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## The Golden Ticket

by Sheridan Maguire

I was passing through Macau on my way to Hong Kong and had arranged to meet my friend Roddy McScott at Vasco's on the Grand Lapa. He was already at the bar when I walked in. Roddy hailed me over. He shook my hand firmly and slapped me on the back with his other arm in his usual hail-fellow way.

*'Just ordering a couple of gin slings old man' he said 'be with you in a jif'.*

While he attracted the attention of the barman, I cast my eye around the half-empty bar.

I immediately noticed - how could one miss her? - a most arresting Chinese woman in a long, body-hugging electric blue silk dress, exquisitely embroidered with golden dragons. Her jet-black hair hung down over her shoulders, cut perfectly straight. She sat stock still in a lit private booth, an untouched drink on the table in front of her. The red of her rouged cheeks perfectly matched the colour of her drink. It gave somehow the overall impression that she was part of a tableau, as though she had been modelled there deliberately to imitate some mysterious oriental scene. I was entranced.

Roddy pushed a gin sling in front of me.

*'Chin chin old man'* and he took a long pull from his glass. I took a sip of my own drink.

*'Roddy, who's that striking woman over there?'* I nodded towards the booth and he glanced over.

*'That's Yu Yan Chen. She's a looker isn't she? Interesting story about her.'*

*'Pray do tell'* I said, perhaps a touch ironically. Roddy shifted a little on the barstool.

*'Well, no-one seems to know where she's from. About three years ago, she suddenly appeared in the neighbourhood, selling herself on street corners. As you know, Macau's a playground for wealthy Chinese. Well, it happened that a wealthy industrialist and his student son were visiting and one evening the boy saw Yu Yan on the street. He bought her services and the story goes over the next few months he became totally besotted with her. She really got under his skin. Of course, the boy's father was furious about the whole carry-on, but he found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand his son was dating a hooker, on the other he could see that she was having a positive influence on the boy. He stopped his heavy drinking and became more mature. In short, Yu Yan had helped the boy grow up and the father was immensely grateful to her for that. Of course, she wasn't wife material so after some Chinese shenanigans, a suitable wife was found for the boy and Yu Yan was out on her ear. The old boy wanted to show his gratitude to her though, so he gave her \$100000 dollars to spend at the local casino, The Golden Ticket.'*

I shot a quick glance at the elegant, richly dressed woman in the booth.

*'And so, what, she won a fortune?'* I asked. Roddy laughed.

*'Nope, she lost every cent on a single turn of the wheel, and they slung her out. She's back on the game now. You can have her for \$10 dollars and drink. Let's get some dinner.'*

He eased himself off the bar stool and started towards the door. I took a final glance at the woman in the booth and knocked back my drink. They make quite a passable gin sling at Vasco's.