October last. Dr Charles looked upon him as a healthy man, perhaps given to too much good living and sometimes also given to drinking more than was good for him – but on occasions only.’

But on occasions only. Oh, the lies, the lies. Already they had begun.