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The Painted Veil



*Par W. Somerset Maugham
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Par W. Somerset Maugham : The Painted Veil before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Painted Veil:

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Description : Description du produitThe story of the lovely but shallow Kitty Fane, the adulterous wife of a bacteriologist stationed in Hong Kong and of her husbands revenge.

Prsentation de l'diteurKitty Fane is the beautiful but shallow wife of Walter, a bacteriologist stationed in Hong Kong. Unsatisfied by her marriage, she starts an affair with charming, attractive and exciting Charles Townsend. But when Walter discovers her deception, he exacts a strange and terrible vengeance: Kitty must accompany him to his new posting in remote mainland China, where a cholera epidemic rages...First published to a storm of protest, The Painted Veil is a classic story of a woman's spiritual awakening.ExtraitlShe gave a startled cry."What's the matter?" he asked.Notwithstanding the darkness of the shuttered room he saw her face on a sudden distraught with terror."Some one just tried the door.""Well, perhaps it was the amah, or one of the boys.""They never come at this time. They know I always sleep after

tiffin." "Who else could it be?" "Walter," she whispered, her lips trembling. She pointed to his shoes. He tried to put them on, but his nervousness, for her alarm was affecting him, made him clumsy, and besides, they were on the tight side. With a faint gasp of impatience she gave him a shoe horn. She slipped into a kimono and in her bare feet went over to her dressing-table. Her hair was shingled and with a comb she had repaired its disorder before he had laced his second shoe. She handed him his coat. "How shall I get out?" "You'd better wait a bit. I'll look out and see that it's all right." "It can't possibly be Walter. He doesn't leave the laboratory till five." "Who is it then?" They spoke in whispers now. She was quaking. It occurred to him that in an emergency she would lose her head and on a sudden he felt angry with her. If it wasn't safe why the devil had she said it was? She caught her breath and put her hand on his arm. He followed the direction of her glance. They stood facing the windows that led out on the verandah. They were shuttered and the shutters were bolted. They saw the white china knob of the handle slowly turn. They had heard no one walk along the verandah. It was terrifying to see that silent motion. A minute passed and there was no sound. Then, with the ghastliness of the supernatural, in the same stealthy, noiseless, and horrifying manner, they saw the white china knob of the handle at the other window turn also. It was so frightening that Kitty, her nerves failing her, opened her mouth to scream; but, seeing what she was going to do, he swiftly put his hand over it and her cry was smothered in his fingers. Silence. She leaned against him, her knees shaking, and he was afraid she would faint. Frowning, his jaw set, he carried her to the bed and sat her down upon it. She was as white as the sheet and notwithstanding his tan his cheeks were pale too. He stood by her side looking with fascinated gaze at the china knob. They did not speak. Then he saw that she was crying. "For God's sake don't do that," he whispered irritably. "If we're in for it we're in for it. We shall just have to brazen it out." She looked for her handkerchief and knowing what she wanted he gave her her bag. "Where's your topee?" "I left it downstairs." "Oh, my God!" "I say, you must pull yourself together. It's a hundred to one it wasn't Walter. Why on earth should he come back at this hour? He never does come home in the middle of the day, does he?" "Never." "I'll bet you anything you like it was amah." She gave him the shadow of a smile. His rich, caressing voice reassured her and she took his hand and affectionately pressed it. He gave her a moment to collect herself. "Look here, we can't stay here for ever," he said then. "Do you feel up to going out on the verandah and having a look?" "I don't think I can stand." "Have you got any brandy in here?" She shook her head. A frown for an instant darkened his brow, he was growing impatient, he did not quite know what to do. Suddenly she clutched his hand more tightly. "Suppose he's waiting there?" He forced his lips to smile and his voice retained the gentle, persuasive tone the effect of which he was so fully conscious of. "That's not very likely. Have a little pluck, Kitty. How can it possibly be your husband? If he'd come in and seen a strange topee in the hall and come upstairs and found your room locked, surely he would have made some sort of row. It must have been one of the servants. Only a Chinese would turn a handle in that way." She did feel more herself now. "It's not very pleasant even if it was only the amah." "She can be squared and if necessary I'll put the fear of God into her. There are not many advantages in being a government official, but you may as well get what you can out of it." He must be right. She stood up and turning to him stretched out her arms: he took her in his and kissed her on the lips. It was such rapture that it was pain. She adored him. He released her and she went to the window. She slid back the bolt and opening the shutter a little looked out. There was not a soul. She slipped on to the verandah, looked into her husband's dressing-room and then into her own sitting-room. Both were empty. She went back to the bedroom and beckoned to him. "Nobody." "I believe the whole thing was an optical delusion." "Don't laugh. I was terrified. Go into my sitting-room and sit down. I'll put on my stockings and some shoes." He did as she bade and in five minutes she joined him. He was smoking a cigarette. "I say, could I have a brandy and soda?" "Yes, I'll ring." "I don't think it would hurt you by the look of things." They waited in silence for the boy to answer. She gave the order. "Ring up the laboratory and ask if Walter is there," she said then. "They won't know your voice." He took up the receiver and asked for the number. He inquired whether Dr. Fane was in. He put down the receiver. "He hasn't been in since tiffin," he told her. "Ask the boy whether he has been here." "I daren't. It'll look so funny if he has and I didn't see him." The boy brought the drinks and Townsend helped himself. When he offered her some she shook her head. "What's to be done if it was Walter?" she asked. "Perhaps he wouldn't care." "Walter?" Her tone was incredulous. "It's always struck me he was rather shy. Some men can't bear scenes, you know. He's got sense enough to know that there's nothing to be gained by making a scandal. I don't believe for a minute it was Walter, but even if it was, my impression is that he'll do nothing. I think he'll ignore it." She reflected for a moment. "He's awfully in love with me." "Well, that's all to the good. You'll get round him." He gave her that charming smile of his which she had always found so irresistible. It was a

slow smile which started in his clear blue eyes and traveled by perceptible degrees to his shapely mouth. He had small white even teeth. It was a very sensual smile and it made her heart melt in her body. "I don't very much care," she said, with a flash of gaiety. "It was worth it." "It was my fault." "Why did you come? I was amazed to see you." "I couldn't resist it." "You dear." She leaned a little towards him, her dark and shining eyes gazing passionately into his, her mouth a little open with desire, and he put his arms round her. She abandoned herself with a sigh of ecstasy to their shelter. "You know you can always count on me," he said. "I'm so happy with you. I wish I could make you as happy as you make me." "You're not frightened any more?" "I hate Walter," she answered. He did not quite know what to say to this, so he kissed her. Her face was very soft against his. But he took her wrist on which was a little gold watch and looked at the time. "Do you know what I must do now?" "Bolt?" she smiled. He nodded. For one instant she clung to him more closely, but she felt his desire to go, and she released him. "It's shameful the way you neglect your work. Be off with you." He could never resist the temptation to flirt. "You seem in a devil of a hurry to get rid of me," he said lightly. "You know that I hate to let you go." Her answer was low and deep and serious. He gave a flattered laugh. "Don't worry your pretty little head about our mysterious visitor. I'm quite sure it was the amah. And if there's any trouble I guarantee to get you out of it." "Have you had a lot of experience?" His smile was amused and complacent. "No, but I flatter myself that I've got a head screwed on my shoulders." She went out on to the verandah and watched him leave the house. He waved his hand to her. It gave her a little thrill as she looked at him; he was forty-one, but he had the lithe figure and the springing step of a boy. The verandah was in shadow; and lazily, her heart at ease with satisfied love, she lingered. Their house stood in the Happy Valley, on the side of the hill, for they could not afford to live on the more eligible but expensive Peak. But her abstracted gaze scarcely noticed the blue sea and the crowded shipping in the harbor. She could think only of her lover. Of course it was stupid to behave as they had done that afternoon, but if he wanted her how could she be prudent? He had come two or three times after tiffin, when in the heat of the day no one thought of stirring out, and not even the boys had seen him come and go. It was very difficult at Hong Kong. She hated the Chinese city and it made her nervous to go into the filthy little house off the Victoria Road in which they were in the habit of meeting. It was a curio dealer... From Library Journal Shallow, poorly educated Kitty marries the passionate and intellectual Walter Fane and has an affair with a career politician, Charles Townsend, assistant colonial secretary of Hong Kong. When Walter discovers the relationship, he compels Kitty to accompany him to a cholera-infested region of mainland China, where she finds limited happiness working with children at a convent. But when Walter dies, she is forced to leave China and return to England. Generally abandoned, she grasps desperately for the affection of her one remaining relative, her long-ignored father. In the end, in sharp, unexamined contrast to her own behavior patterns, she asserts that her unborn daughter will grow up to be an independent woman. The Painted Veil was first published in 1925 and is usually described as a strong story about a woman's spiritual journey. To more pragmatic, modern eyes, Kitty's emotional growth appears minimal. Still, if not a major feminist work, the book has literary interest. Sophie Ward's uninflected reading is competent if not compelling. Recommended only for large literature collections. I. Pour-El, Des Moines Area Community Coll., Boone, IA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.