

## CHAPTER VI

### CONTINUATION OF THE PORTRAIT—HER MAJESTY'S DOGS

I HAD daily morning sittings from Her Majesty for the portrait, but always surrounded by the whole Court, with eunuchs coming and going. The sittings were long enough, for I had an hour in the morning and a half-hour in the afternoon with Her Majesty, but she did not expect me to work except when she posed, and this was not enough to make any headway on the picture, as there was a great deal I might have done at other times. Though there was so much going and coming in the Throne-room, it was a great advantage working in Her Majesty's own "milieu," surrounded by her favorite furniture, flowers, and fruits. This was some compensation; but I saw, if Her Majesty insisted upon my resting when she did—if I were allowed to work only in the Throne-room and only when she posed—the work could not go on as it should. Sitting for her portrait seemed to be looked on somewhat in the light of an amusement by the Empress Dowager, as a time for conversation and relaxation. She put me many questions while she sat, and I felt she was studying me as closely as I was studying her during that time.

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My interest in the personality of this wonderful woman increased each day. I loved to watch the extreme mobility of her countenance when she was at ease and was not invested in her official expression, nor her Buddha-like pose. Her voice was most musical, with no indication of age in it. Her enunciation was clear, and I loved to hear her talk. Though understanding but little of what she said, the music of her voice, the grace of her gesticulations, and the charm of her smile made her conversation most delightful to watch and listen to.

I was delighted that Her Majesty seemed to like me, and I appreciated her consideration in not wishing me to tire myself out with my work, and her kind hospitality which desired to make me acquainted with the charms of the Summer Palace and which allowed me to participate in her promenades and the simple amusements of her Ladies; but I felt it was important to advance the work on the portrait as quickly as possible. I knew that the "favor of kings" is uncertain, and I feared Her Majesty might soon tire of this new departure, of having her portrait painted! I feared the openly expressed opposition of the Chinese to a foreign lady being made a member of the Court circle, their superstition regarding the painting of a portrait of one of Their Majesties, which was against all Chinese tradition, might any day put a stop to the work; but, notwithstanding my fears and my desire to work, the days passed with little painting, and this was the only flaw in my perfect enjoyment of the fairy-like days and the unique experiences through which I was passing.

## With the Empress Dowager

The walks with Her Majesty had all the pomp and ceremony of the boat-rides—Her Majesty's and the Empress's yellow-satin sedan-chairs, with their six bearers, leading off, followed by the red chairs of the Princesses and Ladies-in-waiting, according to their rank, with a rigorous adherence to precedence, and attended by an army of eunuchs and chair-bearers, etc. No one ever knew what our destination was to be when we started out on these walks, Her Majesty directing her chair-bearers as she was carried along, and the others following this lead; but we were always taken to some interesting spot, where there was something quite worth seeing. When Her Majesty's chair stopped, all the others were immediately put down by the bearers, and the Ladies got out and went up to where the Empress Dowager's yellow camp-stool was placed. She had excellent taste in the choice of stopping-places, and the views were always picturesque. She seemed to take great pleasure in showing off the charming points of view, as well as the flowers, grounds, and buildings.

On one of our walks, her dogs were brought out by their attendant eunuchs. Dogs are great favorites with all the Chinese, and especially with the Empress Dowager. She has some magnificent specimens of Pekingese pugs and of a sort of Skye terrier. The pugs are bred with great care and have reached a high state of perfection, their spots being perfectly symmetrical and their hair beautifully long and silky, and they are of wonderful intelligence. The King Charles spaniels are said to have been bred out of the first of these dogs ever carried to Europe. The Empress Dowager

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has dozens of these pets, but she has favorites among them, and two are privileged characters. One of these is of the Skye variety, and is most intelligent and clever at tricks. Among other tricks, he will lie as dead at Her Majesty's command, and never move until she tells him to, no matter how many others may speak to him. Her other favorite she loves for his beauty. He is a splendid, fawn-colored Pekingese pug, with large, pale-brown, liquid eyes. He is devoted to her, and she is very fond of him, but as he was not easily taught, even as a puppy, she called him "Shudza" (fool). Her dogs all have most appropriate names, given by herself. They know Her Majesty's voice and will obey her slightest word.

The Empress Dowager does not care for the small sleeve-dog; she hates the thought of their being stunted by being fed only on sweets and wines. She says she cannot understand animals being deformed, at man's pleasure. The day we first met the dogs in the garden was the first time I had seen them. They rushed up to Her Majesty, not paying the slightest attention to any one else. She patted their heads and caressed and spoke to her favorites. After a while they seemed to notice that a stranger was present, and they bounded over toward me. Some of them growled and showed other evidences of displeasure, some seemed surprised almost to fear; but as the instinct of a dog never deceives him as to who is his friend, this was all soon changed to friendly greetings. I bent down to caress them, and forgot my surroundings, in my pleasure at seeing and fondling these beautiful creatures. I glanced up, presently, never

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dreaming Her Majesty had been paying any attention to me, as I was standing at a little distance behind her, and I saw on her face the first sign of displeasure I had noticed there. It seems her dogs never noticed any one but herself, and she appeared not to like her pets being so friendly with a stranger at first sight. Noticing this, I immediately ceased fondling them, and they were presently sent away. It was but a momentary shadow that passed over her face, and I quite understood the feeling. One does not like to see one's pets too friendly with strangers, and I had been tactless in trying to make friends with them at once.

A few days later, on another of our walks, some young puppies were brought to be shown the Empress Dowager. She caressed the mother and examined critically the points of the puppies. Then she called me up to show them to me, asking me which I liked best. I tried not to evince too much interest in them this time, but she called my attention to their fine points and insisted upon my taking each of them up. She seemed to be ashamed of her slight displeasure of the day before, and to wish to compensate for it.

The dogs at the Palace are kept in a beautiful pavilion with marble floors. They have silken cushions to sleep on, and special eunuchs to attend them. They are taken for daily outdoor exercise and given their baths with regularity. There are hundreds of dogs in the Palace, the young Empress, the Princesses and Ladies, and even the eunuchs, having their own. Some of the eunuchs are great fanciers and breeders of them. One of them still breeds the sleeve-dog. Her Majesty's known dislike to these

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latter is probably the cause of fewer being bred in the Palace now than formerly; and the race is slowly dying out. All the other dogs in the Palace, except Her Majesty's, are kept in the apartments and courts of their owners, and are not seen by her.

She dislikes cats very much, but some of the eunuchs have very fine specimens of the felines. They keep them, however, "sub rosa" and within rigid bounds, on no condition allowing them to come within Her Majesty's ken.

The pavilion at the Summer Palace where the Empress Dowager's dogs were kept was near her Throne-room, and also near the pavilion she had set aside for me. When the Court was taking its siesta, I used to go out where the dogs were basking in the sun in their court and look at and play with these interesting little animals. I was free to do as I pleased, and no one but the dogs' guardian eunuchs saw me there.

Among the younger set, of these pampered pets, was one that caught my fancy—one of those which had been brought for Her Majesty to look at in the garden. He was a beautiful white-and-amber-colored Pekingese pug. He soon learned to know me and would come running to me when I crossed the threshold of the court. Not long after I had discovered where the dogs were kept and had been paying them my daily visits, one night, when we had finished dinner at Her Majesty's table, one of her eunuchs brought in this very little dog and put it in my arms, saying Her Majesty had presented it to me from her own kennel! She had evidently learned of my visits to the dogs, though none of the eunuchs around her

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person had seen me go there, at least so I thought! I was delighted to own this beautiful animal, and when the Empress Dowager came into the Throne-room from her own apartments, I went up to her and kissed her hand and thanked her for it. She seemed much pleased that I liked it, and remarked that she had heard it was my favorite of her dogs, that I was to call him "Me-lah" (Golden Amber), from the color of his spots. Her Majesty and the Princesses were all much amused at the way he followed me around, not leaving my side for an instant, nor paying any attention to their frequent efforts to attract his attention. From that day, he became my constant companion and faithful friend.