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Had I stayed home and married

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Had I stayed home and married Wilda Morris

that girl in San Francisco
I would not have known
the kingly feel of perching
on the lead camel in a caravan
crossing rolling grasslands
of Mongolia, the hissing sand
across the high dunes of the Ordos,
cresting like waves and breaking,
the hazy smoke of dung fires
at daybreak, the sight of women
dipping water from the creek,
the storyteller with his tales
of princes, dragons, demons
punctuated by the ping
of a turning fork.

Had I stayed home and married
that girl in San Francisco
I would not wakened on a houseboat,
the Yangtze in flood tearing it
from the levee where we'd moored,
not rescued frightened peasants,
nor had to push clawing hands
from the side when the boat
was already too full.

Had I stayed home and married
that girl in San Francisco
I would not have stood
before the Dragon Throne
in the Forbidden City
when Pu-Yi was declared Emperor
again, nor had to escape
General Li by donning golden robes
and joining a procession of monks.

Had I stayed home and married
that girl in San Francisco
I would not have caravanned
into an April blizzard, lost
my snow goggles, had my sight
ruined. But oh, sure as my name
is Fred Meyer Schroder,
what I had already seen and done
gave me a lifetime of tales to tell
that girl in San Francisco
when I did go home to marry her.