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Lixia of Gold Mountain

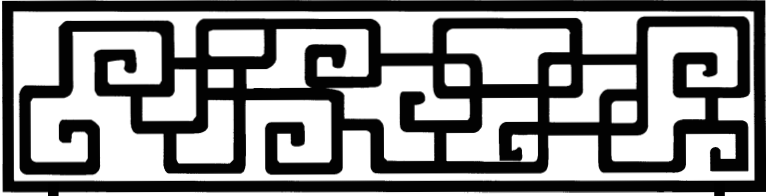


A Story of Early California

Clara Stites



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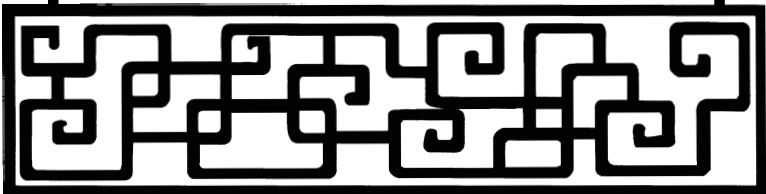
A STORY OF EARLY CALIFORNIA



Clara Stites

illustrated by Penny Brewer
cultural consultant Shixian Sheng

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Lixia's Family and Friends

Lixia, a brave young girl who comes from China to California disguised as a boy.

Mother, who makes the hard journey across the Pacific Ocean and gradually regains health and happiness in California.

Father, a farmer from China's Guangdong Province who travels to America with his three brothers to find gold at *Gam Saan*.

Old Cousin, a trusted family friend who brings a message from Father.

The Sisters, who come on the ship with Lixia and Mother to meet their new husbands in America.

First Uncle, who runs a store for the Chinese miners and helps Lixia plant her garden.

Second Uncle and **Third Uncle**, who come to California in search of gold and later work on the building of America's first transcontinental railroad.

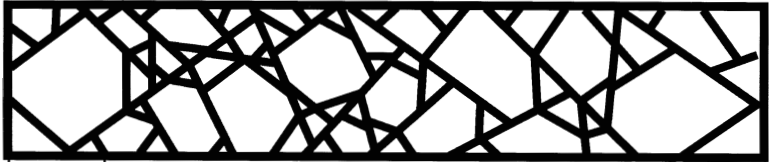
Wai Sing, who is the wife of a miner, the mother of twin boys, and a cook in Jackson's Hotel.

The Twins, two little boys who become friends with Lixia.

Mr. Jackson, who owns the hotel and most of the land around the mining town and takes an interest in Lixia's garden.

Lixia's name is pronounced "Lee-Shia" with the accent on the final "A." It can be written in two Chinese characters, or letters. The first character means "beautiful." The second character means "early morning, rosy glow." "Beautiful Dawn" seems like a good name for someone starting a new life in California!

Lixia of Gold Mountain



金勺传书 父亲在召唤



远渡重洋 母女共患难



CHAPTER 1

The Golden Spoon

THE CHICKENS were very hungry. Lixia loved the way they gathered all around her when she fed them. She threw a handful of extra food to her favorite white chicken. The little hen pecked at the food and peeped her funny chicken noise of happiness.

Suddenly all the chickens ran away. When Lixia looked around, she saw a thin old man riding in an ox cart. The man stopped the ox by the cherry tree and got off the cart. He walked toward Lixia carrying a brown paper box tied with red strings.

“Good morning, Little One. Is your mother at home?” Lixia nodded her head and pointed to

one of the three houses clustered close together near the garden. Her aunt and uncle and their children lived in the first one. Another uncle lived in the middle one. Lixia and her mother lived in the third one along with Lixia's grandmother. Lixia was afraid to speak to this old stranger, but she watched him walk to the third house.

Lixia's mother came to the door. She and the old man greeted each other as if they were friends. Then they went inside the little house. Lixia was very curious. She wished she could go inside too, but first she must collect the eggs. She took her basket and went to where the chickens nested. There were five eggs. They were big eggs, and one of them was still warm from being inside the chicken. Lixia hoped this meant good luck.

Lixia put the eggs in her basket and went to the house. She peeked shyly in. The old man was drinking a cup of tea and Lixia's mother was standing near the door. In her hand, she held a big metal spoon that Lixia had never seen before.

"Mother, what is that?" she asked when her mother showed her the spoon.

"As you can see, it is a spoon," her mother an-

The Golden Spoon

swered. "Your father has sent it to us from far away in Gold Mountain, from *Gam Saan*."

Lixia wondered why her father, whom she had not seen for nearly six years, would send them a rusty old spoon. But she did not dare to ask her mother, because the old man was looking at her over the edge of his tea cup.

Lixia did not know that the spoon would change her life forever.

Two days later, Lixia and her mother said goodbye to Lixia's cousins and her aunt and her two uncles and to Grandmother. Lixia was sad to leave them all behind, but she knew her uncles would take good care of Grandmother just as they had watched over Lixia and her mother. Mother put their little bundle of clothing and blankets into the old man's cart and climbed up onto the wooden seat beside Lixia. The old man walked beside the cart, poking at the ox with a stick to make him hurry along the road.

Lixia had learned now that the man was called Old Cousin and that he was taking them to Hong Kong. From there, Lixia and her mother would go on a boat to California. While the ox

pulled the cart, Old Cousin told his story. "I was with your father at *Gam Saan*," Old Cousin said. "He is working hard to find the gold, but it is not so easy as we hoped. It has taken your father more than two years to save the gold that he put into the spoon for you. At last, he has built a cabin, and his brother has leased a store that all the miners come to. They have made a home in California, and they are eager to see you again."

Lixia listened very carefully to everything Old Cousin said. How could her father hide gold in a spoon? How could she and Mother go all the way to California alone? Although Lixia was afraid, she kept silent as the cart bumped along the dusty road.

When at last they came to the big island of Hong Kong, Old Cousin took them to his house. There, Mother gave Old Cousin the spoon, and he went away with it. "He has gone to melt the gold out of the spoon," Mother explained to Lixia. "When the spoon is very hot, the gold will come out of it as wax comes out of a candle."

Old Cousin came home late in the afternoon. "I have now completed all the arrangements for

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you to travel to California,” he said. “I have also bought these clothes for Little One.” Old Cousin opened a package, and Lixia saw a pair of boy’s trousers and shoes and a little blue jacket.

“There are not many young girls or even women in Gold Mountain. You are very brave to make this journey,” Old Cousin told Mother. “Although he is eager to have you both by his side, Lixia’s father is afraid for her. He has asked me to give you clothes for a boy so that Lixia can travel more safely. She must put them on before we go to the ships tomorrow, and she must wear her hair in a pigtail down her back like every other Chinese boy.”

At the docks, there were crowds of people, all saying goodbye to each other. When the time came, everyone rushed toward the ship, afraid to be left behind. Lixia and Mother waved goodbye to Old Cousin while the ship pulled away from the dock, stretching and snapping off the bright paper streamers that decorated it. Lixia wore her boy’s clothing and kept her hair pulled back in a braid as Old Cousin insisted.

The inside of the ship was so dark that no one

could have told whether Lixia was a girl or a boy. She and Mother each had a narrow bunk in a room with many, many other people. Lixia had never seen so many people before, and she saw that her father had been right. The passengers were all men except for her and her mother and two young Chinese women. Mother whispered that the two young women were sisters, on the way to meet the men they would marry.

Mother spread their quilts on the bunks and untied the bundle that held their tea and their cooking pot and the little packages of sesame crackers and preserved plums and lemons that Old Cousin had given to them. "Every day you must chew on the rind of the lemon and eat a little of these fruits," he had said. "They will keep you from getting sick."

Lixia and her mother were careful to do what Old Cousin had told them, but Mother grew sick from the motion of the ship. She lay all day in her bunk. Lixia did not know how to help. When Mother tried to eat, the food would not stay in her stomach. She grew thin and weak and hot with a terrible fever. "I thought I was a strong woman, Lixia, so strong that I assured your father

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I could make the journey,” Mother whispered. “But this sickness has made me like an empty shell or a leaf in the wind.”

“I will be strong for us both, Mother,” Lixia whispered back. She learned how to cool Mother’s face with wet rags and how to break up the sesame crackers and put just a tiny bit in her mother’s mouth. She was very frightened. What if Mother died and left her alone to find her father? Lixia could not even remember how her father looked, but she told herself that everything must turn out right.

The two sisters who traveled with them could speak some English. They were very kind and tried to teach Lixia and Mother the new words. Lixia learned to say “hello” and “good-bye” and “thank you very much” and “please, may I have that,” but English was a strange and ugly sounding language. Although Lixia did not like to speak it, she learned all that she could.

The two sisters called Lixia “a brave little man.” Lixia wished she could tell them she was not a man, not even a boy. She wished she could tell them how afraid she was and how she missed her grandmother, her cousins, her aunt, and her

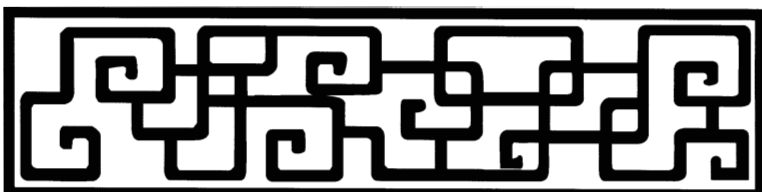
two uncles. She even missed Old Cousin though she had known him for so short a time. But Mother had warned again and again that she must not tell anyone the truth.

Sometimes Lixia and the sisters went up on the deck during the day. How good it felt to breath the clean air and feel the sun on their faces. But the sea looked so large, it seemed to go forever and forever. Lixia wondered if there really was a California.

One of the sisters kept count of the days. Every morning, she made a small mark in the wood of the ship above her bunk. By the time the sister had made 63 marks in the wood, Lixia's braid had grown longer and she had learned many words of English.

Then one day she heard people running on the deck, and one of the sisters came hurrying to her. "There is land," the sister called out. "We have come at last to Gold Mountain!"





金山团聚

游子思故乡



女扮男装

父赞好儿郎



CHAPTER 2

The Four Brothers

LIXIA AND HER mother gazed in silent wonder at San Francisco. The other passengers crowded together and laughed and shouted and pushed down the gangway. With long bamboo poles hung across their shoulders to carry bedding and clothing, they made a river of men.

On the wharf, Lixia saw more people. They were men, all men, and they looked different from any men she had ever seen. There were men with silver spurs and men in long woolen capes. There were rough looking, grizzled men with slouch hats and bright shirts. There were pale-skinned men in suits. And there was the smell of it all, a smell of heat and garbage and seaweed.