

SAMUEL MERWIN

IN RED AND
GOLD

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Содержание

CHAPTER I – FELLOW VOYAGERS	5
CHAPTER II – BETWEEN THE WORLDS	13
CHAPTER III – MISS HUI FEI	21
CHAPTER IV – INTRIGUE	28
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	36

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CHAPTER I – FELLOW VOYAGERS

ON a night in October, 1911, the river steamer *Yen Hsin* lay alongside the godown, or warehouse, of the Chinese Navigation Company at Shanghai. Her black hull bulked large in the darkness that was spotted with inadequate electric lights. Her white cabins, above, lighted here and there, loomed high and ghostly, extending as far as the eye could easily see from the narrow wharf beneath. Swarming continuously across the gangplanks, chanting rhythmically to keep the quick shuffling step, crews of coolies carried heavy boxes and bales swung from bamboo poles.

During the evening the white passengers were coming aboard by ones and twos and finding their cabins, all of which were forward on the promenade deck, grouped about the enclosed area that was to be at once their dining-room and “social hall.” Here, within a narrow space, bounded by strips of outer deck and a partition wall, these few casual passengers were to be caught, willy-nilly, in a sort of passing comradeship. For the greater part of this deck, amidships and aft, was screened off for the use of traveling Chinese officials, and the two lower decks would be crowded with lower class natives and freight. And, not unnaturally, in the minds of nearly all the white folk, as they settled for the night, arose questions as to the others aboard. For strange beings of many nations dig a footing of sorts on the China Coast, and odd contrasts occur when any few are thrown together by a careless fate... And so, thinking variously in their separate cabins of the meeting to come, at breakfast about the single long table, and of the days of voyaging into the heart of oldest China, these passengers, one by one, fell asleep; while through open shutters floated quaint odors and sounds from the tangle of sampans and slipper-boats that always line the curving bund and occasional shouts and songs from late revelers passing along the boulevard beyond the rows of trees.

It was well after midnight when the *Yen Hsin* drew in her lines and swung off into the narrow channel of the Whangpoo. Drifting sampans, without lights, scurried out of her path. With an American captain on the strip of promenade deck, forward, that served for a bridge, a yellow pilot, and Scotch engineers below decks, she slipped down with the tide, past the roofed-over opium hulks that were anchored out there, past the dimly outlined stone buildings of the British and American quarter, on into the broader Wusung. Here a great German mail liner lay at anchor, lighted from stem to stem. Farther down lay three American cruisers; and below these a junk, drifting dimly by with ribbed sails flapping and without the sign of a light, built high astern, like the ghost of a medieval trader.

“There’s his lights now!” Thus the captain to a huge figure of a man who stood, stooping a little, beside him, peering out at the river. And the captain, a stocky little man with hands in the pockets of a heavy jacket, added – “The dirty devil!”

Indeed, a small green light showed now on the junk’s quarter; and then she was gone astern.

After a silence, the captain said: “You may as well turn in.”

“Perhaps I will,” replied the other. “Though I get a good deal more sleep than I need on the river. And very little exercise.”

“That’s the devil of this life, of course. Look a’ me – I’m fat!” The captain spoke in a rough, faintly blustering tone, perhaps in a nervous response to the well-modulated voice of his mate, “Must make even more difference to you – the way you’ve lived. And at that, after all, you ain’t a slave to the river.”

“No... in a sense, I’m not.” The mate fell silent.

There were, of course, vast differences in the degrees of misfortune among the flotsam and jetsam of the coast. Captain Benjamin, now, had a native wife and five or six half-caste children tucked away somewhere in the Chinese city of Shanghai.

"We've got quite a bunch aboard this trip," offered the captain.

"Indeed?"

"One or two well-known people. There's our American millionaire, Dawley Kane. Took four outside cabins. His son's with him, and a secretary, and a Japanese that's been up with him before. Wonder if it's a pleasure trip – or if it means that the Kane interests are getting hold up the river. It might, at that. They bought the Cantey line, you know, in nineteen eight. Then there's Tex Connor, and his old sidekick the Manila Kid, and a couple of women schoolteachers from home, and six or eight others – customs men and casuals. And Dixie Carmichael – she's aboard. Quite a bunch! And His Nibs gets on tomorrow at Nanking."

"Kang, you mean?"

"The same. There's a story that he's ordered up to Peking. They were talking about it yesterday at the office."

"Do you think he's in trouble?"

"Can't say. But if you ask me, it don't look like such a good time to be easy on these agitators, now does it? And they tell me he's been letting 'em off, right and left."

The mate stood musing, holding to the rail. "It's a problem," he replied, after a little, rather absently.

"The funny thing is – he ain't going on through. Not this trip, anyhow. We're ordered to put him off at his old place, this side of Huang Chau. Have to use the boats. You might give them a look-see."

"They've gossiped about Kang before this at Shanghai."

"Shanghai," cried the captain, with nervous irrelevancy, "is full of information about China – and it's all wrong!" He added then, "Seen young Black lately?"

The mate moved his head in the negative.

"Consul-general sent him down from Hankow, after old Chang stopped that native paper of his. I ran into him yesterday, over to the bank. He says the revolution's going to break before summer."

The mate made no reply to this. Every trip the captain talked in this manner. His one deep fear was that the outbreak might take place while he was far up the river.

It had been supposed by all experienced observers of the Chinese scene, that the Manchu Dynasty would not long survive the famous old empress dowager, the vigorous and imperious little woman who was known throughout a rational and tolerant empire, not without a degree of affection, as "the Old Buddha." She had at the time of the present narrative been dead two years and more; the daily life of the infant emperor was in the control of a new empress dowager, that Lung Yu who was notoriously overriding the regent and dictating such policies of government as she chose in the intervals between protracted periods of palace revelry.

The one really powerful personage in Peking that year was the chief eunuch, Chang Yuan-fu, a former actor, notoriously the empress's personal favorite, who catered to her pleasures, robbed the imperial treasury of vast sums, wreaked ugly vengeance on critical censors, and publicly insulted dukes of the royal house.

All this was familiar. The Manchu strain had dwindled out; and while an empress pleased her jaded appetites by having an actor cut with the lash in her presence for an indifferent performance, all South China, from Canton to the Yangtze, seethed with the steadily increasing ferment of revolution. Conspirators ranged the river and the coast. At secret meetings in Singapore, Tokio, San Francisco and New York, new and bloody history was planned. The oldest and hugest of empires was like a vast crater that steamed and bubbled faintly here and there as hot vital forces accumulated beneath.

The mate, pondering the incalculable problem, finally spoke: "I suppose, if this revolt should bring serious trouble to Kang, it might affect you and me as well."

The captain flared up, the blustering note rising higher in his voice. "But somebody'll have to run the boats, won't they?"

"If they run at all."

His impersonal tone seemed to irritate further the captain's troubled spirit. "If they run at all, eh? It's all right for you – you can go it alone – you haven't got children on your mind, young ones!"

The big man was silent again. A great hand gripped a stanchion tightly as he gazed out at the dark expanse of water. The captain, glancing around at him, looking a second time at that hand, turned away, with a little sound.

"I will say good night," remarked the mate abruptly, and left his chief to his uncertain thoughts.

The steamer moved deliberately out into the wide estuary of the Yangtze, which is at this point like a sea. Squatting at the edge of the deck, outside the rail, the pilot spoke musically to the Chinese quartermaster. Slowly, a little at a time, as she plowed the ruffling water, the steamer swung off to the northwest to begin her long journey up the mighty river to Hankow where the passengers would change for the smaller Ichang steamer, or for the express to Peking over the still novel trunk railway. And if, as happened not infrequently, the *Yen Hsin* should break down or stick in the mud, the Peking passengers would wait a week about the round stove in the old Astor House at Hankow for the next express.

A mighty river indeed, is the Yangtze. During half the year battle-ships of reasonably deep draught may reach Hankow. In the heyday of the sailing trade clippers out of New York and blunt lime-juicers out of Liverpool were any day sights from the bund there. Through a busy and not seldom bloody century the merchants of a clamorous outside world have roved the great river (where yellow merchants of the Middle Kingdom, in sampan, barge and junk, roved fifty centuries before them) with rich cargoes of tea (in leaden chests that bore historic ideographs on the enclosing matting) – with hides and horns and coal from Hupeh and furs and musk from far-away Szechuen, with soya beans and rice and bristles and nutgalls and spices and sesamum, with varnish and tung oil and vegetable tallow, with cotton, ramie, rape and hemp, with copper, quicksilver, slate, lead and antimony, with porcelains and silk. Along this river that to-day divides an empire into two vast and populous domains a thousand thousand fortunes have been gained and lost, rebellions and wars have raged, famines have blighted whole peoples. Forts, pagodas and palaces have lined its banks. The gilded barges of emperors have drifted idly on its broad bosom. Exquisite painted beauties have found mirrors in its neighboring canals. Its waters drain to-day the dusty red plain where Lady Ch'en, the Helen, of China, rocked a throne and died.

The morning sun rode high. Soft-footed cabin stewards in blue robes removed the long red tablecloth and laid a white. By ones and twos the passengers appeared from their cabins or from the breezy deck and took their seats, eying one another with guarded curiosity as they bowed a morning greeting.

Miss Andrews, of Indianapolis, stepped out from her cabin through a narrow corridor, and then, at sight of the table, stopped short, while her color rose slightly. Miss Andrews was slender, a year or so under thirty, and, in a colorless way, pretty. Shy and sensitive, the scene before her was one her mind's eye had failed to picture; the seats about the long table were half filled, and entirely with men. She saw, in that one quick look, the face of a young German between those of two Englishmen. A remarkably thin man in a check suit looked up and for an instant fixed furtive eyes on hers. Just beyond him sat a big man, with a round wooden face and one glass eye; he turned his head with his eyes to look at her. A quiet man of fifty-odd, with gray hair, a nearly white mustache that was cropped close, and the expression of quiet satisfaction that only wealth and settled authority can give, was putting a spoonful of condensed milk into his coffee. Next to him sat a young man – very young, certainly not much more than twenty or twenty-one – perhaps his son (the aquiline nose and slightly receding but wide and full forehead were the same) – rubbing out a cigarette on his butter plate. He had been smoking before breakfast. She remembered these two now; they had been at the Astor

House in Shanghai; they were the Kanes, of New York, the famous Kanes. They called the son, “Rocky” – Rocky Kane.

Unable to take in more, Miss Andrews stepped back a little way into the corridor, deciding to wait for her traveling companion, Miss Means, of South Bend. She could hardly go out there alone and sit down with all those men.

But just then a door opened and closed; and across the way, coming directly, easily, out into the diningroom, Miss Andrews beheld the surprising figure of a slim girl – or a girl she appeared at first glance – of nineteen or twenty, wearing a blue, middy blouse and short blue skirt. Her black hair was drawn loosely together at the neck and tied with a bow of black ribbon. Her somewhat pale face, with its thin line of a mouth, straight nose, curving black eyebrows and oddly pale eyes, was in some measure attractive. She took her seat at the table without hesitation, acknowledging the reserved greetings of various of the men with a slight inclination of the head.

It seemed to Miss Andrews that she might now go on in there. But the thought that some of these men had surely noticed her confusion was disconcerting; and so it was a relief to hear Miss Means pattering on behind her. For that firmly thin little woman had fought life to a standstill and now, except in the moments of prim severity that came unaccountably into possession of her thoughts, found it dryly amusing. They took their seats, these two little ladies, Miss Means laying her copy of *Things Chinese* beside her coffee cup; and Miss Andrews tried to bow her casual good mornings as the curious girl in the middy blouse had done. The girl, by the way, seemed a very little older at close view.

Miss Andrews stole glimpses, too, at young Mr. Rocky Kane. He was a handsome boy, with thick chestnut hair from which he had not wholly succeeded in brushing the curl, but she was not sure that she liked the flush on his cheeks, or the nervous brightness of the eyes, or the expression about the mouth. There had been stories floating about the hotel in Shanghai. He plainly lacked discipline. But she saw that he might easily fascinate a certain sort of woman.

A door opened, and in from the deck came an extraordinarily tall man, stooping as he entered. On his cap, in gilt, was lettered, “1st Mate.” He took the seat opposite Mr. Kane, senior, next to the head of the table. It seemed to Miss Andrews that she had never seen so tall a man; he must have stood six feet five or six inches. He was solid, broad of shoulder, a magnificent specimen of manhood. And though the hair was thin on top of his head, and his grave quiet face exhibited the deep lines of middle age, he moved with almost the springy-step of a boy. If others at the table were difficult to place on the scale of life, this mate was the most difficult of all. With that strong reflective face, and the bearing of one who knows only good manners (though he said nothing at all after his first courteously spoken, “Good morning!”) he could not have been other than a gentleman – Miss Andrews felt that – an American gentleman! Yet his position... mate of a river steamer in China...!

The atmosphere about the table was constrained throughout the meal. The Chinese stewards padded softly about. The one-eyed man stared around the table without the slightest expression on his impassive face. The girl in the middy blouse kept her head over her plate. Miss Andrews once caught Rocky Kane glancing at her with an expression nearly as furtive as that of the thin man in the check suit. It was after this small incident that young Kane began helping her to this and that; and, when they rose, followed her out to her deck chair and insisted on tucking her up in her robe.

“These fall breezes are pretty sharp on the river,” he said. “But say, maybe it isn’t hot in summer.”

“I suppose it is,” murmured Miss Andrews.

“I’ve been out here a couple of times with the pater. You’ll find the river interesting. Oh, not down here” – he indicated the wide expanse of muddy water and the low-lying, distant shore – “but beyond Chinkiang and Nanking, where it’s narrower. Lots of quaint sights. The ports are really fascinating. We stop a lot, you know. At Wuhu the water beggars come out in tubs.”

“In tubs!” breathed Miss Andrews.

Miss Means joined them then, book under arm; and met his offer to tuck her up with a crisply pointed, "No, thank you!"

He soon drifted away.

Said Miss Andrews: "Weren't you a little hard on him, Gerty?"

"My dear," replied Miss Means severely – her Puritan vein strongly uppermost – "that young man won't do. Not at all. I saw him myself, one night at the Astor House, going into one of those private dining-rooms with a woman who – well, her character, or lack of it, was unmistakable!.. Right there in the hotel... under his father's eyes. That's what too much money will do to a young man, if you ask; me!"

"Oh...!" breathed Miss Andrews, looking out with startled eyes at the gulls.

It was mid-afternoon when Captain Benjamin remarked to his first mate: "Tex Connor's got down to work, Mr. Duane. Better try to stop it, if you don't mind. They're in young Kane's cabin – sixteen."

Number sixteen was the last cabin aft in the port side, next the canvas screen that separated upper class white from upper class yellow. The wooden shutters had been drawn over the windows and the light turned on within. Cigarette smoke drifted thickly out.

They were slow to open. Doane heard the not unfamiliar voice of the Manila Kid advising against it. He had to knock repeatedly. They were crowded together in the narrow space between berth and couch, a board across their knees – Connor twisting his head to fix his one eye on the intruder, the Kid, in his check suit, a German of the customs and Rocky Kane. There were cards, chips and a heap of money in American and English notes and gold.

"What is it?" cried Kane. "What do you want?"

"You'd better stop this," said the mate quietly.

"Oh, come, we're just having a friendly game! What right have you to break into a private room, anyway?"

The mate, stooping within the doorway, took the boy in with thoughtful eyes, but did not reply directly.

Connor, with another look upward, picked up the cards, and with the uncanny mental quickness of a practised *croupier* redistributed the heap of money to its original owners, and squeezed out without a word, the mate moving aside for him. The German left sulkily. The Kid snapped his fingers in disgust, and followed.

Doane was moving away when the Kid caught his elbow. He asked: "Did Benjamin send you around?"

Doane inclined his head.

"Running things with a pretty high hand, you and him!"

"Keep away from that boy," was the quiet reply.

The thin man looked up at the grave strong face above the massive shoulders; hesitated; walked away. The mate was again about to leave when young Kane spoke. He was in the doorway now, leaning there, hands in pockets, his eyes blazing with indignation and injured pride.

"Those men were my guests!" he cried.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kane, to disturb your private affairs, but – "

"Why did you do it, then?"

"The captain will not allow Tex Connor to play cards on this boat. At least, not without a fair warning."

The boy's face pictured the confusion in his mind, as he wavered from anger through surprise into youthful curiosity.

"Oh..." he murmured. "Oh... so that's Tex Connor."

"Yes. And Jim Watson with him. He was cashiered from the army in the Philippines. He is generally known now, along the coast, as the Manila Kid."

“So that’s Tex Connor!.. He managed the North End Sporting in London, three years ago.”

“Very likely. I believe he is known in London and Paris.”

“He’s a professional gambler, then?”

“I am not undertaking to characterize him. But if you would accept a word of advice – ”

“I haven’t asked for it, that I’m aware of.” An instant after he had said this, the boy’s face changed. He looked up at the immense frame of the man before him, and into the grave face. The warm color came into his own. “Oh, I’m sorry!” he cried. “I needn’t have said that.” But confusion still lay behind that immature face. The very presence of this big man affected him to a degree wholly out of keeping with the fellow’s station in life, as he saw it. But he needn’t have been rude. “Look here, are you going to say anything to my father?”

“Certainly not.”

“Will the captain?”

“You will have to ask him yourself. Though you could hardly expect to keep it from him long, at this rate.”

“Well – he’s so busy! He shuts himself up all day with Braker, his secretary. The chap with the big spectacles. You see” – Kane laughed self-consciously; a naively boyish quality in him, kept him talking more eagerly than he knew – “the pater’s reached the stage when he feels he ought to put himself right before the world. I guess he’s been a great old pirate, the pater – you know, wrecking railroads and grabbing banks and going into combinations. Though it’s just what all the others have done. From what I’ve heard about some of them – friends of ours, too! – you have to, nowadays, in business. No place for little men or soft men. It’s a two-fisted game. This fellow spent a couple of years writing the pater’s autobiography: – seems funny, doesn’t it! – and they’re going over it together on this trip. That’s why Braker came along; there’s no time at home. The original plan was to have Braker tutor me. That was when I broke out of college. But, lord!..”

“You’ll excuse me now,” said the mate.

Meantime the Manila Kid had sidled up to the captain.

“Say, Cap,” he observed cautiously, “wha’d you come down on Tex like that for?”

“Oh, come,” replied the captain testily, not turning, “don’t bother me!”

“But what you expect us to do all this time on the river – play jackstraws?”

“I don’t care what you do! Some trips they get up deck games.”

“Deck games!” The Kid sniffed.

“You’ll find plenty to read in the library”

“Read!..”

“Then I guess you’ll just have to stand it.”

For some time they stood side by side without speaking; the captain eying the river, the Kid moodily observing water buffalo bathing near the bank.

“Tex has got that Chinese heavyweight of his aboard – down below.”

“Oh – that Tom Sung?”

“Yep. Knocked out Bull Kennedy in three rounds at the Shanghai Sporting. Got some matches for him up at Peking and Tientsin. Taking him over to Japan after that. There’s an American marine that’s cleaned up three ships’.” He was silent for a space; then added: “I suppose, now, if we was to arrange a little boxing entertainment, you wouldn’t stand for that either, eh?”

“Oh, that’s all right. Take the social hall if the ladies don’t object. But who would you put up against him?”

“Well – if we could find a young fellow on board, Tex could tell Tom to go light.”

“You might ask Mr. Doane. He complains he ain’t getting exercise enough.”

“He’s pretty old – still, I’d hate to go up against him myself... Say, you ask him, Cap!”

“I’ll think it over. He’s a little... I’ll tell you now he wouldn’t stand for your making a show of it. If he did it, it ‘ud just be for exercise.”

“Oh, that’s all right!”

Miss Means awoke with a start. It was the second morning out, at sunrise. The engines were still, but from without an extraordinary hubbub rent the air. Drums were beating, reed instruments wailing in weird dissonance, and innumerable voices chattering and shouting. A sudden crackling suggested fire-crackers in quantity. Miss means raised herself on one elbow, and saw her roommate peeping out over the blind.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It looks very much like the real China we’ve read about,” replied Miss Andrews, raising her voice above the din. “It’s certainly very different from Shanghai.”

The steamer lay alongside a landing hulk at the foot of broad steps. Warehouses crowded the bank and the bund above, some of Western construction; but the crowded scene on hulk and steps and bund, and among the matting-roofed sampans, hundreds of which were crowded against the bank, was wholly Oriental. From every convenient mast and pole pennants and banners spread their dragons on the fresh early breeze. A temporary *pen-low*, or archway, at the top of the steps was gay with fresh paint and streamers. In the air above were scores of kites, designed and painted to represent dragons and birds of prey, which the owners were maneuvering in mimic aerial warfare; swooping and darting and diving. As Miss Means looked, one huge painted bird fell in shreds to a neighboring roof, and the swarming assemblage cheered ecstatically.

Soldiers were marching in good-humored disorder down the bund, in the inevitable faded blue with blue turbans wound about their heads. It appeared as if not another person could force his way down on the hulk without crowding at least one of its occupants into the water, yet on they came; and so far as our two little ladies could see none fell. Fully two hundred of the soldiers there were, with short rifles and bayonets. Amid great confusion they formed a lane down the steps and across to the gangway.

Next came a large, bright-colored sedan chair slung on cross-poles, with eight bearers and with groups of silk-clad mandarins walking before and behind. Farther back, swaying along, were eight or ten more chairs, each with but four bearers and each tightly closed, waiting in line as the chair of the great one was set carefully down on the hulk and opened by the attending officials.

Deliberately, smilingly, the great one stepped out. He was a man of seventy or older, with a drooping gray mustache and narrow chin beard of gray that contrasted oddly with the black queue. His robe was black with a square bit of embroidery in rich color on the breast. Above his hat of office a huge round ruby stood high on a gold mount, and a peacock feather slanted down behind it.

Bowing to right and left, he ascended the gangplank, the mandarins following. There were fifteen of these, each with a round button on his plumed hat – those in the van of red coral, the others of sapphire and lapis lazuli, rock crystal, white stone and gold.

One by one the lesser chairs were brought out on the hulk and opened. From the first stepped a stout woman of mature years, richly clad in heavily embroidered silks, with loops of pearls about her neck and shoulders, and with painted face under the elaborately built-up head-dress. Other women of various’ ages followed, less conspicuously clad. From the last chair appeared a young woman, slim and graceful even in enveloping silks, her face, like the others, a mask of white paint and rouge, with lips carmined into a perfect cupid’s bow. And with her, clutching her hand, was a little girl of six or seven, who laughed merrily upward at the great steamer as she trotted along.

Blue-clad servants followed, a hundred or more, and swarming cackling women with unpainted faces and flapping black trousers, and porters – long lines of porters – with boxes and bales and bundles swung from the inevitable bamboo poles.

At last they were all aboard, and the steamer moved out.

“Who were all those women, in the chairs, do you suppose?” asked Miss Andrews.

“His wives, probably.”

“Oh...!”

“Or concubines.”

Miss Andrews was silent. She could still see the waving crowd on the wharf, and the banners and kites.

“He must be at least a prince, with all that retinue.”

Miss Andrews, thinking rapidly of Aladdin and Marco Polo, of wives and concubines and strange barbarous ways, brought herself to say in a nearly matter-of-fact voice: “But those women all had natural feet. I don’t understand.”

Miss Means reached for her *Things Chinese*; looked up “Feet,”

“Women,”

“Dress,” and other headings; finally found an answer, through a happy inspiration, under “Manchus.”

“That’s it!” she explained; and read: “The Manchus do not bind the feet of their women.”

“Well!” Thus Miss Andrews, after a long moment with more than a hint of emotional stir in her usually quiet voice: “We certainly have a remarkable assortment of fellow passengers. That curious silent girl in the middy blouse... traveling alone...”

“Remarkable, and not altogether edifying,” observed the practical Miss Means.

CHAPTER II – BETWEEN THE WORLDS

TOWARD noon Miss Means and Miss Andrews were in their chairs on deck, when a gay little outburst of laughter caught their attention, and around the canvas screen came running the child they had seen on the wharf at Nanking. A sober Chinese servant (Miss Means and Miss Andrews were not to know that he was a eunuch) followed at a more dignified pace.

The child was dressed in a quilted robe of bright flowered silk, the skirt flaring like a bed about the ankles, the sleeves extending down over the hands. Her shoes were high, of black cloth with paper soles. Over the robe she wore a golden yellow vest, shortsleeved, trimmed with ribbon and fastened with gilt buttons. Over her head and shoulders was a hood of fox skin worn with the fur inside, tied with ribbons under the chin, and decorated, on the top of the head, with the eyes, nose and ears of a fox. As she scampered along the deck she lowered her head and charged at the big first mate. He smiled, caught her shoulders, spun her about, and set her free again; then, nodding pleasantly to the eunuch, he passed on.

Before the two ladies he paused to say: “We are coming into T’aping, the city that gave a name to China’s most terrible rebellion. If you care to step around to the other side, you’ll see something of the quaint life along the river.”

“He seems very nice – the mate,” remarked Miss Andrews. “I find myself wondering who he may have been. He is certainly a gentleman.”

“I understand,” replied Miss Means coolly, “that one doesn’t ask that question on the China Coast.” They found the old river port drab and dilapidated, yet rich in the color of teeming human life. The river, as usual, was crowded with small craft. Nearly a score of these were awaiting the steamer, each evidently housing an entire family under its little arch of matting, and each extending bamboo poles with baskets at the ends. As the steamer came to a stop, a long row of these baskets appeared at the rail, while cries and songs arose from the water.

The little Manchu girl had found a friend in Mr. Rocky Kane. He was holding her on the rail and supplying her with brass cash which she dropped gaily into the baskets. The eunuch stood smiling by. After tiffin the child appeared again and sought her new friend. She would sit on his knee and pry open his mouth to see where the strange sounds came from. And his cigarettes delighted her.

It was the Manila Kid himself who asked Miss Means and Miss Andrews if they would mind a bit of a boxing: match in the social hall. They promptly withdrew to their cabin, after Miss Means had uttered a bewildered but dignified: “Not in the least! Don’t think of us!”

Shortly after dinner the cabin stewards stretched a rope around four pillars, just forward of the dining table. The men lighted cigarettes and cigars, and moved up with quickening interest. Tex Connor, who had disappeared directly after the coffee, brought in his budding champion, a large grinning yellow man in a bathrobe. The second mate, and two of the engineers found seats about the improvised rings. Then an outer door opened, and the great mandarin appeared, bowing and smiling courteously with hands clasped before his breast. The fifteen lesser mandarins followed, all rich color and rustling silk.

The young officers sprang to their feet and arranged chairs for the party. The great man seated himself, and his attendants grouped themselves behind him.

Into this expectant atmosphere came the mate, in knickerbockers and a sweater, stooping under the lintel of the door, then straightening up and stopping short. His eyes quickly took in the crowded little picture – the gray-bearded mandarin in the ringside chair, backed with a mass of Oriental color; that other personage, Dawley Kane, directly opposite, with the aquiline nose, the guardedly keen eyes and the quite humorless face, as truly a mandarin among the whites as was calm old Kang among the yellows; the flushed eager face of Rocky Kane; the other whites, all smoking, all watching him

sharply, all impatient for the show. He frowned; then, as the mandarin smiled, came gravely forward, bent under the rope and addressed him briefly in Chinese.

The mandarin, frankly pleased at hearing his own tongue, rose to reply. Each clasped his own hands and bowed low, with the observance of a long-hardened etiquette so dear to the Oriental heart.

“How about a little bet?” whispered Rocky Kane to Tex Connor. “I wouldn’t mind taking the big fellow.”

“What odds’ll you give?” replied the impassive one.

“Odds nothing! Your man’s a trained fighter, and he must be twenty years younger.”

“But this man Doane’s an old athlete. He’s boxed, off and on, all his life. And he’s kept in condition. Look at his weight, and his reach.”

“What’s the distance?”

“Oh – six two-minute rounds.”

“Who’ll referee?”

“Well – one of the Englishmen.”

But the Englishmen were not at hand. A friendly bout between yellow and white overstepped their code. One of the customs men, an Australian, accepted the responsibility, however.

“I’ll lay you a thousand, even,” said Rocky Kane.

“Make it two thousand.”

“I’ll give you two thousand, even,” said Dawley Kane quietly.

“Taken! Three thousand, altogether – gold.”

The mate, turning away from the mandarin, caught this; stood motionless looking at them, his brows drawing together.

“Gentlemen,” he finally remarked, “I came here with the understanding that it was to be only a little private exercise. I had no objection, of course, to your looking on, some of you, but this...”

“Oh, come!” said Connor. “It’s just for points. Tom’s not going to fight you.”

Young Kane, gripping the rope nervously with both hands, cried: “You wouldn’t quit!”

The mate looked down at these men. “No,” he replied, in the same gravely quiet manner, “I shall go on with it. I do this” – he made the point firmly, with a dignity that in some degree, for the moment, overawed the younger men – “I do it because his excellency has paid us the honor of coming here in this democratic way. He tells me that he is fond of boxing. I shall try to entertain him.” And he drew the sweater over his head, and caught the gloves that the Kid tossed him.

The elder Kane shrewdly took him in. The authority of the man was not to be questioned. Without so much as raising his voice he had dominated the strange little gathering. Physically he was a delight to the eye; anywhere in the forties, his hair thin to the verge of baldness, his strong sober face deeply lined, yet with shoulders, arms and chest that spoke of great muscular power and a waist without a trace of the added girth that middle age usually brings; of sound English stock, doubtless; the sort that in the older land would ride to hounds at eighty.

Dawley Kane looked, then, at the Chinese heavyweight. This man, though not quite a match in size for the giant before him, appeared every inch the athlete. Kane understood the East too well to find him at all surprising; he had seen the strapping northern men of Yuan Shi K’ai’s new army; he knew that the trained runners of the Imperial Government were expected, on occasion, to cover their hundred miles in a day; in a word, that the curious common American notion of the Chinese physique was based on an occasional glimpse of a tropical laundryman. And he settled back in his comfortable chair confident of a run for his money. The occasion promised, indeed, excellent entertainment.

The mate, still with that slight frown, glanced about. Not one of the crowded eager faces about the ropes exhibited the slightest interest in himself as a human being. He was but the mate of a river steamer; a man who had not kept up with his generation (the reason didn’t matter) – an individual of no standing... He put up his hands.

Tom Sung fell into a crouch. With his left shoulder advanced, his chin tucked away behind it, he moved in dose and darted quick but hard blows to the stomach and heart. Duane stepped backward, and edged around him, feeling him out, studying his hands and arms, his balance, his footwork. It early became clear that he was a thoroughgoing professional, who meant to go in and make a fight of it... Doane, sparring lightly, considered this. Conner, of course, had no sportsmanship.

Tom's left hand shot up through Doane's guard, landing clean on h. – S face with a sharp thud; followed up with a remarkably quick right swing that the mate, by sidestepping, succeeded only in turning into a glancing blow. And then, as Doane ducked a left thrust, he uppercut with all his strength. The blow landed on Doane's forearms with a force that shook him from head to foot.

A sound of breath sharply indrawn came from the spectators, to most of whom it must have appeared that the blow had gone home. Doane, slipping away and mopping the sweat from eyes and forehead, heard the sound; and for an instant saw them, all leaning forward, tense, eager for a knockout, the one possible final thrill.

The yellow man was at him again, landing left, right and left on his stomach, and butting a shaven head with real force against his chin. For an instant stars danced about his eyes. Elbows had followed the head, roughing at his face. Doane, quickly recovering, leaped back and dropped his hands.

"What is this?" he called sharply to Connor, whose round expressionless face with its one cool light eye and thin little mouth looked at him without response. "Head? Elbows? Is your man going to box, or not?"

The eyes that turned in surprise about the ringside were not friendly. These men cared nothing for his little difficulties; their blood was up. They wanted what the Americans among them would term "action" and "results."

Tom was tearing at him again. So it was, after all, to be a fight. No preliminary understandings mattered. He felt a profound disgust, as by main strength he stopped rush after rush, making full use of his greater reach to pin Tom's arms and hurl him back; a disgust however, that was changing gradually to anger. He had known, all his life, the peculiar joy that comes to a man of great strength and activity in any thorough test of his power.

The customs man called time.

Rocky Kane – flushed, excited, looking like a boy – felt in his pockets for cigarettes; found none; and slipped hurriedly out to the deck.

There a silken rustle stopped him short.

A slim figure, enveloped in an embroidered gown, was moving back from a cabin window. The light from within fell – during a brief second – full on an oval face that was brightly painted, red and white, beneath glossy black hair. The nose was straight, and not wide. The eyes, slanted only a little, looked brightly out from under penciled brows. She was moving swiftly toward the canvas screen; but he, more swiftly, leaped before her, stared at her; laughed softly in sheer delighted surprise. Then, with a quick glance about the deck, breathing out he knew not what terms of crude compliment he reached for her; pursued her to the rail; caught her.

"You little beauty!" he was whispering now. "You wonder! You darling! You're just too good to be true!" Beside himself, laughing again, he bent over to kiss her. But she wrenched an arm free, fought him off, and leaned, breathless, against the rail.

"Little yellow tiger, eh?" he cried softly. "Well, I'm a big white tiger!"

She said in English: "This is amazing!"

He stood frozen until she had disappeared behind the canvas screen. Then he staggered back; stumbled against a deck chair; turning, found the strange thin girl of the middie blouse stretched out there comfortably in her rug.

She said, with a cool ease: "It's so pleasant out here this evening, I really haven't felt like going in."

With a muttered something – he knew not what – he rushed off to his cabin; then rushed back into the social hall.

The customs man called time for the second round.

As Doane advanced to the center of the ring, Tom rushed, as before, head down. Doane uppercut him; then threw him back, forestalling a clinch. The next two or three rushes he met in the same determined but negative way; hitting a few blows but for the most part pushing him off. The sweat kept running into his eyes as he exerted nearly his full strength. And Tom Sung's shoulders and arms glistened a bright yellow under the electric lights.

Rocky Kane, lighting a cigarette and tossing the blazing match away, called loudly: "Oh, hit him! For God's sake, do something! Don't be afraid of a Chink!"

Doane glanced over at him. Tom rushed. Doane felt again the crash of solid body blows delivered with all the force of more than two hundred pounds of well-trained muscle behind them. Again he winced and retreated. He knew well that he could endure only a certain amount of this punishment... Suddenly Tom struck with the sharpest impact yet. Again that hard head butted his chin; an elbow and the heel of a glove roughed his face... Doane summoned all his strength to push him off. Then he stepped deliberately forward.

At last the primitive vigor in this giant was aroused. His eyes blazed. There was no manner of pleasure in hurting a fellow man of any color; but since the particular man was asking for it, insisting on it, there was no longer a choice. The fellow had clearly been trained to this foul sort of work. That would be Connor's way, to take every advantage, place a large side bet and then make certain of winning. There was, of course, no more control of boxing out here on the coast than of gambling or other vice.

When Tom next came forward, Doane, paying not the slightest heed to his own defense, exchanged blows with him; planted a right swing that raised a welt on the yellow cheek. A moment later he landed another on the same spot.

At the sound of these blows the men about the ringside straightened up with electric excitement. Then again the long muscular right arm swung, and the tightly gloved fist crashed through Tom's guard with a force that knocked him nearly off his balance. Doane promptly brought him back with a left hook that sounded to the now nearly frantic spectators as if it must have broken the cheek-bone.

Tom crouched, covered and backed away.

"Have you had enough?" Doane asked. As there was no reply, he repeated the question in Chinese.

Tom, instead of answering, tried another rush, floundering wildly, swinging his arms.

Doane stepped firmly forward, swinging up a terrific body blow that caught the big Chinaman at the pit of the stomach, lifted his feet clear of the floor and dropped him heavily in a sitting position, from which he rolled slowly over on his side.

"What are you trying to do?" cried the Manila Kid, above the babel of excited voices, as he rushed in there and revived his fellow champion. "What are you trying to do – kill 'im?"

The mate stripped off his wet gloves and tossed them to the floor. "Teach your man to box fairly," he replied, "or some one else will." With which he stepped out of the ring, drew on his sweater and, with a courteous bow to the mandarin, went out on deck. There, after depositing with the purser the winnings paid over by a surly Connor, Dawley Kane found him.

"Well!" cried the hitherto calm financier, "you put up a remarkable fight."

Doane looked down at him, unable to reply. He was still breathing hard; his thoughts were traveling strange paths. He heard the man saying other things; asking, at length, about the mandarin.

"He is Kang Yu," Doane replied now, civilly enough, "Viceroy of Nanking."

"No! Really? Why, he was in America!"

"He toured the world. He has been minister at Paris, Berlin, London, I believe. He is a great statesman – certainly the greatest out here since Li Hung Chang."

“No – how extremely interesting!”

“He is ruler of fifty million souls, or more.” The mate had found his voice. He was speaking a thought quickly, with a very little heat, as if eager to convince the great man of America of the standing and worth of this great man of China. “He has his own army and his own mint. He controls railroads, arsenals, mills and mines. Incidentally, he is president of this line.”

“The Chinese Navigation Company? Really! You are acquainted with him yourself?”

“No. But he is a commanding figure hereabouts. And of course, I – at present I’m an employee of the Merchants’ Line.”

“Oh, yes! Yes, of course! You seem to speak Chinese.”

“Yes” – the mate’s voice was dry now – “I speak Chinese.”

A shuffling sound reached their ears. Both turned. The viceroy had come out of the cabin and was advancing toward them, followed by all his mandarins. Before them he paused, and again exchanged with the mate the charming Eastern greeting. In Chinese he said – and the language that needs only a resonant, cultured voice to exhibit its really great dignity and beauty, rolled like music from his tongue: “It will give me great pleasure, sir, if you will be my guest to-morrow at twelve.”

The mate replied, with a grave smile and a bow: “It is a privilege. I am your servant.”

They bowed again, with hands to breast. And all the mandarins bowed. Then they moved away in stately silence to their quarters aft.

Kane spoke now: “How very curious! Very curious!”

Doane said nothing to this.

“They really appear to have charm, these upper class people. It’s a pity they are so poorly adapted to the modern struggle.”

Doane looked down at him, then away. As a man acquainted with the East he knew the futility of discussing it with a Western mind; above all with the mind of a successful business man, to whom activity, drive, energy, were very religion.

His own thoughts were ranging swiftly back over two thousand years, to the strong civilization of the Han Dynasty, when disciplined Chinese armies kept open the overland route to Bactria and Parthia, that the silks and porcelains and pearls might travel safely to waiting Roman hands; to the later, richer, riper centuries of Tang and Sung, after Rome fell, when Chinese civilization stood alone, a majestic fabric in an otherwise crumbled and chaotic world – when certain of the noblest landscapes and portraits ever painted were finding expression, when philosophers held high dreams of building conflicting dogma into a single structure of comprehensive and serene faith. The Chinese alone, down the uncounted centuries, had held their racial integrity, their very language. Surely, at some mystical but seismic turning of the racial tide, they would rise again among the nations.

This giant, standing there in sweater and knickerbockers, bareheaded, gazing out at the dark river, was not sentimentalizing. He knew well enough the present problems. But he saw them with half-Eastern eyes; he saw America too, with half-Eastern eyes – and so he could not talk at all to the very able man beside him who saw the West and the world with wholly Western eyes. No, it was futile. Even when the great New Yorker, who had just won two thousand dollars, gold, spoke with wholly unexpected kindness, the gulf between their two minds remained unfathomable.

“I want you to forgive me, sir – I do not even know your name, you see – but, frankly, you interest me. You are altogether too much of a man for the work you are doing here. That is clear. I would be glad to have you tell me what the trouble is. Perhaps I could help you.”

This from the man who held General Railways in the hollow of his hand, and Universal Hydro-Electric, and Consolidated Shipping, and the Kane, Wilmarth and Cantey banks, a chain that reached literally from sea to sea across the great young country that worshiped the shell of political freedom as insistently as the Chinese worshiped their ancestors, yet gave over the newly vital governing power of finance into wholly irresponsible private hands.

The situation, grotesque in its beginning, seemed now incredible to Doane. He drew a hand across his brow; then spoke, with compelling courtesy but with also a dismissive power that the other felt: "You are very kind, Mr. Kane. At some other time I shall be glad to talk with you. But my hours are rather exacting, and I am tired."

"Naturally. You have given a wonderful exhibition of what a man of character can do with his body. I wish I had you for a physical trainer. And I wish the example might start my boy to thinking more wholesomely... Good night!" And he extended a friendly hand.

Mr. Kane's boy presented himself on the following morning as an acute problem. He was about the deck, shortly after breakfast, playing with the Manchu child. Then, after eleven, Captain Benjamin handed his mate a note that had been scribbled in pencil on a leaf torn from a pocket note-book and folded over. It was addressed:

"To the Chinese Lady who spoke English last night." And the content was as follows: "I shouldn't have been rude, but I must see you again. Can't you slip around the canvas this evening, late? I'll be watching for you." There was no signature.

"Make it out?" asked the captain. "Old Kang sent it up to me – asks us to speak to the young man. But how'm I to know which young man it is?"

"Do you know how it was sent?"

"Yes. The little princess took it back."

"It won't be hard to find the man."

"You know?"

"I think so."

"Well, just put him wise, will you?"

"I'll speak to him."

"Wait a minute! You thinking of young Kane?"

The mate inclined his head.

"Well – you know who he is, don't you? Who they are?"

Doane bowed again.

"Better use a little tact."

Doane walked back along the deck to cabin sixteen. A fresh breeze blew sharply here; the chairs had all been moved across to the other side where the sunlight lay warm on the planking. Within the social hall the second engineer – a wistful, shy young Scot – had brought his battered talking machine to the dining table and was grinding out a comic song. Two or three of the men were in there, listening, smoking, and sipping highballs; Doane saw them as he passed the door. Through the open but shuttered window of cabin number twelve came the clicking of a typewriter and men's voices, that would be Mr. Kane, discussing his "autobiography" with its author.

Before number sixteen, Doane paused; sniffed the air. A curious odor was floating out through these shutters, an odor that he knew. He sniffed again; then abruptly knocked at the door.

A drowsy voice answered! "What is it? What do you want?"

"I must see you at once," said Doane.

There was a silence; then odd sounds – a faint rattling of glass, a scraping, cupboard doors opening and closing. Finally the door opened a few inches. There was Rocky Kane, hair tousled, coat, collar and tie removed, and shirt open at the neck. Doane looked sharply at his eyes; the pupils were abnormally small. And the odor was stronger now and of a slightly choking tendency.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" cried young Kane, shrinking back a little way.

"I think," said Doane, "you had better let me come in and talk with you."

"What right have you got saying things like that? What do you mean?"

"I have really said nothing as yet."

Kane, seeming bewildered, allowed the door to swing inward and himself stepped back. The big mate came stooping within.

"Your note has been returned," he said shortly; and gave him the paper.

Kane accepted it, stared down at it, then sank back on the couch.

"What's this to you!" he managed to cry. "What right... what do you mean, saying I wrote this?"

"Because you did. You sent it back by the little girl."

"Well, what if I did! What right – "

"I am here at the request of his excellency, the viceroy of Nanking. You have been annoying his daughter. The fact that she chooses, while in her father's household, to wear the Manchu dress, does not justify you in treating her otherwise than as a lady. Perhaps I can't expect you to understand that his excellency is one of the greatest statesmen alive to-day. Nor that this young lady was educated in America, knows the capitals of Europe better, doubtless, than yourself, and is a princess by birth. She went to school in England and to college in Massachusetts. Take my advice, and try no more of this sort of thing."

The boy was staring at him now, wholly bewildered. "Well," he began stumbingly, "perhaps I have been a little on the loose. But what of it! A fellow has to have some fun, doesn't he?"

The mate's eyes were taking in keenly the crowded little room.

"Well," cried Kane petulantly, "that's all, isn't it? I understand! I'll let her alone!"

"You don't feel that an apology might be due?"

"Apologize? To that girl?"

"To her father."

"Apologize – to a Chink?"

The word grated strangely on Doane's nerves. Suddenly the boy cried out: "Well – that's all? There's nothing more you want to say? What are you – what are you looking like that for?"

The sober deep-set eyes of the mate were resting on the high dresser at the head of the berths. There, tucked away behind the water caraffe, was a small lamp with a base of cloisonné work in blue and gold and a small, half globular chimney of soot-blackened glass.

"What are you looking at? What do you mean?"

The boy writhed under the steady gaze of this huge man, who rested a big hand on the upper berth and gazed gravely down at him; writhed, tossed out a protesting arm, got to his feet and stood with a weak effort at defiance.

"Now I suppose you'll go to my father!" he cried. "Well, go ahead! Do it! I don't care. I'm of age – my money's my own. He can't hurt me. And he knows I'm on to him. Don't think I don't know some of the things he's done – he and his crowd. Ah, we're not saints, we Kanes! We're good fellows – we've got pep, we succeed – but we're not saints."

"How long have you been smoking opium?" asked the mate.

"I don't smoke it! I mean I never did. Not until Shanghai. And you needn't think the pater hasn't hit the pipe a bit himself. I never saw a lamp until he took me to the big Hong dinner at Shanghai last month. They had 'em there. And it wasn't all they had, either – "

"If you are telling me the truth," said the mate.

– "I am. I tell you I am."

– "Then you should have no difficulty in stopping. It would take a few weeks to form the habit. You can't smoke another pipe on this boat."

"But what right – good lord, if the pater would drag me out here, away from all my friends... you think I'm a rotter, don't you!"

"My opinion is not in question. I must ask you to give me, now, whatever opium you have."

Slowly, moodily, evidently dwelling in a confusion of sulky resentful thoughts, the boy knelt at the cupboard and got out a small card-board box.

The mate opened it, and found several shells of opium within. He promptly pitched it out over the rail.

"This is all?" he asked.

“Well – look in there yourself!”

But the mate was looking at the suit-case, and at the trunk beneath the lower berth.

“You give me your word that you have no more?”

“That’s – all,” said the boy.

The mate considered this answer; decided to accept it; turned to go. But the boy caught at his sleeve.

“You do think I’m a rotter!” he cried. “Well, maybe I am. Maybe I’m spoiled. But what’s a fellow to do? My father’s a machine – that’s what he is – a ruthless machine. My mother divorced him ten years ago. She married that English captain – got the money out of father for them to live on, and now she’s divorced him. Where do I get off? I know I’m overstrung, nervous. I’ve always had everything I want. Do you wonder that I’ve begun to look for something new? Perhaps I’m going to hell. I know you think so. I can see it in your eyes. But who cares!”

Doane stood a long time at the rail, thinking. The ship’s clock in the social hall struck eight bells. Faintly his outer ear caught it. It was time to join his excellency.

CHAPTER III – MISS HUI FEI

THE luncheon table of his excellency was simply set, with two chairs of carven blackwood, behind a high painted screen of six panels. It was at this screen that the first mate (left by a smiling attendant) gazed with a frown of incredulity. Cap in hand, he stepped back and studied the painting, a landscape representing a range of mountains rising above mist in great rock-masses, chasms where tortured trees clung, towering, lagged peaks, all partly obscured by the softly luminous vapor – a scene of power and beauty. Much of the brighter color had faded into the prevailing tones of old ivory yellow shading into some thing near Rembrandt brown; though the original, reds and blues still held vividly in the lower right foreground, where were pictured very small, exquisite in detail yet of as trifling importance in the majestic scheme of the painting as are man and his works in all sober Chinese thought when considered in relation to the grim majesty of nature, a little friendly cluster of houses, men at work, children at play, domestic animals, a stream with a water buffalo, a bridge, a wayfarer riding a donkey, and cultivated fields. The ideographic signature was in rich old gold, inscribed with unerring decorative instinct on a flat rock surface.

The mate bent low and looked closely at the brush-work; then stepped around an end panel and examined the texture of the silk.

“Ah!” – it was a musical deep voice, speaking in the mandarin tongue – “you admire my screen, Griggsby Doane.” The name was pronounced in English.

His excellency wore a short jacket of pale yellow over a skirt of blue, both embroidered in large circles of lotus flowers around centers of conventional good-fortune designs, in which the swastika was a leading motive. His bared head was shaved only at the sides, as the top had long been bald. He looked gentle and kind as he stood leaning on his cane and extending a wrinkled hand; smiling in the fashion of forthright friendship. The thin little gray beard, the unobtrusively courteous eyes, the calm manner, all gave him an appearance of simplicity that made it momentarily difficult to think of him as the great negotiator of the tangled problems of statesmanship involved in the expansion of Japan, the man who very nearly convinced Europe of American good faith during the agitated discussion and correspondence that arose out of the “Open Door” proposals of John Hay, a man known among the observant and informed in London, Paris and Washington as a great statesman and a greater gentleman.

“I thought at first” – thus the mate, touched by the fine honor done him (an honor that would, he quickly felt, demand tact on the bridge) – “that it was a genuine Kuo Hsi.”

“No. A copy.”

“So I see. A Ming copy – at least the silk appears to be Ming – the heavy single strand, closely woven. And the seals date very closely. If it were woven of double strands, even in the warp alone, I should not hesitate to call it a genuine Northern Sung.”

“You observe closely, Griggsby Doane. It is supposed that Ch’uan Shih made this copy.” His smile was now less one of kindness and courtesy than, of genuine pleasure. “You shall see the original.”

“You have that also, Your Excellency?”

“In my home at Huang Chau.”

“I have never seen a genuine panting of Kuo Hsi. It would be a great privilege. I have read some of the sayings attributed to him, as taken down by his son. One I recall – ‘If the artist, without realizing his ideal, paints landscapes with a careless heart, it is like throwing earth upon a deity, or casting impurities into the clean wind.’”

“Yes,” added his excellency, almost eagerly, “and this – ‘To have in landscape the opportunity of seeing water and peaks, of hearing the cry of monkeys and the song of birds, without going from the room.’” Servants appeared bearing covered dishes. His excellency placed the mate in the seat

commanding the wider view of the river. A clear broth was served, followed by stewed shell fish with cassia mushrooms, steamed sharks' fins set red with crabmeat and ham, roast duck stuffed with young pine needles, and preserved pomegranates, carambolas and plums, followed by small cups of rice wine.

The conversation lingered with the great Sung painters, passing naturally then to the conflict during the eleventh and twelfth centuries between the free vitality of Buddhist thought and the deadening formalism of the Confucian tradition.

And Doane's thoughts, as he listened or quietly spoke, dwelt on the attainments and character of this great man who was so simple and so friendly. His excellency had spoken his own full name, Griggsby Doane, which would mean that the wide-reaching, instantly responsive facilities for gathering information that may be set at work by the glance of a viceroy's eye or a movement of his jeweled finger had been brought into play within the twenty-four hours.

"My heart is there in the Sung Dynasty," his excellency said. "I never look upon the old canals of Hang Chow or the ruins of stone-walled lotus gardens by the Si-hu without sadness. And Kai-feng-fu to-day wrings my heart."

"Truly," mused Doane, "it was in the days of Tang and Sung that the soul of China so nearly found its freedom."

"You indeed understand, Griggsby Doane!" The two English words stood out with odd emphasis in the musical flow of cultured Chinese speech. "Had that spirit endured, China would to-day, I like to think, have Korea and Manchuria and Mongolia and Sin Kiang. China would not to-day wear a piteous smile on the lips, turning the head to hide tears of shame, while the Russians absorb our northern frontiers and the French draw tribute from Annam and Yunnan, while the English control this great valley of the Yangtze, while the Germans drive their mailed fist into Shantung, and the Japanese send their spies throughout all our land and stand insolently at the very gate of the Forbidden City. I could not, perhaps, speak my heart freely to one of my own countrymen, but to you I can say, Confucian scholar though they may term me, that since what you call the thirteenth century there has been a gradual paralysis of the will in China, a softening of the political brain... You will permit an old man this latitude? I have served China without thought of self during nearly fifty years. To the Old Buddha I was ever a loyal servant. If toward the new emperor and the empress dowager I find it impossible to feel so deeply, my heart is yet devoted to the throne and to my people. If while sent abroad in service of my country it has been given me to see much of merit in Western ways, it is not that I have become a revolutionist, a traitor to the government of my ancestors."

There was a light in the kindly eyes; a strong ring in the deep voice. He went on:

"No, I am not a traitor. It is not that. It is that my country has suffered, is now prostrate, with a long sickness. She must be helped; but she must as well help herself. She is like one who has lain too long abed. She must think, arise, act. With my poor eyes I can see no other hope for her. Even though I myself may suffer, I can not, in truth to my own faith, punish those who, loving China as deeply as I myself love her, yet feel that they must goad her until she awakens from her pitiful sleep of more than six centuries... Nor am I a republican. China is not like your country. In an imperial throne I must believe. Yet, she must listen to all, study all, draw from all. Freedom of thought there must be. We must not longer worship books and the dead. We must learn to look about us and on before."

Their chairs were drawn about to the window's. Slowly the wide river slipped off astern.

"But you, Griggsby Doane, why are you here? This is not the life for which you so laboriously and so worthily prepared yourself. I knew of you over in T'ainan-fu. You were a true servant of your faith. After the dreadful year of the Boxers you returned to your task. And during the trouble in nineteen hundred and seven, the fighting with the Great Eye Society in Hansi, you conducted yourself with bravery. I was at Sian-fu that year, and was well informed. Yet you gave up the church mission."

The mate's eyes were fixed gloomily on the long vista of the river. For a moment it seemed as if he would speak; and the viceroy, seeing his lips part, leaned a little way forward; but then the lips were closed tightly and the great head bent deliberately forward.

"I knew," continued his excellency, "when the Asiatic Company of New York was negotiating with me the contract for rebuilding the banks of the Grand Canal in Kiang-su that you had gone from T'ainan, and that you had, as well, left the church. You had even gone from China."

"That was in nineteen nine," said Doane, in the somber voice of one who thinks moodily aloud. "I was in America then."

"Yes, it was in your year nineteen nine. For a time those negotiations hung, I recall, on the question of the means to be employed in dealing with local resentments. The trouble over the Ho Shan Company in Hansi, of which you knew so much and which you met with such noble courage, had taught us all to move with caution."

"My position in that Hansi trouble has not been clearly understood, Your Excellency. I was there only, a short time, and was ill at that."

The viceroy smiled, kindly, wisely. "You went alone and on foot from T'ainan-fu to So T'ung in the face of a Looker attack, and yourself settled that tragic business. You then walked, without even a night's rest, the fifty-five *li* from T'ainan to Hung Chan. There, at the city gate, you were attacked and severely wounded, and crawled to the house of a Christian native. But while still weak and in a fever you walked the three hundred *li* to Ping Yang and made your way through the Looker army into Monsieur Pourmont's compound..."

He pronounced the two words "Monsieur Pour-mont" in French. What a remarkable old man he was – mentally all alive, sensitive as a youth to the quick currents of life! The accuracy of his information, like his memory, was surprising. Though to the Westerner, every normal Chinese memory is that. Merely learning the language needs or builds a memory...

Most surprising was that so deep attention had been given to Doane's own small case. The fact bewildered; was slow in coming home. For Kang was a great man; his proper preoccupations were many; that he was a poet, and had early aspired to the laureateship, was commonly known – indeed, Doane had somewhere his own translation of Kang's *Ode to the Rich Earth*, from the scroll in the author's calligraphy owned by Pao Ting Chuan at T'ainan-fu. As an amateur in the art of his own land of fine taste and sound historical background he was known everywhere; his collection of early paintings, porcelains, jades and jewels being admittedly one of the most valuable remaining in China. And he was reputed to be the richest individual not of the royal blood (excepting perhaps Yuan Shi K'ai).

A contrast, not untinged with a passing bitterness, arose in Doane's mind. Here before him quietly sat this so-called yellow man who was more competent than perhaps any other to select his own art treasures and write his own poems and state papers; whose journals, known to exist, must inevitably, if not lost in a war-torn land, take their place as a part of China's history; a man who was at once manufacturer, financier, and statesman, on whom for a decade a weakening throne had leaned. While in the cabin forward was a great white man as truly representative of the new civilization as was Kang of the old; yet who hired men of special knowledge to select the art treasures that would be left, one day, in his name and as a monument to his culture, who even employed a trained writer to pen the work that he proposed unblushingly to call his "autobiography." For such a man as Dawley Kane, whatever his manners, Doane felt now, knew only the power of money. Through that alone his genius functioned; the rest was a lie. On the one hand was culture, on the other – something else. The thought bit into his brain.

But his excellency had not finished:

"And there, my dear Griggsby Doane, while still suffering from your wound, you learned that those in Monsieur Pourmont's compound were cut off from communication with their nationals at Peking. You at once volunteered to go again, alone, through the Looker lines to the railhead with

messages, and successfully did so... Do you wonder, my dear young friend, that knowing this, and more, of your honesty and personal force from my one-time assistant, Pao Ting Chuan, of T'ainan-fu, I pressed strongly on the gentlemen from New York who represented the Asiatic Company my desire that they secure you to act as their resident director? And do you wonder that I regretted your refusal so to act?"

This statement came to Doane as a surprise.

"They offered me a position, yes," he said, pondering on the inexplicable ways in which the currents of life meet and cross. "But they told me nothing of your interest."

His excellency smiled. "It might have raised your price. They would think of that. The sharpest trading, Griggsby Doane, is not done in the Orient. That I have learned from a long lifetime of struggling against the aggressions of white nations. During the discussion of the concerted loan to China – you recall it? – they talked of lending us a hundred million dollars, gold. To read your New York papers was to think that we were almost to be given the money. It seemed really a philanthropy. But do you know what their left hands were doing while their right hands waved in a fine gesture of aid to the struggling China? These were the terms. First they subtracted a large commission – that for the bankers themselves; then, what with stipulations of various sorts as to the uses to which the money – or the credit – was to be put, mostly in purchases of railway and war material from their own hongs at further huge profits to themselves, they whittled it down until the actual money to be expended under our own direction, amounted to about fifteen millions. And with that went immense new concessions – really the signing away of an empire – and new foreign supervision of our internal affairs. For all these privileges we were to pay an annual interest and later repay the full amount, one hundred millions. It was quite unbearable." He sighed. "But what is poor old China to do?"

Doane nodded gravely. "I felt all that – the sort of thing – when I talked with representatives of the Asiatic Company. Not that I blamed them, of course. It is a point of view much larger than any of them; they are but part of a great tendency. I couldn't go into it."

"Why not?" The viceroy's keen eyes dropped to the slightly faded blue uniform, then rested again on the strong face.

"The past few years – I will pass over the details – have been – well, not altogether happy for me. I have been puzzled. All the rich years of my younger manhood were given to the mission work. But I had to leave the church. At first I felt a joy in simple hard work – I am very strong – but hard work alone could not satisfy my thoughts."

"No... No."

"For a time I believed that the solution of my personal problem lay in taking the plunge into commercial life. I had come to feel, out there, that business was, after all, the natural expression of man's active nature in our time."

"Yes. Doubtless it is."

"It was in that state of mind that I returned home – to the States. But it proved impossible. I am not a trader. It was too late. My character, such as it was and is, had been formed and hardened in another mold. I talked with old friends, but only to discover that we had between us no common tongue of the spirit. Perhaps if I had entered business early, as they did, I, too, would have found my early ideals being warped gradually around to the prevailing point of view."

"The point stands out, though," said the viceroy, "that you did not enter business. You chose a more difficult course, and one which leaves you, in ripe middle age, without the means to direct your life effectively and in comfort."

"Yes," mused Doane, though without bitterness. "I feel that, of course. And it is hard, very hard, to lose one's country. Yet..."

His voice dropped. He sat, elbow on crossed knees, staring at the ever-changing river. When he spoke again, the bitter undertone was no longer in his voice. He was gentler, but puzzled; a man who has suffered a loss that he can not understand.

“All my traditions,” he said, “my memories of America, were of simple friendly communities, a land of earnest religion, of political freedom. In my thoughts as a younger man certain great figures stood out – Washington, Lincoln, Charles Sumner, Wendell Philips, Philips Brooks and – yes, Henry Ward Beecher. I had deeply felt Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell and Whittier. The Declaration of Independence could still fire my blood. And it was such a land of simple faith that I tried for so many years, however ineffectually, to represent here in China. To be sure, disquieting thoughts came – church disunity, the spectacle of unbridled license among so many of my fellow countrymen in the coast ports, the methods of certain of our great corporations in pushing their wares in among your people. But even when I found it necessary to leave the church, I still believed deeply in my country.”

He paused to control a slight unsteadiness of voice; then went on:

“May I ask if you, Your Excellency, after your long visits in Europe, have not come home to meet with something the same difficulty, to find yourself looking at your own people with the eyes of a stranger, receiving such an impression as only a stranger can receive?”

“Indeed, yes!” cried the viceroy softly, with deep feeling. “It is the most difficult moment, I have sometimes felt, in a man’s life. It is the summit of loneliness, for there is no man among his friends who can share his view, and there is none who would not misunderstand and censure him. And yet, a country, a people, like a city, does present to the alien eye, a complete impression, it exhibits clearly outlined characteristics that can be observed in no other way. Even the alien lose? that clear, true impression on very short acquaintance. He then becomes, like all the others, a part of the picture he has once seen.”

“It is so, Your Excellency. My country, in that first, startled, clear glance, affected me – I may as well use the word – unpleasantly. It was utterly different from anything I had known, a trader’s paradise, a place of unbelievable confusion, of an activity that bewildered, rushing to what end I could not understand.”

He was speaking now not only in the Chinese language but in the idiom as well, generalizing rhetorically as the Chinese do. It was almost as if the words came from a Chinese mind.

They were silent for a time. Then the viceroy asked, in his gently abrupt way: “Why did you leave the church?”

“Because I sinned.”

“Against the church?”

“That, and my own faith.”

“Were you asked to leave?”

“No.”

“They knew of your sin?”

“I told them.”

“Yet they would have kept you?”

“Yes. My own feeling was that my superior temporized.”

“He knew your value.”

“I can not say as to that. But he wished me to marry again. I couldn’t do that – not in the spirit intended. Not as I felt.”

“We are different, Griggsby Doane, you and I. I am a Manchu, you an American. The customs of our two lands are very different. What would seem a sin to you, might not seem so to me. Yet I, too, have a conscience to which I must answer. I believe I understand you. It is, I see, because of your conscience that you sit before me now, on this boat and in this uniform, a man, as your great Edward Everett Hale has phrased it, without a country.”

He paused, and filled again the little pipe-bowl, studied it absently as his wrinkled fingers worked the tobacco. His nails were trimmed short, like those of a white man. Doane thought, swiftly, of the man’s dramatic past, sent out as he had been to become a citizen of the world by a nation that would in very necessity fail to understand the resulting changes in his outlook. There was his

daughter; she would be almost an American, after four years of college life. And she, now, would be a problem indeed! What could he hope to make of her life in this Asia where woman, like labor in his own country, was a commodity. It would be absorbingly interesting, were it possible, to peep into that smooth-running old brain and glimpse the problems there. They were gossiping about him. His stately figure was to-day the center about which coiled the life and death intrigue of Chinese officialdom and over which hung suspended the silken power of an Oriental throne... Doane's personal problem shrank into nothing – a flitting memory of a little outbreak of egotism – as he studied the old face on which the revealing hand of Age had inscribed wisdom, kindness and shrewdness.

Soft footfalls sounded; then, after a moment, a sharper sound that Doane assumed, with a slight quickening of the imagination, to be the high wooden clogs of a Manchu lady, until he realized that no clogs could move so lightly; no, these were little Western shoes.

A young woman appeared, slender and comely, dressed in a tailored suit that could have come only from New York, and smiling with shy eagerness. She was of good height (like the Manchus of the old stock), the face nearly oval, quite unpainted and softly pretty, with a broad forehead that curved prettily back under the parted hair, arched eyebrows, eyes more nearly straight than slanting (that opened a thought less widely than those of Western people), and with a quaint, wholly charming friendliness in her smile.

He felt her sense of freedom; and knew as she tried to take his huge hand in her own small one that she carried her Western ways, as her own people would phrase it, with a proud heart. She was of those aliens who would be happily American, eager to show her kinship with the great land of fine free traditions.

And holding the small hand, looking down at her, Doane found his perhaps overstrained nerves responding warmly to her fine youth and health. He reflected, in that swift way of his wide-ranging mind, on the amazing change in Chinese official life that made it even remotely possible for the viceroy to present his daughter with a heart as proud as hers. The change had come about during the term of Doane's own residence... America, then, was not alone in changing. It was a shaking, puzzled and puzzling world.

"This," his excellency was saying, "is my daughter, Hui Fei."

"I am very pleas' to meet you," said Hui Fei.

They sat then. The girl became at once, as in America, the center of the talk. Though of the heedlessness not uncommonly found among American girls she had none. She was prettily, sensitively, deferential to her father. Somewhere back of the bright surface brain from which came the quick eager talk and the friendly smile, deep in her nature, lay the sense of reverence for those riper in years and in authority that was the deepest strain in her race. She dwelt on things almost utterly American: the brightness of New York – she said she liked it best in October, when the shops were gay; the approaching Yale-Harvard football game, a motoring tour through the White Mountains, happy summers at the seashore.

Doane watched her, speaking only at intervals, wondering if there might not be, behind her gentle enthusiasm, some deeper understanding of her present situation. He could not surely make out. She had humor, and when he asked if it did not seem strange to step abruptly back into the old life, she spoke laughingly of her many little mistakes in etiquette. Her English he found charming. She was continually slipping back into it from the Mandarin tongue she tried to use, and as continually, with great gaiety, reaching back into Chinese for the equivalent phrase. She had so nearly conquered the usual difficulty with the l's and r's as to confuse them only when she spoke hurriedly. At these times, too, she would leave off final consonants. The long *e* became then, a short *i*. Doane even smiled, with an inner sense of pleasure, at her pretty emphasis when she once converted *people* into *pipple*. She was, unmistakably, a young woman of charm and personality. Despite the quaintness of her speech, she was accustomed to thinking in the new tongue. Her command of it was excellent; better than would commonly be found in America. All of which, of course, intensified the problem.

His excellency sat back, smoked comfortably, and looked on her with frankly indulgent pride.

A servant came with a message; bowing low. The viceroy excused himself, leaving his daughter and Doane together. Doane asked himself, during the pause that followed his departure, what the observant attendants beyond the screen would be thinking. The situation, from any familiar Chinese point of view, was unthinkable. Yet here he sat; and there, her brows drawn together (he saw now) in sober thought, sat delightful Miss Hui Fei.

She said, in a low voice, while looking out at the river: "Mr. Doane, no matter what you may think – I mus' see you. This evening. You mus' tell me where. It mus' not be known to any one. There are spies here."

Doane glanced up; then, too, looked away. There could be no question now of the girl's deeper feeling. She was determined. Her tune was honest and forthright, with the unthinking courage of youth. It would be her father, of course...

But his mind had gone blank. He knew not what to think or say.

"Please!" she murmured. "There is no one else You mus' help us. Tell me – father will be coming back."

And then Griggsby Doane heard his own voice saying quietly: "The boat deck is the only place. You will find a sort of ladder near the stern. If you can –"

"I will go up there."

"It will be only just after midnight that I could arrange to be there."

His excellency returned then. And Doane took his leave. He had been but a few moments in his own cabin when two actors of his excellency's suite appeared, each with a lacquered tray, on one of which was a small chest of tea, wrapped in red paper lettered in gold and bearing the seal stamp of the private estate of Kang Yu, on the other an object of more than a foot in height carefully wound about with cotton cloth.

Doane dismissed the lictors with a Mexican dollar each and unwrapped the larger object, which the servant had placed with great care on his berth. It proved to be a *pi*, a disk of carven jade, in color a perfect specimen of the pure greenish-white tint that is so highly prized by Chinese collectors. The diameter was hardly less than ten inches, and the actual width of the stone from the circular inner opening to the outer rim about four inches. It stood on edge set in a pedestal of blackwood, the carving of which was of unusual delicacy. The pedestal was, naturally, modern, but Doane, with a mounting pulse, studied the designs cut into the stone itself. That cutting had been done not later than the Han Dynasty, certainly within two hundred years of the birth of Christ.

CHAPTER IV – INTRIGUE

THE *Yen Hsin* would arrive at Kiu Kiang by mid-afternoon.

Half an hour earlier. Doane, on the lower deck, came upon a group of his excellency's soldiers – brown deep-chested men, picturesque in their loose blue trousers bound in above the ankles and their blue turbans and gray cartridge belts – conversing excitedly in whispers behind the stack of coffins near the stern. At sight of him they broke up and slipped away.

A moment later, passing forward along the corridor beside the engine room, he heard his name: “Mr. Doane! If you please!” This in English.

He turned. Just within the doorway of one of the low-priced cabins stood a pedler he had observed about the lower decks; a thin Chinese with an overbred head that was shaped, beneath the cap, like a skull without flesh upon it; the eyes concealed behind smoked glasses.

“May I have a word with you, Mr. Doane?”

The mate considered; then, stooping, entered the tiny cabin. The pedler closed the door; quietly shot the bolt; then removed his cap and the queue with it, exposing a full head of stubby black hair, trimmed, as is said, pompadour. The glasses came off next; discovering wide alert eyes. And now, without the cap, the head, despite the hair and the seriously intellectual face, looked, balanced on its thin neck, more than ever like a skull.

“You will not know of me, Mr. Doane. I am Sun Shi-pi of Shanghai. I was attached, as interpreter, to the yamen of the tao-tai. I left his service some months ago to join the republican revolutionary party. I was arrested shortly after that at Nanking and condemned to death, but his excellency, the viceroy – ”

“Kang?”

“Yes. He is on this boat. He released me on condition that I go to Japan. I kept my word – to that extent; I went to Japan – but I could not keep my word in spirit. My life is consecrated to the cause of the Chinese Republic. Nothing else matters. I returned to Shanghai, and was made commander there of the ‘Dare-to-dies.’ You did not know of such an organization? You will, then, before the winter is gone. We shall be heard from. There are other such companies – at Canton, at Wuchang – at Nanking – at every center.”

Doane seated himself on the narrow couch and studied the quietly eager young man.

“You speak English with remarkable ease,” he said.

“Oh, yes. I studied at Chicago University. And at Tokio University I took post-graduate work.”

“And you are frank.”

“I can trust you. You are known to us, Mr. Doane. Wu Ting Fang trusts you – and Sun Yat Sen, our leader, he knows and trusts you.”

“I did know Sun Yat Sen, when he was a medical student.”

“He knows you well. He has mentioned your name to us. That is why I am speaking to you. America is with us. We can trust Americans.”

Doane's mind was ranging swiftly about the situation. “You are running a risk,” he said.

Sun Shi-pi shrugged his shoulders. “I shall hardly survive the revolution. That is not expected among the ‘Dare-to-dies.’”

“If his excellency's soldiers find you here they will kill you now.”

“The officers would, of course. Many of the soldiers are with us. Anyway, it doesn't matter.”

“What is your errand?”

“I will tell you. The revolution, as you doubtless know, is fully planned.”

“I've assumed so. There has been so much talk. And then, of course, the outbreak in Szechuen.”

“That was premature. It was the plan to strike in the spring. This fighting in Szechuen has caused much confusion. Sun Yat Sen is in America. He is going to England, and can hardly reach

China within two months. He will bring money enough for all our needs. He is the organizer, the directing genius of the new republic. But the Szechuen outbreak has set all the young hotheads afire.”

“I am told that the throne has sent Tuan Fang out there to put down the disturbance. But we have had no news lately.”

“That is because the wires are cut. Tuan Fang will never come back. We will pay five thousand taels, cash, to the bearer of his head, and ask no questions. We must exterminate the Manchus. It has finally come down to that. It is the only way out. But we must pull together. Did you know that the Wu Chang republicans plan to strike at once?”

“No.”

“I have been sent there to tell them to wait. That is our gravest danger now. If we pull together we shall win. If our emotions run away with our judgment – ”

“The throne will defeat your forces piecemeal and destroy your morale.”

“Exactly. My one fear is that I may not reach Wu Chang in time. But” – with a careless gesture – “that is as it may be. I will tell you now why I spoke to you. We need you. Our organization is incomplete as yet, naturally. One matter of the greatest importance is that our spirit be understood from the first by foreign countries. There is an enormous task – diplomatic publicity, you might call it – which you, Mr. Doane, are peculiarly fitted to undertake. You know both China and the West. You are a philosopher of mature judgment. You would work in association with Doctor Wu Ting Fang at our Shanghai offices. There will be money. Will you consider this?”

“It is a wholly new thought,” Doane replied slowly. “I should have to give it very serious consideration.”

“But you are in sympathy with our aims?”

“In a general way, certainly. Even though I may not share your optimism.”

“On your return to Shanghai would you be willing to call at once on Doctor Wu and discuss the matter?”

“Yes... Yes, I will do that. I must leave you now. We are nearly at Kiu Kiang.”

Sun, glancing out the window, raised his hand. Doane looked; two small German cruisers, the kaiser’s flag at the taff, were steaming up-stream.

“They know,” murmured Sun, with meaning. “I wish to God I could find their means of information. They *all* know. From the Japanese in particular nothing seems to be hidden. Two or three of your American war-ships are already up there. And the English, naturally, in force.”

“They must be on hand to protect the foreign colony at Hankow. The Szechuen trouble would justify such a move.”

But Sun shook his head. “They *know*,” he repeated. Then he clasped Doane’s hand. “However... that is a detail. It is now war. You will find events marching fast – faster, I fear, than we republicans wish. Good-by now. You will call on Doctor Wu.”

The steamer moved slowly in toward the landing hulk. Doane, from the boat deck, by the after bell pull, gazed across at the park-like foreign bund, with its embankment of masonry and its trees. Behind lay, compactly, the walled city. Everything looked as it had always looked – the curious crowd along the railing, the water carriers passing down and up the steps, the eager shouting swarm of water beggars. Below, the coolies swung out from the hulk, ready to make their usual breakneck leap over green water to the approaching steamer. Now – they were jumping. The passengers were leaning out from the promenade deck to watch and applaud... Doane’s thoughts, as he went mechanically through his familiar duties, wandered off inland, past the battlements and towers of the ancient city to the thousands of other ancient cities and villages and farmsteads beyond; and he wondered if the scores of millions of lethargic minds in all those centers of population could really be awakened from their sleep of six hundred years and stirred into action.

Could a republic, he asked himself, possibly mean anything real to those minds? The habit of mere endurance, of bare existence, was so deep-seated, the struggle to live so intense, the opportunity

so slight. Sun Shi-pi and his kind were a semi-Western product. They were, when all was said and done, an exotic breed. They were the ardent, adventurous young; and they were the few. There had always been a throne in China, always extortionate mandarins, always a popular acceptance of conditions.

The lines were out now. And suddenly a blue-clad soldier climbed over the rail, below, balanced along the stern hawser, leaped to the hulk, and was about to disappear among the coolies there when a rifle-shot cracked and he fell. He seemed to fall, if anything, slightly before the shot. Another soldier, following close, was caught by a second shot as he was balancing on the hawser, and spun headlong into the water where the propeller still churned.

A few moments later, when Doane moved among the passengers, it became clear that they knew nothing of the casual tragedy astern. They were all pressing ashore for a walk in the native city, eager to buy the worked silver that is traditionally sold there. The slim girl in the middy blouse had apparently captured young Rocky Kane; they strolled off across the bund together. But Dawley Kane remained aboard, stretched out comfortably in a deck chair, listening thoughtfully to the stocky little Japanese, one Kato, who was by now generally known to be his *alter ego* in the matter of buying objects of Oriental art.

None of these folk knew or cared about China. Excepting this Kato. Him Doane was continually encountering below decks, chatting smilingly in Chinese with the good-natured soldiers. His work along the river, doubtless, ranged over a wider field than his present employer would ever learn. It would be interesting, now, to know what he was saying, talking so rapidly and always, of course, smiling... The rest of this upper-deck white man's existence Doane dismissed from his mind as he went about his work. It was all too familiar. Though later he thought of Rocky Kane. The boy, wild though he might be, had attractive qualities. It was not pleasant to see that girl get her hands on him. Just one more evil influence.

He thought, at this juncture, of the – the word came – appalling change in himself. That he, once a fervid missionary, could stand back like a sophisticated European, and let the wandering and vicious and broken human creatures about him go their various ways, as might be, was disturbing, was even saddening. Something apparently had died in him. Sun had called him a philosopher. The Oriental, of course, even the blazing revolutionist, admired this passive quality, this fatalistic acceptance of the fact. He sighed. To be a philosopher was, then, to be emotionally dead. The church had been taken out of his life, leaving – nothing. A mate on a river steamer, in China. Life had gone quite topsy-turvy. Even the amazing courtesy of his excellency – it was that, when you considered – and this profound compliment from the revolutionary junta seemed but incidents. Too many promises had smiled at Doane, these years of his spiritual Odyssey – smiled and faded to nothing – to permit an easy hope of anything new and beautiful. He was beginning to believe that a man can not build and live two lives. And he had built and lived one.

Captain Benjamin found him; a dogged little captain with dull fright in his eyes. "It's happened," he said, trying desperately to attain an offhand manner. "Company wire. They're fighting at Wu Chang. What do you know about that!"

Doane was silent. It was extraordinarily difficult, here by this calm old city, on a sunny afternoon, to believe that it was, as Sun had put it, war.

"We're to tie up," the captain went on, "until further orders. The foreign concessions at Hankow were safe enough this noon, but with an artillery battle just across the river, and an imperial army moving down from the north over the railway, they stand a lot of show, they do."

"I wonder if they'll send us on."

"What difference will it make?" The captain's voice was rising. "You know as well as I do that they'll be fighting at Nanking before we could get back there. Here, too, for that matter. I tell you the whole river'll be ablaze by to-morrow. This bloody old river! And us on a Manchu-owned boat! A lot o' chance we stand."

The sight-seers strolled across the shady bund, passed a stone residence or two and a warehouse, and made their way through the tunneled gateway in the massive city wall. Little Miss Andrews was escorted by young Mr. Braker. Miss Means walked with one of the customs men. Two or three others of the men wandered on ahead. Rocky Kane and the thin girl in the middy blouse brought up the rear.

As they entered the crowded city within the wall a babel of sound assailed their ears – the beating of drums and gongs, clanging cymbals, a musket shot or two, fire-crackers; and underlying these, rising even above them, never slackening, a continuous roar of voices. The teachers paused in alarm, but the customs man smilingly assured them that in a busy Chinese city the noise was to be taken for granted.

Nearly every shop along the way was open to the street, and at each opening men swarmed – bargaining, chaffering, quarreling. The only women to be seen were those in black trousers on a wheelbarrow that pushed briskly through the crowds, the barrow man shouting musically as he shuffled along. Beggars wailed from the niches between the buildings. Dogs snarled and barked – hundreds of dogs, fighting over scraps of offal among the hundreds of nearly naked children.

A mandarin came through in a chair of green lacquer and rich gold ornament, supercilious, fat, carried by four bearers and followed by imposing officials who wore robes of black and red and hats with red plumes. As the street was a scant ten feet in width and the crowds must flatten against the walls to make way the roar grew louder and higher in pitch.

There were shops with nothing but oils in huge jars of earthenware or in wicker baskets lined with stout paper. There were tea shops with high pyramids of the familiar red-and-gold parcels, and other pyramids of the brick tea that is carried on camel back to Russia. There were the shops of the idol makers, and others where were displayed the carved animals and the houses and carts and implements that are burned in ancestor worship, and the tinsel shoes. There were shops where remarkably large coffins were piled in square heaps, some of glistening lacquer with the ideograph characters carved or embossed in new gold. There were varnishers, lacquerers, tobacconists; open eating houses in which could be seen rows of pans set into brickwork. There were displays of bean cakes, melon seeds and curious drugs.

Two Manchu soldiers sauntered by, in uniforms of red and faded blue; fans stuck in their belts and painted paper umbrellas folded in their hands. One bore a hooded falcon on his wrist.

Miss Andrews sniffed the penetrating odor of all China, that was spiced just here with smells of garlic cooking and frying fish and pork and strong oil? and – like the perfume of a dainty lady amid the complex odors of a French theater – an unexpected whiff of burning incense. She looked up between the high walls, on which hung, close together, the long elaborate signs of the tradesmen, black and green and red with gold, always the gold. Across the narrow opening from roof to roof, extended a bamboo framework over which was drawn coarse yellow matting or blue cotton cloths; and through these the sunbeams, diffused, glowed in a warm twilight, with here and there a chance ray slanting down with dazzling brightness on a golden sign character.

“It’s all rather terrifying,” murmured Miss Andrews, at Braker’s ear, “but it’s beautiful – wonderful! I never dreamed of China being so human and real.”

“And to think,” said he eagerly, “that it has always been like this, and always will be. It was just so in the days of Abraham and Isaac. The one people in the world that doesn’t change. It’s their whole philosophy – passive non-resistance, peace. And-do you know, I’m beginning to wonder if they aren’t right about it. For here they are, you know. Greece is dead. Rome’s dead. And Assyria, and Egypt. But here they are. It’s their philosophy that’s done it, I suppose. Almost be worth while to come out here and live a while, when our part of the world gets too upset. Just for a sense of stability – somewhere.”

These two young persons, dreaming of stability while the earth prepared to rock beneath their feet!

Rocky Kane and the slim girl had dropped out of sight, lingering at this shop and that. The party later found them at a silversmith’s counter. They had bought a heap of the silver dragon-boxes

and cigarette cases; and then devised a fresh little idea in gambling, weighing ten Chinese dollars against other ten in the balanced scales, the heavier lot winning.

Young Kane had got through his clothing, somehow, there in the street, to his money belt, for he held it now carelessly rolled in one hand. He was flushed, laughing softly. He and the thin girl were getting on.

“Come along, you two,” remarked the customs man. “We stop only two hours here.”

The young couple, gathering up their purchases and the heaps of silver dollars, slowly followed.

“That was great!” exclaimed Rocky Kane. The thin girl, he had decided, was a good fellow. She was always quiet, discreet, attractive. In her curiously unobtrusive way she seemed to know everything. The face was cold in appearance. Yet she was distinctly friendly. Made you feel that nothing you might say could disturb or shock her. He wondered what could be going on behind those pale quiet eyes, behind the thin lips. The men had remarked on the fact that she was traveling alone. She was a provocative person – the curiously youthful costume; the black hair gathered at the neck and tied, girlishly, with a bow – really an exciting person. The way she had taken that little scene out on deck with the gorgeous Chinese girl – Rocky knew nothing of the distinctions between the Asiatic peoples – who spoke English; quite as a matter of course. Though she took everything that way. This little gambling, for instance. She loved it – was quick at it.

“I’m wondering about you,” he said, as they wandered along. “Wondering – you know – why you’re traveling this way. Have you got folks up the river?”

“Oh, no,” she replied – never in his life had he known such self-control; there wasn’t even color in her voice, just that easy quiet way, that sense of giving out no vitality whatever. “Oh, no. I have some business at Hankow and Peking.”

That was all she said. The subject was closed. And yet, she hadn’t minded his asking. She was still friendly; he felt that. His feelings rose. He giggled softly.

“Lord!” he said, “if only the pater wasn’t along!”

“Does he hold you down?”

“Does he? Brought me out here to discipline me. Trying to make me go back to college – make a grind of me... I was just thinking – here’s a nice girl to play with, and plenty of fun around, and not a thing to drink. He gave me fits at Shanghai because I took a few drinks.”

“You have the other stuff,” said she. He turned nervously; stared at her. But she remained as calmly unresponsive as ever. Merely explained: “I smelt it, outside your cabin. You ought to be careful – shut your window tight when you smoke it.”

He held his breath a moment; then realized, with an uprush of feeling warmer than any he had felt before, that he had her sympathy. She would never tell, never in the world. That big mate might, but she wouldn’t.

She added this: “I can give you a drink. Wait until things settle down on the boat and come to my cabin – number four. Just be sure there’s no one in the corridor. And don’t knock. The door will be ajar. Step right in. Do you like saké?”

“Do I – say, you’re great! You’re wonderful. I never knew a girl like you!”

She took this little outbreak, as she had taken all his others, without even a smile. It was, he felt, as if they had always known each other. They understood – perfectly.

If he had been told, then, that this girl had been during two or three vivid years one of the most conspicuous underworld characters along the coast – that coast where the underworld was still, at the time of our narrative, openly part of what small white world there was out here – a gambler and blackmailer of what would very nearly have to be called attainment – he would have found belief impossible, would have defended her with the blind impulsiveness of youth.

It was said that the steamer would not proceed at the scheduled hour, might be delayed until night. Disgruntled white passengers settled down, in berth and deck chair, to make the best of it. There was, it came vaguely to light, a little trouble up the river, an outbreak of some sort.

Rocky Kane, a flush below his temples, slipped stealthily along the corridor. At number four he paused; glanced nervously about; then, grinning, pushed open the door and softly closed it behind him.

The strange thin Miss Carmichael was combing out her black hair. With a confused little laugh he extended his arms. But she shook her head.

“Sit down and be sensible,” she said. “Here’s the saké.”

She produced a bottle and poured a small drink into a large glass. He gulped it down.

“Aren’t you drinking with me?” he asked.

“I never take anything.”

“You’re a funny girl. How’d you come to have this?”

“It was given to me. You’d better slip along. I can’t ask you to stay.”

“But when am I going to see you, for a good visit?”

“Oh, there’ll be chances enough. Here we are.”

“That’s so. Looks as if we’d stay here a while, too. There’s a battle on, you know, up at Wu Chang and Hankow. Big row. We get all the news from Kato. He’s that Japanese that father has with him. The revolutionists have captured Wu Chang, and are getting ready to cross over. The imperial army’s being rushed down to defend Hankow. Regular doings. Shells were falling in the foreign concessions this morning. Kato’s got all the news there is. It’s a question whether we’ll go on at all. You see the Manchus own this boat, and the republicans would certainly get after us. There are enough foreign warships up there to protect us, of course... How about another drink?”

“Better not. Your father will notice it.”

“He won’t know where I got it.” Rocky chuckled. He felt himself an adventurous and quite manly old devil – here in the mysterious girl’s cabin, watching her as she smoothed and tied her flowing hair, and sipping the potent liquor from Japan. “It’s funny nothing seems to surprise you. Did you know they were fighting up there?”

“No.”

“Wouldn’t you be a little frightened if we were to steam right into a battle?”

“I shouldn’t enjoy it particularly.”

“Aren’t you even interested? Is there anything you’re interested in?”

“Certainly – I have my interests. You must go – really... No, be quiet! Some one will hear! We can visit to-night – out on deck.”

“But you’re – I don’t understand! Here we are – like this – and you shoo me out. I don’t even know your first name.”

“My name is Dixie – but I don’t want you to call me that.”

“Why not? We’re friends, aren’t we – ”

“Of course, but they’d hear you.”

“Oh!”

“Wait – I’ll look before you go... It’s all clear now.”

They visited long after dinner. He was brimming with later advices from the center of trouble up the river. Mostly she listened, studying him with a mind that was keener and quicker and shrewder in its sordid wisdom than he would perhaps ever understand.

Everything that Kato had told his father and himself he passed eagerly on to her. He was a man indeed now; making an enormous impression; possessor of inside information of a vital sort – the viceroy’s priceless collection of jewels, jades, porcelains and historic paintings, which Kato was advising his father to pick up for a song while red revolution raged about the old Manchu, the dramatic plans of the republicans, their emblems and a pass-word (Kato knew everything) – “Shui-li” – “union is strength”; the small meeting below decks ending in the death of two soldiers. He dramatized this last as he related it.

The girl, lying still in her chair, listened as if but casually interested, while her mind gathered and related to one another the probable facts beneath his words. She was considering his dominant

quality of ungoverned hot-blooded youth. Of discretion he clearly enough had none; which fact, viewed from her standpoint, was both important and dangerous. For the information he so volubly conveyed she had immediate use. That was settled, however cloudy the details. But this further question as to the advisability of holding the boy personally to herself she was still weighing. Two courses of action lay before her, each leading to a possible rich prize. If the two could be combined, well and good; she would pursue both. But it was not easy to sense out a possible combination. The obvious first thought was to go whole-heartedly after the larger of the prizes and as whole-heartedly forget the other. As usual in all such choices, however, the lesser prize was the easier to secure. Perhaps, even, by working – the word “working” was her own – with great rapidity she might make – again her word – a killing with this wild youth in time to discard him and pursue the still richer prize.

Because he was, at least, the bird in hand, she submitted passively when his fingers found hers under the steamer rug. Twilight was thickening into night now on the river. And they were in a dim corner. He was, she saw, at the point of almost utter disorganization. He was sensitive, emotional, quite spoiled. It was almost too easy to do what she might choose with him. It would be amusing to tantalize him, if there were time; watch him struggle in the net of his own nervously unripe emotions, perhaps shake him down (we are yet again dropping into her phraseology) without the surrender of a *quid pro quo*. That would please her sense of cool sharp power. But he might in that event, like the young naval officer down at Hong Kong, shoot himself; which wouldn't do. No, nothing in that!

This other larger matter, now, was a problem indeed; really, as yet, only a haze in her sensitive, strangely gifted mind. It put to the test at once her imagination, her instinct for dangerous enterprise, her skill at organizing the sluggish minds of others. It would mean dangerous and intense activity.

She asked, in a careless manner, where the viceroy kept his treasures; and fixed in her mind the place he named – Huang Chau.

The fool was squeezing her fingers now; unquestionably building in his ungoverned brain an extravagant image of herself; an image wrapped in veils of somewhat tarnished but certainly boyish innocence, sentimentalized, curiously less interesting than the complicated wickedness and intrigue of actual human life as it presented itself to her.

When he tried to kiss her she left him. But lingered to listen to his proposal that she should follow him to his own cabin; smiled enigmatically in the dusk beneath the deck light; humming lightly, pleasingly, she moved away; turned to watch him bolting for his room.

She strolled around the deck then. Apparently none other was sitting out. The teachers and the young men were spending the evening, she knew, with Dawley Kane at the consulate. Rocky had got out of that. Tex Connor was in his cabin; reading, doubtless, with his one good eye. For rough as he might be, this gambler and promoter of boxing and wrestling reveled secretly in love stories. He read them by the hundred, the old-fashioned paper-covered romances and tales of adventure. A pretty able man. Tex; useful in certain sorts of undertakings; certainly useful now; but with that curious romantic strain – a weakness, she felt. And a difficult man, strong, arrogant, leaning on crude power and threats where she leaned on delicately adjusted intrigue. Had Tex known better how to cover his various trails he would be in New York or London now, not out here on the coast picking up small change. Approaching him would be a bit of a problem; for a year or so their ways, hers and his, had lain far apart. It was not known, here on the boat, that they were so much as casually acquainted. They bowed at the dining table; nothing more.

The Manila Kid was in the social hall, rummaging through the shelf of battered and scratched records above the taking machine. A quaint spirit, the Kid; weak, oddly useless, gloomily devoted to music of a simple sort, quite without enterprise. But... by this time the delicate steel machinery of her mind was functioning clearly... he would serve now, if only as a means of solving that first little problem of interesting Tex.

She paused in the doorway; caught his furtive eye, and with a slight beckoning movement of her head, moved back into the comparative darkness. Slowly – thick-headedly of course – he came out.

“Jim,” she said, “I’m wondering if you and Tex wouldn’t like to pick up a little money.”

“What do you think we are?” he replied in a guarded sulky voice. “Tex dropped three thousand at that fight. There’s no talking to him. He’s rough – that’s what he is.”

“Jim – ” she considered the man before her deliberately; his lank spineless figure, his characterless, hatchet face: “Jim, send Tex to me.”

“Why should I, Dix? Answer me that.”

“Don’t act up, Jim. I’ve never handed you anything that wasn’t more than coming to you. I know all about you, Jim. Everything! I’m not talking – but I know. This is a big proposition I’ve got in mind, and you’ll get your share, if you come in and stick with me? How about half a million in jewels?”

“I don’t know’s Tex would care to go in for anything like that. If it’s a yegg job – ”

“I’m not a yegg,” she replied crisply. “Ask Tex to slip around here. I don’t want to talk on that side of the deck.”

“I suppose you wouldn’t like young Kane to know what you are – er?”

“That sort of talk won’t get you anywhere, Jim.”

“Well – I’ve got eyes, you know.”

“Better learn how to use them. You hurry around to Tex’s cabin. We may have to move quickly.” Sulkily the Kid went; and shortly returned.

“Well” – this after a silence – “what did he say? Is he coming?”

“He wants you to go around there – to his stateroom.”

“I won’t do that. He’s got to come here.”

This decision lightened somewhat the gloom on the Kid’s saturnine countenance. He went again, more briskly.

The girl slipped into her own cabin and consulted a folding map of China she had there. Huang Chau – she measured roughly from the scale with her thumb – would be seventy or eighty miles up-stream from Kiu Kiang here, perhaps thirty-five down-stream from Hankow.

Tex was chewing a cigar by the rail At her step his round impassive face turned toward her.

She said, “Hello, Tex!”

He replied, his one eye fixed on her: “Well, what is this job?”

“Listen, Tex – are you game for a big one?”

“What is it?”

“The revolution’s broken out at Hankow – or across at Wu Chang – ”

“Yes, I know!”

“There’s going to be another big battle near Hankow. The republicans are moving over. Sure to be a mix-up.”

“Oh. yes!”

“There’ll be loot – ”

“Oh, that!”

“Wait! I know where there’s a collection of jewels – diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds – all kinds.”

“Do you know how to get it?”

“Yes. It’s a big thing. We’d be selling stones for years in America and Europe, Will you go in with me, fifty-fifty?”

“What’s the risk?”

“Not much – with things so confused. Looks to me like one of those chances that just happens once in a hundred years. Take some imagination and nerve.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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