

Little Buddha's Big Miracle In Lai-Shan Road

(And Other Stories)

By John A. Rickard

Also available by the author:

THE GOLGOTHA GATE

BEYOND 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE' : LYDIAS LIVES

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Author's Foreword

A word or two from Me to You

WELCOME to this collection of short stories. I hope you enjoy them all, and that the pence, cents or yen you have laid out for your purchase will prove to be a bargain – bearing in mind that a book is like a good shirt – it can be used over and over again. (In my own case, until shirts or books fall to bits).

A word or two about writing and writers. We, that is me and other wordsmiths, are often asked if people in our stories are drawn from real life, or are characters woven out of mist and fancy – just dust from fairy tales. I can't answer for other writers, but I would have to say: *Sometimes drawn from life! Perhaps half and half. But, wherever the recipe comes from, the ingredients are always well and truly stirred. Just like a good gin and tonic – you can't tell where the gin finishes and the tonic starts. Or is it the other way around?*

Perhaps it is a matter of perception. What is real? What is fancy?

Take the first tale in this collection, for example, about the Little Buddha sitting in the garden of a somewhat seedy hotel cum boarding house in Singapore, the Humming Bee, and a group of residents unlikely to receive a regular invitation to the local parson's tea and biscuits knees-up in aid of the church roof restoration fund.

Among the Humming Bee Hotel's residents in the story there is a massive pro-wrestler, McGurk, famed for matches with

other mad (and hungry) fighters in a caged ring, whose only other occupant for a time was not a referee – but a lion. Another hotel resident is a professional knife thrower – not to mention a beautiful Chinese cabaret performer with ambitions to be a film star.

So – fact or fiction? It's a mixture of both. The tale is fiction, more or less. But the hotel and the characters in the tale do have their origins in the world of reality.

There was a retired Australian wrestler, who was a friend and colleague of mine for a number of years, when I worked as a journalist in Tokyo. As well as wrestling in Australia he was well known on the South Asian Circuit, particularly in Singapore. And for a time, a very short time, when the whole world was hungry, lions in the ring were an added attraction.

Many years later, when I knew him in Tokyo, he had retired from the ring and was no longer a young man. But he still looked as though he could give King Kong a hard time for three or four rounds. And when we went swimming in the summer, his physique was always cause for respectful comment. His arms and legs seemed to be full of cricket balls, and judging from the shapes showing through his skin his stomach was full of wriggling pythons. He was the real life model for the make believe McGurk in the Little Buddha story.

The Humming Bee Hotel had its counterpart in Akasaka, one of the more interesting entertainment areas in down town Tokyo. The owner was a very broad minded Chinese gentleman, and the establishment catered to equally broad minded people from the four quarters of the earth – most of them in show business – in the broadest sense of the term – *Show and Business*. Among them was a couple from Lancashire. His speciality was swallowing swords, hers was swallowing fire. They were a most devoted couple. He had a passion for

crossword puzzles; when not swallowing swords, she spent most of her after hours time knitting.

From time to time the hotel was busy with groups of guests much livelier than the Lancashire Lad and His Lassie – chorus girls of many nationalities, though mainly British. Many a millionaire sighed after those girls, but the tough ladies who were the chorus group managers ensured that the virtue of their girls remained intact – and the millionaires, sometimes lighter in pocket, were left to carry on sighing for what might have been.

The Chinese cabaret performer who stars in the Buddha story had a real life model. She was a beautiful girl from Hongkong or Macau who assisted her father in a conjuring act that toured Asia, working in cabarets, night clubs and American military clubs. When in Tokyo, they stayed at the Akasaka hotel, and I got to know the girl quite well, for we spent many a very late night drinking beer, watching TV in the small reception lounge, and chatting of the world and its weird and wonderful ways.

I kept a close eye on the charming magician's daughter, and would have been very willing to take things further – preferably in the direction of my room. Unfortunately, although I kept a close eye on the girl with the figure of an Asian Venus, her father kept a much, much closer eye on me!

In the finale of the conjuring act the girl, dressed only in a bikini like costume covered in glittering sequins, placed a large electric light bulb in her mouth, and the bulb lit up. I never saw the act, just photographs of the finale. She never would tell me how the trick was done. As the years have passed, I have sometimes wondered if a daughter or granddaughter is lighting up an Oriental stage somewhere with that same smile, an electric light bulb in the mouth, and legs that must have been created in paradise.

I've always had a soft spot for the Golden Buddha, in his many manifestations, big and small, in my long life, but I am particularly fond of the Little Golden Buddha in the Humming Bee garden in Singapore, as he sits smiling into the face of eternity. That's why I chose that particular story to start this collection.

I could give a little background briefing on most of the stories, but far better I just open the doors to this little world of words right now and allow you, the Reader, to carry on reading. And make up your own mind as to what is Fact, what is Fancy!

Happy Reading!

Other stories in this book...

TV Tillymint and The Generation Gap

Death Has a Fling in Samarra

A Golden Crown From China

Death Becomes A Papa

A Rose By Any Other Name

Death Collects A Fare On The Mersey Ferry

Dark Sun Over Fuji

A Love Letter In Far Distant Sands

We'll Meet Again

The Repeaters

A Kiss For Judas

The Sparrows Who Sing Like Skylarks

Planet 43 Universe-21:

They shoot all their generals at dawn!

Last Post for a Drummer Boy

X Marks The Spot