

**SAMUEL
MERWIN**

ANTHONY THE
ABSOLUTE

Samuel Merwin
Anthony The Absolute

«Public Domain»

Merwin S.

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Samuel Merwin

Anthony The Absolute

At Sea – March 28th

THIS evening I told Sir Robert What's-His-Name he was a fool.

I was quite right in this. He is.

Every evening since the ship left Vancouver he has presided over the round table in the middle of the smoking-room. There he sips his coffee and liqueur, and holds forth on every subject known to the mind of man. Each subject is his subject. He is an elderly person, with a bad face and a drooping left eyelid. He wears a monocle; and carries his handkerchief in his left sleeve.

They tell me that he is in the British Service – a judge somewhere down in Malaysia, where they drink more than is good for them. I believe it. He tosses about his *obiter dicta* as if he were pope of the human intellect. A garrulous pope. Surely the mind of a judge, when exposed, is a dreadful thing!

Go where I will, of an evening, there is no peace for me. In the “social hall” some ungoverned young thing is eternally at the piano – “On the Mississippi” and “The Robert E. Lee” and the other musical literature of the turkey trot. I could not possibly sit five minutes there without shrieking. Outside, on deck, it has been raw and chill for a week, with rain penetrating my clothing and misting the lenses of my spectacles and rousing my slumbering rheumatism. And you can not sit long in a stuffy cabin, with the port screwed fast; it is unpleasant enough sleeping there... So I have huddled myself each night in a corner of the smoking-room. I have played at dominoes. I have played at solitaire with cards. *And I loathe games!* But anything is a relief that will divert my mind, even for an instant now and then, from thoughts of that loose, throaty voice, and of the truly awful mind that animates it.

Few of the passengers ever give me more than a nod; for I am not what is called a “mixer.” Except the Port Watch. He has looked confidingly at me twice over his siphon. But I have not encouraged him, for he has an over-intense eye and the flush of drink is on his cheek. Every day, hours on end, he paces the deck; hence his nickname. He is, like myself, a lonely man; and a little wild – distinctly a little wild.

Sir Robert outdid himself this evening. No man could possibly know so much. I have made a list (not complete, of course) of the subjects on which he speaks with dogmatic authority – very positive, very technical, with a glib use of catch phrases, with emphasis always on the peculiarly significant point in the matter. The list runs:

Aëronautics; the American temperament as affected by immigration; archery; art; ballistics; dog-breeding; engineering (civil and military); ethnology; folk-lore of all nations; geology; horticulture; inferiority of Latin peoples (particularly the French); laces and embroideries; modern accounting; navigation (which he explained last night in detail to the Chief Officer, a silent person); psychology (all branches); Roman law; rugs (and textiles generally); *Weltpolitik*; wireless telegraphy; and, at all times and places, the glory of England and the superiority of English blood.

This evening he was dismissing, with a torrent of apparently precise ethnological and historical data, the recent Japanese pretension to Aryan origin – doubtless for the benefit of that little Japanese commercial agent with bad teeth who sat in the corner opposite me working out problems on a go-board. The usual group of weak-minded persons were sitting about Sir Robert's table, listening with the usual awe.

Now, I rather like that Japanese. Only this morning he was so kind as to sing several examples of the folk-song of his country into my phonograph. Five records he gave me, so that my work is begun

even before we land. Excellent specimens, two of them, of the Oriental tone sense, with observably different intervals for the ascending and descending scales.

He exhibited no sign that Sir Robert's talk annoyed him; quietly went on placing the little black and white shells on the board. (It is interesting to note, at this point, that the Japanese handle small objects with the first three fingers only, without employing the thumb as we do.) But I felt myself becoming angry. My forehead grew hot and flushed, as it always does when I am stirred. I tried to calm myself by constructing a house of dominoes; but the pitching of the ship overturned it.

Still that throaty voice. "Thank God," I thought, "in another day we shall be at Yokohama!"

I tried to read a four-weeks-old copy of the *Illustrated London News*. No use; the voice held me.

It occurred to me, as an exercise in self-control, to interest myself in speculating on the emotions and the characteristics back of the faces here in the smoking-room. I achieved some success at this exercise. Why, when you come to think of it, should each particular unit in this haphazard assemblage of men and women be journeying away off here to the other side of the earth? There are surely dramas in our little company. The two middle-aged ladies with the firm chins, for instance, who dress so quietly and speak so discreetly – it is whispered among the men that they are high and prosperous in a sad business on Soo-chow Road, Shanghai. And the young German adventurer with the scars across his nose, who borrowed fifteen dollars from me, to be repaid when we land at Yokohama – if he approaches me again I shall refuse him firmly. And the fat vaudeville manager from Cincinnati, who plays fan-tan every night with a heap of Chinese brass *cash* and a bowl borrowed from the ship's dining-room!

As I mused, I felt the Port Watch gazing at me again over his siphon. I believe he would pour out his story, were I to permit it. But I do not choose to hear. After all, I am not a romancer, but a scientific man. My concern is not with the curious and personal tangle of human affairs, but with impersonal fact and sober deductions therefrom.

Sir Robert was now defining culture as the touchstone of civilization – from the British point of view, of course. God, that voice! And then, without a thought in my head as to where the talk was leading – suddenly – he plumped squarely down on my subject. It was the first time in the twelve days of our voyage. Until this moment, the tribal god referred to in his national anthem had spared him. *My subject!* The one thing I know more about than any other human being. I had him.

"The surest test of the culture of a people," said he, *ex cathedra*, "is the music of that people. Primitive races invariably express their emotions in primitive music. They try to tell me that the Chinese are a civilized people. 'Very well,' I say then; 'let me hear their music.' No nation has progressed far along the great highroad of civilization without coming into an understanding of the diatonic system. The Chinese civilized? When their finest musical instrument is the little *sheng*, a crude collection of twelve pipes that are not even in tune? When they have failed to arrive at even a rudimentary perception of tonality and scale relationships? No; I tell you, the Chinese civilization is to the European as the little *sheng* is to the grand piano. The piano, on which all scales are related, all harmonies possible, is the supreme artistic achievement of the highest civilization."

This was enough. I got right up and went over to the round table. My forehead was burning; I must have been red as fire.

"You do not know what you are talking about," I cried out. I had to lean over the shoulder of one of the weak-minded in order to catch Sir Robert's eye. "It is the piano that has killed music in Europe! The piano is a lie from end to end of the keyboard. Bach confirmed that lie with his miserable triumph of the well-tempered clavichord. And in finally fastening his false scale upon us he destroyed in us the fine ear for true intervals that is to-day found only in your primitive peoples. The Chinese have it. The Javanese have it. The Siamese, most wonderful of all, have a true isotonic scale. But we of the *cultured* West (I put a wonderful sneering emphasis on that word) can not even *hear* true fluid music to-day, because our tone perception goes no farther than the barbarous mechanical compromise of the piano keyboard. You do not know what you are talking about. You are a fool!"

When I am excited my voice rises and becomes shrill. I talked rapidly, so that no one could interrupt. And the weak-minded ones sank back in their chairs. They were actually afraid, I think now. In fact, when I paused the whole smoking-room was still as death.

I swept my eye about – commandingly, I think. The fat vaudeville man – he sat behind Sir Robert – was grinning at me with delight in his eyes, and was softly clapping his hands behind the fantan bowl. The Port Watch with red face and suddenly twinkling eyes, had clapped his hand over his mouth as if to smother an outright laugh. Sir Robert was looking up at me, his left eyelid drooping, a sort of perplexed uncertainty on his face – his old face that was all lines and wrinkles.

Now that I had the floor, it seemed worth while to make a thorough job of it, so I swept on:

“You make the piano the test of civilization. Greece had a civilization – where were the pianos of Greece? Oh, I am tired of your talk. I have listened to you for twelve long days and nights. I have suspected your accuracy, but I could not be sure, for you luckily avoided *my* subject. But now I have you! And I know you for a fraud on all subjects! I see confusion in your face. You are groping for something to say about the music of Greece. Very well; I will say it for you. The Greeks had no piano, because they had no harmony. They did not know that harmony was possible. And if they had heard it, they would not have liked it.”

“Ah,” cried Sir Robert, flushing under the parchment of his skin, and (I must say) taking up the gage of battle, “but Greece gave us our diatonic system. The root of our scale, the tetrachord, came to us from the Greeks.”

I laughed him down. The intervals of that Greek tetrachord were not the same as ours. They used intervals that actually can not be written in our notation – three quarter tones, one and a quarter tones. Pythagoras states, ‘The intervals in music are rather to be judged intellectually through numbers than sensibly through the ear.’ For they followed the acoustic laws, *like the Chinese!* The fragments we have of the worship of Apollo are more nearly like the ancient Confucian hymn than like anything known in modern music. “Tell me, sir, did you know that? And tell me this – does not the quality you call ‘culture’ imply that we should seek sympathetically for the standpoint of other minds? Has it never occurred to you that when Oriental music sounds absurd and out of key to you, it is your own ear that is at fault – that the intervals are too fine and true for your false, piano-trained sense? For such is the fact.”

I was shaking my finger under his nose, so closely that he had to lean back.

“And I will tell you,” I added, standing right over him, “that the Chinese *sheng* has seventeen pipes, not twelve.”

“Ah,” he broke in, “but the other pipes are mute.”

“Two are mute,” I replied triumphantly. “And two are duplicates of others. The correct number of speaking pipes is fifteen.”

His eyes were kindling now. “See here!” he cried. “Who and what are you?”

“I am a banker!” I shouted – the first thing that came to my tongue. Then I turned and walked straight out on deck. It was precisely the moment for leaving; even the weak-minded could see that their oracle was tripped. Besides, I had to be alone. For I was breaking into a profuse sweat. The drops were running down my forehead into my eyes and clouding my spectacles; I had to take them off and carry them in my hand.

My under lip was quivering so that my teeth chattered. And my heart was palpitating, and skipping beats.

It was wet and wild and dark out there on deck; but in my intense moods I like the rough, elemental thing.

I stood right up to the storm, clinging to the weather-rail. The ship rolled away down, then away up, until I could see only the dim, scurrying clouds. The rain beat into my face. I felt happy, in a way.

A hand came down on my shoulder. I sprang away, and turned. I dislike exceedingly to have any one lay hands on me.

It was the Port Watch. He had put on a long raincoat, and a cap that was pulled low on his forehead. Under it I could see his eyes shining in a nervous, excited way. He certainly is a wild man, if there ever was one. But then I saw that he was grinning at me, and felt relieved.

“You sure did hand it to the old cock,” he said, shouting against the storm. “It was great. I don’t know a dam’ thing about music. But I know when a bluff is called. He’s gone below.”

“Well,” said I, for there was no need of being uncivil to the man, “I got sick of his voice. And then, he was wrong.”

“Any one could see that,” chuckled the Port Watch.

We walked around together to the lee side of the ship, so that he could light a cigar. And while I did not like his taking my arm, still he seems to be a decent fellow enough, after all. We exchanged cards. He is connected with a Stock Exchange house in New York. He is a big, vigorous man, surely not past his middle thirties. I rather envy him his strength, I am so thin and frail myself. He is one of those who know nothing of what we weaker ones go through who have to husband our energies. A rather primitive person, I should say. He occupies one of the high-priced cabins on the promenade-deck, with a private bath. It must be pleasant to travel that way.

When we parted at the after stairway, I said: “I did n’t think I should like you. Shall I tell you why?”

“Yes,” said he.

“Because you drink too much.”

At this he stood still, his hands plunged into the pockets of his raincoat, chewing his under lip. Finally he said, with a break in his voice:

“You’re right there. I *am* drinking too much. But – God, if you knew!”

Then, without so much as a good night, he plunged off down the passage toward that comfortable room of his, with bath. And I went below to my stuffy cabin, where the port has been screwed fast for a week.

His name is Crocker, Archibald Crocker, Jr., son of the well-known and, truth to tell, rather infamous millionaire and manipulator of stocks. Our worlds lie wide apart, his and mine. I realized that much when he looked at my card. The name of Anthony Ives Eckhart conveyed nothing to him – the name that is known and respected by Boag and the great von Stumbostel of Berlin, by de Musseau, Ramel, and Fourmont at Taris, by Sir Frederick Rhodes of Cambridge; the name that spells anathema to that snarling charlatan, von Westfall, of Bonn.

Crocker has offered to guide me through the Yoshiwara district at Yokohama to-morrow evening. He says that the music will interest me.

I think I shall go with him. He says that every traveled white man in the world has been to “Number Nine” – that it is a legitimate, even necessary part of a man’s experience. Certainly I do not wish to appear unmanly.

My room proved intolerable, and I was still too excited to rest; so I came back to the deserted smoking-room to write up my journal.

It is very late. The steward is hovering anxiously about, yawning now and then. I may as well let the poor fellow get to his berth. God knows, he sees little enough of it.

But first I will have him fetch me a mug of their wonderful English stout. I find that this is even better than ale for inducing sleep. At least, in my own case.

Yokohama, Grand Hotel, March 20th

IT was past three o'clock to-day when the ship came to anchor and the steam tender brought us ashore. It interested me to see the rickshaws with their bare-legged coolies. By the time we had ridden along the Bund to the hotel and secured our rooms it was four o'clock. We went down to the "lounge," Crocker and I, and had tea brought in. Or I did. He drank a whisky and *Tan San*. Then pretty soon he drank another.

Several couples from the ship were about, but not many of the men who were traveling alone.

"Where are they all?" I asked.

"Who?" said he.

"The men from the ship. Have they gone to other hotels?"

"Some of them – perhaps," he replied. Then he looked away and smiled.

Sometimes, when I talk with a hard, practical man of the world, I find myself feeling vaguely out of it all. My life, devoted as it is to the discovery and classification of facts, is certainly a practical life; yet I seem to dwell aside from the main current. I do not quite catch the point of view of a rough-handed rich man like Crocker. And when I speak my mind, as I always endeavor to do, men do not resent it. I do not understand this. Come to think of it, I was decidedly outspoken last night with Sir Robert. He should have struck me; at least, he should have exhibited some anger. He would have struck Crocker, I think, in such a case – or jailed him for contempt.

We lingered nearly an hour over our tea and whisky. The experience was wholly new to me – comfortably seated in a large European hotel, with English folk and Americans all about, and yet with Japanese servants, and yellow, shrewd little Oriental faces behind the desk, and a Chinese cashier in a blue robe, and Chinese tailors pressing in on one, samples on arm, offering to make suits of clothes overnight. And out the window, floating about the glittering harbor, sampans and a great Chinese junk or two, and the fleet of fishing-boats with ribbed sails just skimming in between the breakwaters. We were the West, we and our absurdly Anglo-Saxon hotel; but all about us were hints and flavors of the eternal East.

Suddenly I realized that Crocker had been for quite a little time twisting restlessly in his armchair. I looked at him now. He was tapping the carpet softly but very rapidly with his right foot, and rubbing his chin with his hand. Crocker's chin is of good size and shape, the sort we usually speak of as "strong." He is a dark man, inclined to fullness in the face and figure, but still athletic in appearance. His eyes are brown. He is not at all a bad-looking fellow, when you study him out. I rather like the blend in him of vigor, and perhaps stubbornness, with frankness. I should say that apart from the abnormal experiences, whatever they may be, that have driven or drawn him to this part of the world, he is a man of will and spirit. He would fight, I think, in a pinch. When fully himself, in his own home and business environment, he must be a man's man. He is nearly a head taller than I.

He caught me looking at him, and smiled.

"Well," said he, "shall we go along?"

"Where?"

"On that little expedition we spoke of last night."

"Oh!" I remembered now. "But – is n't it – do we want to go to such a place now – in the day-time?"

He raised his eyebrows. "You old sybarite!" he chuckled, and hummed, "*Et la nuit, tous les chats sont gris!*" Then he added, more seriously:

"But really, Eckhart, three ships are in to-day – the Pacific Mail and the French liner besides ours – and if we wait until evening we shall have no choice at all."

"Very well," said I then, briskly, for I do not like to be ridiculed. "Just wait until I can get my phonograph."

“Your *what?*” said he.

“My phonograph,” I repeated, with dignity. And I went upstairs for it.

When I came down, with the heavy instrument in its case under one arm and a box of new record cylinders under the other, he was not in the lounge. I passed on out to the porch, and found him there with two rickshaws waiting. When he saw me with my heavy burdens, he began laughing in that nervous, jumpy way he has. But I ignored him, and placed the boxes carefully in my rickshaw. We were about to start when I realized that I had forgotten my record-taking horn, so I went back for it.

“Look here, old man,” said Crocker, from his rickshaw, when I reappeared, “it’s all right, of course, – I don’t mind, – but what on earth are you bringing all that junk for?”

“You were so good as to explain that I would find the music interesting,” I replied. “You surely don’t suppose that I trust my ear in this delicate research work. Why, my dear fellow, in my studies of our American Indian songs I have succeeded in recording intervals as close as the sixteenth part of a tone.”

He was still grinning. “All right,” he said; “don’t get stuffy. I’ll be good. Hop into your rickshaw.”

I did so. The coolies turned for directions. Crocker was about to give them when two of our fellow passengers, accompanied by their wives, stepped out of the hotel. Crocker waited, and we sat there, looking rather foolish, until they had passed on out of ear-shot; then he leaned forward and said in a low voice:

“Number Nine.”

“Heh!” cried the two coolies instantly, as one man, and wheeling about they ran the little vehicles out of the court and into the street.

I must admit that my first impression of the Yokohama streets was rather disappointing – that is, until we turned a corner unexpectedly and entered the Yoshiwara district. The streets were much more like England than the Japan of my fancy. Crocker tells me that Yokohama was built up as a foreign concession for purposes of trade, and therefore is really not Japanese at all. But once in the Yoshiwara quarter my nerves began to tingle; for this was a bit of Japan.

Crocker insists that it is small and tawdry compared to the Tokio Yoshiwara. Never having explored that portion of the capital, I can not say. To me it was quite enchanting. The houses were higher than is customary in Japanese cities. In color all were of the unpainted but pleasantly weathered shade of light brown that is so agreeable to the eye – very possibly they stain the wood, as we do in the case of our modern bungalows. There were little hanging balconies on the upper stories, with decorative festoons of colored paper lanterns. Through the windows and the open doorways one caught glimpses of the spring flowers and blossoms that play so great and fine a part in the esthetic life of this extraordinary people. And here and there, at a window or over a balcony railing, could be seen a face – a quaint and girlish face with glossy black hair done up fantastically high over wide shell combs and with glimpses of flowered silks about slim shoulders. The fragrance of the early cherry and plum blossoms was in the air.

The famous “Number Nine” proved to be a large house at the end of the street. The door stood invitingly open. A well-trained servant took my two boxes and the horn and carried them in. Another servant guided us upstairs.

The interior was cool and spacious. It differed in so many respects from photographs of typical Japanese house interiors that I decided it is really a foreign resort. Later inquiries this evening have confirmed this conclusion. In the actual Japanese house, the floor is elevated a foot or more and is also the seat; and in entering one passes first into a tiny hall on the street level, removes his shoes, then steps up to the floor proper. Here there was no such arrangement. We mounted steps, then walked through a broad hall that led into a central court full of flowers. The woodwork of floor and walls was of that characteristic and agreeable tan or natural shade. The rugs were simple and quiet in design and color.

Our guide led us to a stairway. The boy with my apparatus looked to me for instructions, and I motioned him to follow. Then we mounted the stairs, and passed along a broad corridor overlooking the court to an office-like room in the corner that was furnished with European tables and chairs. On the way we passed an open doorway, and I caught a passing glimpse of a dim, large room, in which the only furniture appeared to be a low platform covered with a rug of light red.

“That’s where the geisha girls dance,” Crocker whispered.

I nodded. I was looking forward with a good deal of interest to hearing the music that accompanies this performance.

In the corner room we were welcomed very civilly by a little old woman, and tea was brought us. Then she said something to Crocker in a sort of pidgin-English which I did not quite catch. He nodded eagerly.

It occurred to me, with some bitterness I am afraid, that the little old woman would never have thought of turning to me as the leading spirit – never in the world. She hardly looked at me. So I went on sipping my tea.

A door opened, and in came a file of girls – fourteen of them. All were young; one, I thought, of not more than thirteen or fourteen years – though it is difficult for us of the West to judge accurately the age of Orientals. They shuffled along in their curious little shoes. Several seemed to me extremely pretty; all were small and dainty. Everything considered, they made a pleasing picture as they stood there, looking at us with a demure twinkling in each almond eye. I wondered what would come next. A dance, perhaps.

Crocker had hitched forward in his chair and was looking rapidly from one end of the line to the other. His face was more flushed even than usual; his eyes were eager. Finally his gaze rested on the third girl from the right end of the line. I began to feel uncomfortable.

After a moment he rose, and nodded toward that third girl. She promptly stepped forward. “See you later, old man,” he said to me brusquely, hardly looking at me, and then, laying down a gold coin and taking the girl’s arm, hurried from the room with her.

Left alone there, with the old woman and the thirteen girls, I found myself rather confused. It had not occurred to me that the business was to be rushed through with so mechanically, so brutally. The beauty of the building and the charm of these quaint little girls in soft-colored costumes had up to this moment held a strong lure for me. But suddenly the situation rang hard and metallic. It was, after all, just the problematic, age-old business in a new dress.

And then I began to feel ashamed. After all, most men are direct and practical in these puzzling matters. They do not theorize, they do not shrink from rough facts. They take life as they find it, and pass on. Here am I (so ran my thoughts) drawing hack, refusing life, and that not in any firmness of purpose, but in a sort of fright!

“I should like to see the geishas dance,” I managed to say.

“No can do,” replied the old woman, with a gesture of her skinny hands. “One day – three day – must tell.” And she held up three fingers.

“I don’t understand you,” said I.

“Geisha girls no have got – must go catchee two, three, four piecee girl; two, three, four piecee music. Two – three day you tell. No can do.”

She evidently meant that it was necessary to give notice if one wished the geisha dance. And she was grinning at me now and pointing to the girls. I was being swept along in this brutal business. Otherwise, they would feel, why had I come to take up their time?

I felt the color rushing into my face as I raised my hand and pointed at random. One of the girls came forward. The old woman held out her hand. I found a gold coin and dropped it on her palm; then turned for my apparatus, which the boy had set on a chair by the door. I made a rather awkward matter of picking it up, dropping the horn with a clatter. The other girls and the old woman were leaving the room and seemed not to observe my confusion. The girl whom I had selected picked

up the horn; then led the way out the door and along the corridor overlooking the wide court where the flowers were.

We entered a room, and she closed the door. My heart was palpitating, and I knew that my face was red; so I busied myself setting down the two boxes on the table and opening them.

I felt her brush against my arm, and looked at her. She was rather older than I had thought, though still young enough, God knows, for the pitiful trade she plies. And she was smiling, with what appeared to be genuine good humor. Probably I amused her. Worldly-wise women, when they observe me at all, usually look amused; so I make it a rule to avoid them when I can.

“Wha’ ees eet?” she asked, nodding toward the instrument. She spoke in quite understandable English, though with a strong accent.

I told her it was a phonograph, and asked if she would sing into it. She seemed pleased.

I had her sing all the native songs she was able to think of at the moment, making notes of the title of each, as nearly as I could catch the sound of the words. To make sure that I had each correctly identified, I repeated it to her. She laughed a good deal over my attempts to pronounce these titles. The seven songs that interested me I then requested her to sing into the phonograph. This she did, with only fair satisfaction to me; for she laughed a good deal, and would occasionally turn her head to look up at me, thus directing the tone away from the horn. I had to make her sing four of them twice. I regretted this, as four cylinders were thereby wasted, and I can not replace these specially made cylinders on this side the Pacific. I began to see that the twenty-two hundred I have brought with me will be used up pretty rapidly when my investigation gets under full headway on the farther side of the Yellow Sea.

I have, later to-night, played over these seven records here in my room at the hotel, with some sense of disappointment. One of them I think will prove, on careful analysis, to have for its basis the ancient pentatonic scale. The intervals of two are very nearly those of the oldest known Greek scales of a tone and two conjunct tetra-chords. But in the case of the other four I shall be greatly surprised if they employ any other intervals than those of our own equal temperament scale of twelve semitones to the octave.

That, of course, is really the trouble with Japan as a field of research; these marvelous little people pick up and assimilate Western ideas with such rapidity that their ancient traditions become hopelessly confused.

The girl seemed to tire after a while. Her voice became hoarse and she fell to coughing. I realized then that I had been holding her pretty closely to this work, and told her that she could rest a little while.

At this, she sat on the edge of the European bed, and looked at me, half smiling.

“You lig hear the *koto*?” she asked suddenly.

I nodded eagerly. The *koto*, as I have long known, is closely related to the ancient Chinese instrument, the *ch’in*, beloved of Confucius. Many investigators hold, indeed, that it is the same instrument, transplanted in the earliest times and changed a little in its new environment.

She slipped out of the room, and shortly returned with the instrument, which remotely resembles a modern zither – at least, in the fact that it has a number of strings (thirteen in this instance) stretched over a board and played by plucking with the fingers. It was a beautiful object, the *koto* of this nameless little inmate of the Yoshiwara, highly lacquered, with fine inlays of polished woods, tortoise-shell, ivory, and silver; and I could see by her smiling breathlessness and the engaging, almost shy glances she gave me as she curled up on the bed to play it, that she was inordinately proud of it.

“You lig hear me pray?” she murmured.

The word “pray” came to me with a curious shock in this place. Then I remembered the Japanese confusion of our *r* and *l* sounds, and knew that she meant “play.”

I nodded.

She drew from a fold of her dress a pitch-pipe contrived of six little bamboo tubes bound together by means of a copper wire, and tuned all the thirteen strings. Then she played for quite a long time, characteristic melodies of the Orient that floated vaguely and hauntingly between the major and the minor. I was able to get a fairly clear idea of the scale she used before I decided upon the nature of the records I wished to make of it. I moved a table over to the phonograph, and, by resting the koto on small boxes that I found on the bureau, I contrived to place it almost against the horn of the phonograph. Then I had her play, first the scale of the open strings, followed by those two or three of the melodies that had particularly interested me.

It had grown dark some time before this, and she had lighted a lamp. Now, feeling on the whole well satisfied with the ten records I had made, I looked at my watch, and was astonished to learn that it was half-past eight in the evening. I at once set about packing up my apparatus.

She stood close to me, watching the process. Occasionally she put out her small hand and stroked my hair. When I had done, she came still closer and, with momentary hesitation, placed her arms about my neck.

“You go ‘way?” she whispered.

“Yes,” said I, “I must go now.”

“You doan’ lig me?”

“Why, yes, certainly,” I replied, “I like you very much. And you have sung and played very prettily for me.”

“Oh,” said she, looking somewhat puzzled, “you lig that?”

I nodded. My hands had dropped naturally upon her shoulders. But I was conscious then – and indeed, am to-night, as I write it down – of some confusion of thought.

Then she raised her face – by stretching up on tiptoe and pulling with tight little arms about my neck. I did not know what to do. To draw my lips away from hers would be something more than absurd. There is a limit even to what I suppose I must sooner or later admit as my own unmanliness. So I kissed her, white man fashion. And, to my complete surprise, she clung to me with what seemed, for the moment, to be genuine emotion.

I will not attempt to explain either my nature in general or my actions at this particular time. What would be the use? I am writing this journal for my own eyes alone; and, God knows, hours enough of my life have been wasted in the pale avenues of introspection. I am not a wholly bloodless being. And I know well enough that the average man buys women now and then, here and there, whatever obligation he may think himself under to conceal the fact and thereby contribute his support to the immense foundation lie on which our Anglo-Saxon structure of virtue and morality rests.

I do not know why I found myself unable to stay. Perhaps in another place and at another time ‘t would have been different. Perhaps the beauty and charm of the house and the pleasant attractiveness of the little person herself had raised me too high above the ordinary sordid plane of this transaction, and emphasized the ugliness of it.

Perhaps, too, the fact (extraordinary in my lonely experience) that she had given up smiling at me, and now plainly wanted me to stay, was among the curious psychological forces that drove me away. As to *why* she wanted me, I can not say. I have puzzled over that part of it all the evening (it is now a quarter to midnight) without arriving at any conclusion. It may be that by unconsciously permitting her, through my deep interest in her music, to show something of her own enthusiasms and of the emotions that stirred them, I had flattered her more subtly than I knew. Who can say?

I turned right back to my boxes. She called a boy to carry them, and I went away. My last glimpse, as I closed her door, was of a quaint little slant-eyed person, whose hair had become disarranged and was tumbling about her ears, whose lips were parted in a breathless smile.

One thing is sure: I shall never let Crocker know that I came away like that. If he believed me at all, which I doubt, he would certainly think me weaker than I am. I may be a complicated, finicky person; but I do not believe I am as weak as he would think me if he knew.

As I was walking along the corridor I heard other footsteps, and looking across the dim, flower-scented court, just managed to distinguish a rather ponderous figure proceeding slowly among the shadows on the other side. We met at the top of the stairs. It was Sir Robert.

I felt myself coloring furiously; and he wore a shamefaced expression. For such is the curious hypocrisy of man when caught in his more or less constant relationship with the one completely universal and unchangeable of his institutions.

“Well,” said he, rather awkwardly, “it is a very pleasant place, the way they keep it up.”

“Very,” I replied.

“And what is all this?” He was looking at my boxes, in the arms of the boy at my elbow. “Purchases? Here?”

“That is my phonograph,” I explained, quite unnecessarily.

“Your *what?*” He said this much as Crocker had said it.

“My phonograph,” I repeated.

He stood looking at me, with knit brows. Then, “Ah, ha!” he said, musing. “So *that* was it! I could n’t explain that music – hours of it – and the repetitions. I begin to see. You are the authority on Oriental music.”

I bowed coldly.

Sir Robert began smiling – an old man’s smile. I started down the stairs, but he kept at my side.

We went on to the outer door together without a word, and waited while the boy called rickshaws for us. I looked at Sir Robert. He was still smiling.

“Let me congratulate you,” he said then, rather dryly. And his left eyelid drooped in what was grotesquely like a wink. “You have the distinction, I believe, of being quite the most practical man in the world. You will go far.”

Thank God, the rickshaw is the most unsociable of vehicles. Each of us stepped into his own and rolled away through a dim street bordered by rows of gay paper lanterns, which were lighted now.

As my rickshaw turned the corner, we nearly collided head on with another one. By the light of the lanterns I made out its occupant – the fat vaudeville manager from Cincinnati.

He waved a cheerful hand at me as we passed.

“Number Nine?” he called.

“Number Nine,” I replied. I felt depressed and ashamed; but he took it very easily.

I have, however, confirmed a conclusion tonight, so the experience has its value. I shall push on to China, where the ancient music may still be caught in its pure form, uncorrupted and unconfused by the modern touch. For my purposes, time spent in Japan would be wasted. And I shall hurry past the treaty ports to Peking. The treaty ports, they tell me, are not really Chinese at all. For that matter, how could they be?

Grand Hotel, Yokohama, March 30th, Early Afternoon

CROCKER has not yet appeared. I borrowed his key from the office, just before lunch, and looked in his room. His bed had not been, slept in. There is certainly no indirection about Crocker, no introspective uncertainty; he meets life as it presents itself, roughly and squarely.

On the whole, I find I like him much better than I expected. He is really a companionable chap. He is not so eager to tell his troubles as I had thought he would be. In fact, barring that one moment on the ship, he has not even referred to them; and I myself drew that out by telling him he was drinking too much.

Sir Robert came over and sat with me just now in the dining-room while I finished my lunch. I cut the meal as short as I could. He was distinctly affable. He asked point-blank where I am going, and I had to tell. It seems that he is bound for Peking also, *via* Shanghai and Nanking. Fortunately, he announced his route before asking about mine. I decided on the spot to go around by the Korean and Chinese Imperial Railways, through Fusan, Mukden, and Shanhaikwan.

However, he perhaps did me a service by telling me of a pleasant little French hotel at Peking, on the Italian *glacis*, whatever that is. The big hotel in the Legation Quarter, he says, is rather expensive and at this time of year will be swarming with tourists. The little *Hôtel de Chine*, on the other hand, is frequented only by queer types of the Coast, and is really very cheap.

“The *cuisine*,” said Sir Robert, “is atrocious. But, being French, they serve excellent coffee, which does for breakfast and one can, in a pinch, put together a fair luncheon there. For dinner, the *Wagon-lits*, of course. Above all, make no experiments with the cellar of the *Hôtel de Chine*. They will show you an imposing wine-card. Shun it!”

I merely bowed at this. It was no use telling Sir Robert that I should certainly not know one alleged vintage from another.

There is one difficulty. Sir Robert himself, affecting a taste for the quaint, will be stopping at our less pretentious hostelry; again, with my eyes closed at night, I shall see that bad old face with the one drooping eyelid; again that loose voice will sound in my ears. But then, I shall be very busy.

Some one is knocking at my door. Crocker is calling.

Midnight – Still the 30th

CROCKER was in the worst shape I have seen him in so far. His eyes were red. And when he dropped on my couch, the first thing he did was to stretch out his right hand and watch it critically. It was decidedly unsteady.

“Ring up a boy, old chap, will you?” he said. I did so. He ordered a quart bottle of whisky and a half-dozen bottles of *Tan San*.

“Steady my nerves,” he observed, half to himself. “It’s that dam’ *saké*. Gets to me like absinthe.” He chuckled. “I must have a quart of the stuff in me. Some night, my boy!”

Curiously, a few drinks of the whisky did seem to steady his nerves. After a while he came over to the table, sat down opposite me, and lighted a cigar. We talked for an hour or two – until I finally explained that I really had to get at my work. Then he returned to the sofa, stretched out comfortably, with the whisky and an ash-tray on a chair beside him, and watched me, with only an occasional good-natured interruption.

He seemed greatly interested in my method of musical notation. Of course, the ordinary staff of five lines would not serve me at all, since I find it necessary to indicate intervals much closer than the usual half-step. I use large sheets of paper, ruled from top to bottom with fine lines, every sixteenth line being heavier. Thus I can record intervals as fine as the sixteenth of a tone. In fact, as I told Crocker, and as Rameau and von Stumbostel both recognize, *I have actually done so!* I undoubtedly possess the most delicate aural perception of any scientist that has ever investigated the so-called primitive music. My ears are to me what the eyes of the great astronomer are to him. This is why all my contemporaries, particularly the great von Stumbostel, are following my present inquiry with such extraordinary interest.

It was six o’clock before I finished noting down the songs and *koto* melodies from my records of the preceding evening. Crocker sipped continuously at his whisky and *Tan San* – to my surprise, without the slightest apparent ill effect. Perhaps he grew a little mellow, a little more human, as the phrase runs, but that was all. When my work was done, I drew a chair to the sofa, put my feet up, and encouraged him to talk.

At a little after seven he went to his room to dress for dinner. I scrubbed some of the ink off my fingers and slipped into my dinner-jacket, then knocked at his door.

As we descended the wide stairs, I observed that Crocker was walking down very rigidly, placing his foot squarely in the middle of each step. On the landing he paused, and turned to me with a slight smile.

“Am I acting all right?” he asked.

“Perfectly. Why?”

“My boy,” – he lowered his voice, – “I’m drunk as a lord. But I reckon I can get away with it. Come along.”

He really handled himself surprisingly well. I am not an expert, of course, in the various psychological reactions from drink. I should have said he was a little over-stimulated, nothing more. He kept away from the bar, and at the table in the big dining-room drank very little – only a cocktail and a light wine with the roast. And he discussed this with me at the start, finally deciding that it would not be wise for him to stop abruptly.

All went well until the dessert. There was quite a choice of items on the bill. I ordered vanilla ice cream. I distinctly heard him order the same. I recall wondering a little, at the moment; for surely vanilla ice cream was not the most desirable addition to the various substances already on his alcohol-poisoned stomach.

When the waiter set the dish before him, he astonished me with a sudden outburst of anger.

“Good God!” he cried, quite loud, “am I to be treated like this! Has nobody any regard for my feelings!”

I began to feel unpleasantly conspicuous.

“This is past all endurance!” he shouted, pushing back his chair.

The Chinese waiter had turned back, by this time, and stood, bowing respectfully by his chair.

Crocker swore under his breath, sprang to his feet, and with a short, hard swing of his right hand struck the unsuspecting Chinaman on the jaw.

I never before saw a man fall in precisely that way. Indeed, it was not a fall in the ordinary sense of the word. It was more like a sudden paralysis. His knees appeared to give, and he sank to the floor without the slightest sound that I was conscious of.

There was a good deal of confusion, of course. Women made sounds. One or two, I think, ran from the room. There was much scraping of chairs as men got up and made for us. The manager of the hotel appeared, crowding through toward us.

The Chinaman did not stir; he was now merely a heap of blue clothing at our feet, huddled against the table-leg.

Crocker stood beside the table, steadying himself by gripping the back of his chair, and smiling with an air of rather self-conscious distinction. He bowed slightly to the breathless manager.

“It was quite unavoidable,” he said. “As a gentleman you will readily see that.” His tongue was thicker now. “Nobody regrets it more’n I – nobody more’n I.”

The manager gave me a look and caught him by one arm. I took the other. Crocker hung back.

“This is quite unnecessary,” he said, “quite unnecessary. I’m perf’kly sober, I assure you. As a matter o’ fac’, I’m soberes’ man in th ‘ole big room. Very big room. Ver’ big room indeed. Bigges’ room ever saw.”

Between, us, the manager and I got him upstairs and into his room. Then I was left alone with him to undress him and get him into his bed. The task consumed all of an hour. He was rough, almost violent, one moment, and absurdly polite the next. His mind developed a trick of leaping off on unexpected tangents. He tried to point out reasons against removing each article of clothing as we came to it. It was interesting, on the whole. I have since almost regretted that I did not make exact notes of these curious mental flights. But at the moment it seemed too remote from my own field of study. And I suppose my decision was reasonable.

It occurs to me, in glancing back over the foregoing paragraph, that Crocker – had I been the drunk one and he the sober – would not have drifted into this highly self-conscious theorizing; he would not have felt this detachment from the fact. Perhaps that is the secret of my difference from other men. Perhaps that is the peculiar respect in which I am not wholly normal. If this is so, am I doomed to dwell always apart from my fellows in a cold region of pure thought? I am going to set this confession down here: I have almost envied Crocker to-night – not, of course, the frightful things he does, but the human, yes, the animal quality of the man that makes it possible for him to get drunk now and then. *For I can’t do it!* I am farther from the norm than he; on the opposite side, to be sure, but farther. Is not this why I have never had a man chum?

Is not this why no good woman has ever looked on me with the eye of love?

I got him to bed, finally, and sat by him until he fell asleep. I am going back there now to pass the night on his sofa, first undressing here. I shall feel somewhat conspicuous, walking down the hall in the gay kimono I bought this morning. But I do not think any one will notice it. They seem not to mind such things out here.

The manager has just been up to see me. He says that the waiter is all right now, excepting a slight nausea. And he suggests that Crocker leave the hotel as soon as convenient. Poor fellow, I shall have to carry this word to him. I found, on pinning the manager down, that by the phrase “as soon as convenient” he means as early to-morrow as possible. But I shall not wake Crocker up; he shall have his sleep before they turn him out on the Bund.

Well, I must get ready now for my night watch. It is the first time I have ever been responsible for a drunken man.

To-morrow I leave over the Tokaido Railway for the Straits of Tsushima, Korea, Manchuria, and the barbaric old capital of the newest republic on earth. It has been a curious experience throughout, this with Crocker. But it will soon be over now. And I do not regret it. I may never again be drawn so deeply into the rough current of actual life. My way lies far from this.

On the Railway, Coasting the Island Sea – March 31st

CROCKER'S story came out, after all. This morning, in his room. It is rather difficult writing here on the train, with only a suit-case for a table; but I feel that I must set down the last of this strange story, now that I have given so much of my time and thought to the man; and it must be written before any new experiences may arise to claim my attention and perhaps erase some salient detail of the narrative. Then, who knows? This may not be the last. I may find myself involved in it again. Sir Robert observed yesterday: "The China Coast is even smaller than the well-known world. Even if I should miss you at Peking, we shall meet again." He is doubtless right. We shall meet again. And Crocker and I, too, shall meet again, I think. When and how, I can only wonder.

I slept badly last night, on his sofa. Early this morning I returned to my own room, dressed, ordered up a light breakfast, and then spent two hours in packing. It was nearer eleven than ten when I tapped on the door.

"Come in!" he called.

He had pulled an extra pillow in behind his head, and was sitting up in bed. He was whiter than I had before seen him. And the hand that he extended to me shook so that he could hardly hold it up. It was cold to the touch.

For a few moments after I had sent a boy for his coffee, we talked about next to nothing – the time, the weather, my departure. But his hollow eyes were searching me.

"Who put me here?" he asked, finally.

I told him.

"Any trouble?"

I hesitated.

"Tell me. Don't play with me. Did I break out?"

There was nothing to do but tell him the whole story; which I did. He listened in complete silence, sipping the coffee (for which he seemed to feel some repugnance).

"Hurt the fellow?" he asked, when I had done.

"No. He is reported all right this morning."

His chin dropped on his deep chest. He seemed to be mediating, in a crestfallen sort of way; but I observed that his eyes wandered aimlessly about the room. Finally he said:

"Suppose I had killed him."

"You did n't," I replied shortly.

He covered his face with his shaking hands.

"It's the murder in my heart," he muttered.

I could only look at him.

After a little he dropped his hands, leaned back on the pillow, and gazed at me.

"You're blaming me," he said.

I shook my head.

"You are. But not so much as you will. Do you know what I'm doing out here? Do you suppose I left my business to come halfway around the world on a pleasure trip – at my age? Chuck everything worth while, just when I'm at the top of my stride? No, you don't know; but I'm going to tell you."

I put up my hand, but he plunged gloomily on: "My wife eloped with a man. A man I knew. They came out here. I've come to find them. I'm going to kill him and her. With a knife."

"You must not do that," said I. I recall now that the thought came to me to deal with him as if he were a lunatic, and humor him. So I said, "You must not do that."

"It is the only thing to do," said he, rather dogmatically. "How can I face my friends again if I fail? A man who doesn't even try to protect his home!"

"It would be murder."

He shook his head. “No honest jury would hang me for that. It is the unwritten law.” Then, as if conscious of the weakness of his argument, he added: “Besides, what difference does it make? Those two have committed worse than murder against me. It does n’t matter a particle now what becomes of me. I loved my wife. I gave her everything that money could buy. I bought her an automobile for her own only last year. I took her to Europe. And when I married her she had never had anything or been anywhere. I wanted her to be the mistress of my home, and she insisted on sacrificing all that – and me – to her music. So I got her the best teachers in New York and Paris. Even left her in Paris to study. That’s where she met him. She insisted on going into opera. I forbade that – naturally. I wanted children – she refused. Tell me – is that asking too much?”

He had been talking in a monotonous tone; but now his voice began rising, and his face was twitching nervously.

“Is it?” he went on. “Is it asking too much for a husband to have sons to bear his name and inherit his property? When I saw what was going on, she told me to divorce her. I said, ‘By God, that’s one thing I won’t do for you! I’ve some sense of honor, if you haven’t! You’re mine, and yuu stay mine!’ Then she ran away with that crook. But she can’t have him, I tell you! She can’t have him!”

I suggested that he lower his voice. He gave me a curious, wild glance, and fell silent.

It occurred to me that, knowing all this, I had no right to go away – that I must stay and prevent this terrible thing from taking place. I said as much to him.

“No,” he replied, with some vehemence; “there’s nothing in that. You could n’t prevent anything. The best thing you can do is to run along. I don’t even know where they are; but I’ll find them. You can’t hide long on the China Coast – not from a man that’s really looking.”

I thought this over for quite a little time. It was true enough that I could not prevent his giving me the slip. I could not lock him up or detain him in any forcible way. It seemed to me that I must do something; but as the moments passed it grew increasingly difficult to imagine what it could be.

It was all very disturbing. I helped him get up. Then, as he seemed fairly well able to dress himself, I went out and walked for a while on the Bund. When I returned I found him stretched out on my sofa, smoking.

“Come on in,” he said in a strong, sober voice. What an extraordinary fund of vitality the man has to draw on! “I want to talk to you.”

As I sank into a chair beside him, I felt once more that he was the stronger of us, I the weaker, even after all we had been through.

He knocked the ash off his cigar. It missed the ash-tray and fell, part of it, on the leg of my trousers. “I beg your pardon, old man,” he said, and carefully brushed it off. Then he settled back against the wall and stared up through his smoke at the pattern on the ceiling.

“My hand is n’t quite steady yet,” he added calmly.

Then he went on: “I should n’t have told this to you, Eckhart. It is n’t the sort of thing a man can tell. But, as it happens, you know why I did it. I’ve been stewed to the brim for two days. I’m through with that now, though. Until a certain job is done, I touch nothing stronger than wine. Here’s my hand on it.”

I had to clear my throat. I managed to say huskily: “I can’t take your hand on that, Crocker.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Very well,” he said. “If you prefer it that way. It goes, however. I drink no more now. That is one thing I really have you to thank for, Eckhart. Until you spoke out, back there on the ship, I did n’t realize how much I was drinking. What you told me this morning has clinched the business. I’m through. And you will find that I am a man of my word.”

“I am glad of that,” said I, “because I believe that, with the drink out of your system, your philosophy of life will change. I hope it will.”

He shook his head at this.

“No, Eckhart. Now, see here. You have today seen deep into a man’s heart. What you saw was not drink, merely; it was fact.”

His manner of saying this gave me an uncomfortable feeling that he was speaking the truth. Indeed, my increasing conviction as to the great reserve power of the man was distressing me.

“As I told you this morning,” he went on, “there is absolutely nothing you can do in the matter. Except killing me, of course – you could do that. But you won’t.”

“No,” said I sadly; “I won’t.”

“And I’m going to ask you to take the only course that an honorable man can take in the private quarrel of another – stand aside and try to forget what I have told you. You have my drunken confidences; forget them.”

“See here!” I broke out. “Were you faithful to your wife before she turned against you?” His eyes hardened. “What do you mean by that?” he asked.

“Precisely what I say.”

“You’re talking nonsense, Eckhart – ”

“I am *not* talking non – ”

“Yes, *you are!*”

He had swung around, and was sitting up, looking me squarely in the eye, as he shouted me down. My heart sank. Mere squabbling would get us nowhere. I did not know what to do. I do not now know what to do.

He went on:

“Yes; I was, to all intents and purposes, faithful to her. I did as well as a normal, healthy man can be expected to do. Let us not be childish about this. You and I know that man is physiologically different from woman. We know that what there is of purity and sacredness in marriage and in life will be lost forever once we lower our ideal of woman’s virtue.”

“No,” said I; “as a scientific man – ”

I could not go on with my protest; for thoughts of a few wild moments in my own relatively quiet life had come floating to the surface of memory. Who was I, to oppose the double standard of morality that has ruled the world so long!

He was still looking at me in that intent way. There was deep sadness behind the hard surface of his eyes.

“I came here to thank you for all your kindness, Eckhart,” he said then. “As for what you have heard, remember it is mine, not yours. That is all. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll help you get your truck down to the train.”

I did as he said. I am on my way to Peking to pursue my research. He is plunging off to scour the ports of Japan, all the way to Nagasaki, for the man and the woman who have assailed his honor and (what I am tempted to think even more to the point) outraged his pride as the head of his own house. Then he will go on, if necessary, to Shanghai, – that port of all the world, – to Hongkong, Manila, and Singapore, perhaps up the coast to Tientsin and Peking. And he has made me believe that he will do as he has sworn. It is very strange – very sad.

At the station I made my last weak protest.

“Crocker,” I blurted out, “for God’s sake, try to win her back. Perhaps you drove her away. Perhaps you were harsher, less understanding, than you knew. Perhaps you should beg her forgiveness, not she yours.”

He shook his head. “That may be so,” he said. “All that you say may be so. But I could n’t take her back. Don’t you see?”

“No,” I replied stoutly, “I don’t see.”

He raised both his hands in a despairing gesture.

“She is – she is – ” His voice suddenly failed him. “She’s a woman – and she’s soiled!” His eyes filled; a tear rolled down his cheek. He made a queer, convulsive face; then threw up his hands and turned away.

That was all. I boarded my train.

The young German did not return the fifteen dollars. This China Coast is a hive of swindlers – so says Sir Robert. Henceforth I intend hardening my heart against every man. And against every woman, above all. For they, says Sir Robert, are the subtler and the worse.

Peking, April 5th, Midday

THAT Crocker affair haunts me with the power of a bad dream.
I do not like this at all.

I was too sympathetic with that man. I opened the gates of my mind to his ugly story; now I can not thrust it out and close those gates. My first impulse, to hold him at arm's length, was sound. I should have done that. But at least, and at no small cost, I have again learned my little lesson; from now on I purpose dwelling apart from the tangle of contemporary life. It has no bearing on my work, on my thoughts. None whatever. It merely confuses me.

Yet, through momentary weakness, I have permitted my precious line of pure thought to be clouded with the vision of a strong man's face with tears on it. I see it at night. And, worse, I can not stop myself from hunting for the woman he is going to kill. The mere sight of a youngish couple sets my pulse to racing. I watch – on trains, in station crowds, on the street – for a beautiful woman with a sad face. That she will be beautiful I am certain; for Crocker would have had nothing less in that house of which he felt himself so strongly and dominantly the master. And I think she will be sad.

I study the throats of the beautiful young women I see. She will have the full, rather broad throat of the singer. And the deep chest and erect bearing. And I think her head will be well poised.

There *is* a woman here in the hotel – a particular woman, I mean – on this second floor. Though, for that matter, there are only the two floors. I have passed her twice, in the hall. But the light is dim, and I have been unable to observe her throat or her face. She is of a good height, for a woman, – quite as tall as I, – and she steps firmly on the balls of her feet. Her figure is slim. The chest, I think, is deep. And in a way that I, as a man (and a man who knows little of woman outside the psychology books), can not explain in any satisfactory way, she conveys, even in this dim light, the impression of being exquisitely dressed.

I think she has her meals served in her room. At least, I have on three occasions met a waiter coming upstairs with a tray; and I can not make out that it would be for any other.

As Sir Robert intimated, these other guests are a queer lot. There can not be more than twelve or fourteen, in all. The men are seedy, and rather silent. They sit about a good deal, reading the papers (copies of the more suggestive French weeklies are strewn about on every chair and sofa in the lounge), and they eye me and one another with a sort of cool distrust. The women, three or four in all, seem to come and go rather freely. And each has the eye, the manner, even the physical bearing, of the woman for whom the halfworld has no secrets. Then, there is a discreet, drifting class of transients – men from the Legation Quarter, I believe (often, indeed, they come in full uniform), who are always accompanied by young women. Sometimes, as it may happen, these are the familiar women of the place; but quite as often they are strangers to my eyes. And always, day and night, there is in the manner of the guests and in that of the little French manager and his half-caste clerk an air of carefully refraining from questions. It is as if every one said to every one else: “You are here, but you are quite safe, for I make it a rule never to see who comes or what goes on here. Perhaps one day I may have to ask the same discreet courtesy from you. It is quite all right, believe me.”

In this odd atmosphere I live and have my being. The building is a mere rambling collection of *mansardes*. The chairs in the bedrooms – at least, in my own – are of the common bent-iron variety usually seen in gardens. The beds are of the most simple iron sort, once painted with a white enamel that has been largely chipped off. The linen is threadbare, even ragged, – there is a hole in my nether sheet through which my foot slips at night, not infrequently catching there and waking me from dreams of the pillory and chains, – but it is not unclean. There would be no excuse for that, in a whole world of laundry-men. On each mantel and iron-legged table is an ash-tray that blatantly advertises a Japanese whisky.

Yes, in this odd atmosphere I live and, in a manner, breathe – I and the slim, beautifully dressed woman who walks so firmly on the balls of her feet. Whoever she may be, she belongs here no more than I.

Of course, the chances are all against – yet I wonder! For one thing, she is alone. I am positive of this. All the other guests I have seen, now, coming and going. But she never comes or goes – excepting apparently for a short walk each afternoon, and always unaccompanied. He would not have deserted her – away out here. Surely a man would not do that to a woman he has loved.

But wait – I am forgetting the sort of world this is. There is nothing – nothing – man does not do to woman. Or that woman does not do to man. Nothing is too subtly selfish, nothing too cruel.

To-day I mean to time my own walk with hers. I must see her in the light. I must observe her throat and her face... At the thought of what I may see my nerves behave abominably. My forehead burns. My heart beats with an absurd irregularity. These facts alone appear to indicate that my place is not in this wild world of passion and conflict.

It is not wholly unpleasant here in my dingy little room – though the carpet is a rag, and the door between me and my next neighbor has shrunk its lock out of alignment and appears to be blocked off, on the farther side, by some bulky piece of furniture. This door opens on my side of the partition.

No, it is not so unpleasant. Outside, the sun is shining. To my nostrils comes floating the quaint, pungent odor that has in the minds of so many travelers characterized the East. Over the low-tiled roofs of a row of Chinese houses I can see – beyond an open space – the masonry wall of the fortified Legation Quarter, with a sentry-box peeping above it, and the flag of Italy, and trees.

April 5th – night

IT is she.

This afternoon I was revising my notation of the Japanese music; quite late, five o'clock or so. Suddenly I heard a voice – a woman's voice – singing very softly, in the next room, beyond that shrunken door and the bulky piece of furniture. It is a bureau, I think, with a mirror above it that is nearly as high as the door.

She was singing "*Aus Meinen Grossen Schmerzen*" of Robert Franz, that saddest and most exquisite of German *lieder*. The voice is a full, even soprano. It is a big voice, I am sure, though she sang so softly. The impression I received was that she was carefully holding it down to a *pianissimo*. It is, I should say, a remarkable organ. Even in her softest voice there is what the great singers call an "edge" – that firm, fine resonance that will send the lightest thread of tone floating out over all the volume of sound of a full orchestra.

She sang the little song with a tone color of poignant sadness – as if her heart were throbbing with all the sorrow of the world, and yet as if she could not keep from singing. She has plainly studied much. The impulse to sing and the habit of singing are strong within her.

But the voice, so beautiful and under such fine control, was not what suddenly caused me to leap up from my chair and tiptoe to that rather useless door, and then to turn to my kit-bag and fumble wildly for my tuning-fork. No; what excited me – for it did excite me out of all reason – was her sense of pitch. The mezzo-soprano or baritone transposition of that Franz song is in the key of *f*-major, ending in *d*-minor. I stood by her door, the *c*-fork resting lightly against my teeth, waiting for that lovely voice to descend the final minor third, linger, tenderly and sadly, on the *d*. Then I bit the fork. She was singing a perfect *d*. Certainly there was no piano in any of these miserable little rooms. And she had employed no other instrument; she had simply and naturally broken into song because she could not help singing. *She has absolute pitch!*

The great regret of my life is that my own sense of pitch is not absolute. It is very nearly but not quite perfect, despite my extremely delicate ear for close intervals. Yet this young woman, who to my own knowledge has not sung a note for several days, and who can not conceivably have heard any Occidental music whatever, breaks into song, and casually and unconsciously employs the correct pitch to the twentieth part of a tone.

My first thought was that it might be an accident. So I waited, tuning-fork in hand.

Having begun to sing, of course she could not stop. I am thinking now that probably it was the first time she had released her voice for a considerable period, and that at last she simply could not help making use of what was the natural outlet for her emotions.

She next hummed a few bars of "*Im Herbst*," also by Franz. Evidently she is fond of the work of this fine lyric composer. This is in the key of *c*-minor. Again I tested her with my tuning-fork, and again she was correct to the minutest shade of a tone. Her voice had leaped the interval between the two keys apparently without a conscious thought on her own part.

This second song perhaps failed as a vehicle for her mood; at any rate, she stopped it abruptly, and was silent for a time. Standing there close to the door, I could hear her moving about with light, restless feet. Myself, I held my breath at moments. Then the sound of her footsteps ceased, and there was a sudden creaking sound, as if she had thrown herself upon the bed. But still I waited, breathless, balancing there with my left hand against the door-frame, the right clutching the tuning-fork. I was sure she would sing again.

She did. But it must have been after quite a long time, for I realized afterward that my feet ached and that the arm I held up against the door frame had, as we say, gone to sleep.

Finally there came another creaking. She was getting up. Doubtless she was quite too restless to lie down long. Again I heard the quick, light sound of her feet moving about the room. Then the voice again. And again it was that saddest and most exquisite of songs.

”Aus meinen grossen Schmerzen
Mach’ ich die kleine Lieder...”

she sang, very low. I felt nearly certain that she had slipped naturally back into the key of *f*-major, but not absolutely certain.

It was disturbing, this partial uncertainty on my part. No person in the world – not a single living being – has quite so great a need for absolute pitch as I. With that, coupled with my ear for intervals, I would stand as the one scholar perfectly equipped for my own line of investigation. As it is, I am not unlike an astronomer with enthusiasm, exhaustive knowledge, a fine mathematical brain, and a marvelous seeing eye, but with a very slight – oh, – very slight – touch of color-blindness. And I never before missed this one attribute quite so keenly as I miss it now, out here on the ground for the great first-hand investigation of my whole life.

So at last I had to give up my effort to place precisely the key in which she was singing, and sound the fork. As I supposed, she was right again. There was no doubt now. Not the slightest. As I have already written down, she has it – a sheer, prodigal gift of nature. And, of course, it is of no particular value to her. She is not even, at present, a professional singer; and, if she were, she could do very well without this precise gift... I have supposed for years that I had a philosophy. I long ago realized that to waste time and tissue in concerning myself with the one defect in my equipment would be simply by that much to impair my actual effectiveness. But to-day my philosophy failed me, as I thought of that sad little woman who has what I lack, and who does not need it. I even had a wild notion of knocking on the door and making myself known to her.

As for what actually did follow, I think I will try to set down just as simply and naturally as I can, reconstructing the curious scene more or less coolly as I recall it now, with my excitement spent and my mind reasonably steady. That is surely the best way, in the case of such an extraordinary occurrence – just write it down and let it go at that.

She was silent for a little time, perhaps standing at her dresser. I wonder if it is like mine, a rickety chest of drawers, sadly in need of paint, with a narrow mirror above it. My mirror is broken in the right-hand lower corner; and at that point I see, instead of the reflection of the dingy room, only an irregular triangle of pine backing. I should like to think that hers is at least a little fresher and brighter, and that the mirror is not broken. These things mean a great deal to a woman, I think. I might have observed all this for myself, doubtless; but at the moment I was too full of the thrill of my discovery to indulge in a single personal thought.

I was still standing there by the door, my left hand quite numb, my feet a little cold from remaining motionless so long, when she began lightly to run over those remarkable exercises of hers.

She began by striking octaves. Her voice flew ever so lightly, yet firmly and surely, from lower *a* to middle *a* to upper *a*. Then the two octaves of *a*-sharp. Then *b*. And so on, until she was touching, in that same light, sure way, the *d*-sharp above high *c*.

Next she sang an ordinary chromatic scale, no differently from the performance of other singers I have heard excepting perhaps for the remarkable evenness and firmness and pure, floating quality of her *pianissimo* tone. It was after all this that the remarkable gift that amazed me came to light.

She returned to singing octaves. Only, as if testing and trying her own precision of pitch, she began striking the upper octave note, in making the leap from the lower to the higher, first correctly according to the accepted tempered scale of the Western world, then a fraction of a tone flat, then a fraction of a tone sharp, then back to the normal octave. She played with, these fractional tones as

easily and surely as the ordinary good singer plays with mere semitones. She actually took them in succession, quite as easily as she had, a little earlier, taken the semitones of the chromatic scale.

This was too much. I could not stand still any longer. In all my experience I had never found a white person with anything approaching my fineness of ear in merely hearing close intervals.

But I can not sing them as I hear and know them. I have no voice at all; my vocal chords will not obey my will with any degree of precision. Yet here, in this queer, rather unpleasant little French hotel in the great, barbaric city of Peking, in the next room to mine, is an American woman who can actually sing the intervals that I can only hear.

I knocked on the door.

There was instant and utter silence in the next room.

I knocked again.

She must have been holding her breath. I could not hear so much as the rustle of her skirt.

I spoke, in what I suppose was an excited whisper.

“Please let me speak with you,” I said. “Please let me speak with you!”

Still no sound.

Then it was that I opened the door – the shrunken door that would not lock.

Hôtel de Chine, Peking, April 5th – or 6th

TIS sometime in the very early morning. Peking is still. Even in this rookery of night birds every light is out but mine. I had to stop writing a while back and go for a long hard walk – around the Legation Quarter, outside the walls. But now I shall force myself to write down the rest of it. I shall not go to bed until it is done. It is too absurd that a scientist of proved ability and of highly trained will power should be overcome by his emotions in this way.

I have just tiptoed to the shrunken door that so inadequately separates her room from mine. I heard her irregular breathing: and, while I stood there, caught a low jumble of words spoken with the thick tongue of the sleeper.

And she stirs restlessly in her bed. Even from my chair I can hear that.

But I must tell what happened this afternoon.

I opened her door. I was quite beside myself.

Behind it not quite blocking off the opening, the unpainted, dusty back of her bureau confronted me. I looked through the narrow space between the mirror post and the door frame, and saw her.

She was standing by the foot of the bed.

I laid hands on the creaky old bureau and moved it aside. It was heavy, and it had no castors. I had to exert all my strength, tugging and pushing at it. Then I had to wait a moment to recover my breath.

She was standing rigidly, very white, holding with one hand to the bent iron tube over the foot of the little bed. She has long, slender fingers.

She never moved. Her wide eyes were fixed on me.

The sweat was breaking out on my forehead. A drop fell on the right lens of my spectacles. I took them off and fumbled for my handkerchief. Then I said —

“You have absolute pitch!”

She did not move or speak.

“But that is not all,” I went on, more rapidly. “You have the finest sense of intervals of any one in the world. Excepting myself.”

Her eyes narrowed a very little. And she glanced toward the other door, the one that led into the hall. It seemed to me that her tense muscles relaxed somewhat.

But when I had put on my spectacles and, now quite myself, came forward into the room, she swung back a step and flashed her eyes on me again. And I saw her fingers tighten around the iron tube at the foot of the bed.

This would n't do. I had frightened her dreadfully. Of course she could n't possibly know how mistaken she was in this. The thing to do was to explain everything to her.

“My name is Eckhart, Anthony Ives Eckhart,” I began; then paused, thinking that she, being a musical person, might have heard the name. But there was no light of recognition in her eyes.

“You can not imagine what it means to me to find you,” I went on. It seemed to me that from moment to moment she was on the point of interrupting me, so I talked very rapidly, trying at the same time to make my voice and manner as easy and matter-of-fact as possible.

“I have come all the way to China to make phonographic records of Chinese music. I shall make at least two thousand such records, and when I have finished my work will be recognized as the one great contribution to the study of the Oriental tone sense. For I shall secure and preserve on my cylinders the primitive scale intervals that underlie all natural musical expression.”

For some reason this explanation did not seem to get me anywhere. Excepting that now she looked bewildered as well as frightened. But I could not retreat. For here before me was a woman who had the great gift and who could understand. At this thought my mind began racing excitedly ahead. I thought of what she could do for me. And it was so absurdly simple, so little to ask! My forehead

was burning now, and the hand that pressed the handkerchief against it was shaking perceptibly. It was a great moment – the greatest, perhaps, in my life.

“God has sent you to me!” I cried, my voice rising and becoming shrill. “I *must* make you understand!”

She was glancing again toward the hall door. I could n’t make her out at all. But I lowered my voice.

“I must make you understand,” I repeated. “To-day, at the very beginning of my work, I find you. I need you more than anything else in the world – and right now. Yet an hour ago I did not know you existed. It is unbelievable. It is a miracle! I must have a phonographic record of a close-interval scale. For years I have dreamed of securing one. I myself can hear the closest intervals, but I can not sing them. Now you – you – shall sing this scale for me – not the artificial half-tones of our barbarous piano keyboard, but quarter-tones, even eighth-tones. With such a scale, the sounds recorded unerringly on a cylinder from which they can be reproduced at will, we shall at last have an absolute standard for the comparison of all tones and scales. Tell me” – I was trembling with eagerness – “do you think you could sing eighth-tones? *Do* you think you could?”

She just stood there.

“But you must do this!” I cried. “You have no right to withhold such a gift! God has sent you to me, and I shall use you. It will take a little time, but we shall practise, practise, practise! There will be failures, but we shall be patient. My life work is to be a true science at last. They can no longer say that it depends on the caprice of a single human ear. They shall now hear for themselves, they shall make their own comparisons, working with our absolute phonographic scale. Who knows, perhaps we shall yet make the final perfect scale of eighty-one distinct notes to the octave. No voice has yet done that. And no violin. For no living performer has the delicacy of ear and muscle.”

I began chuckling excitedly at this thought. I admit that my condition bordered on hysteria; but has not a man the right to be very slightly hysterical in the great moment of his life?

“We shall make many records,” I said to her, mopping my wet forehead. “Von Stumbostel shall have one, in Berlin – and Boag, Ramel and Fourmont shall have them, at Paris. And de Musseau, at the Sorbonne. And Sir Frederick Rhodes, at Cambridge. The new scale record shall be the basis of volume six – on ‘True Intervals and Natural Song.’ One copy I shall seal in a metal tube for preservation at the British Museum, together with my other records. And – yes, I shall send one to that miserable little von Westfall, of Bonn. I shall silence him. I shall crush him. It will amuse me to do that.”

I stopped, all glowing.

She looked at me until her lids drooped, and I could see her long lashes against the whiteness of her skin.

She fell back a step, hesitating, and shrinking a little, still clinging to the foot of the bed, and made a listless gesture with her left hand.

“You have broken into my room,” she said, steadily enough, but very low.

Women *are* literal.

But it was so. I had done just that. Doubtless it was an outrageous thing to do, but it had not seemed outrageous. It had come about quite naturally.

Still, she confused me. I had been talking volubly; now, all of a sudden, I could not speak at all. For the first time I fully realized how pale she was. And she looked tired about the eyes, where nervous exhaustion always shows first. It occurred to me, too, that her eyes were very blue and distinctly beautiful. I never saw longer lashes.

So I stood stupidly there, looking at her. I had flown too high. Now my spirits were dropping fast into a pit of depression. She suddenly appeared to me as a helpless, pitiful creature. God knows there was little enough privacy for her in this shabby hotel with its thin partitions and its ill-fitting doors and its drifting, dubious class of guests; and what little privacy she had I had violated. I looked at the dilapidated bureau that had stood across our common door. It had taken all my strength to push

it aside. I wondered if she herself had moved it there. What a pitiful effort, if she had, to shield her tired, hunted soul from intrusion! “Will you please go!” she breathed.

I am afraid this nettled me a little. At least, my coming in that wild way had not been a personal matter I had tried to make that much plain to her. Then why make it so personal! But that, of course, is the woman of it. And God knows I was wrong – all wrong.

“Will you please go!” she breathed again.

I bowed and turned to the door. But then I occurred to me as likely that I would no more than get my door closed before she would be in a frantic hurry to move the bureau back. And that bureau was too heavy for her, or for any woman. It was almost too heavy for me.

So I stepped back into her room and began tugging at the bureau again. When I saw the fresh concern on her face, I nodded toward the hall door and said, “I’ll go out that way.”

She understood this. She even came over and watched me as I worked at the thing. It would n’t move. Having no castors, the feet had caught in the matting. I went to the other end and pushed, but only succeeded in tipping it up, and spilling several articles to the floor. I let the bureau drop, and went down on my knees to pick them up. There was a hair brush and a nail buffer, both with heavy silver backs bearing the initials “H. C.” Then there was a small bottle with a glass stopper that came out and let the contents of the bottle run over the matting. And there was a wide tortoise-shell comb, of the sort that you pick up at Nagasaki.

I put all these things back on the bureau, and pushed again. She stood beside me in apparent hesitation, then, as if on an impulse, caught hold and pulled with me. But it was no use. The matting was by this time hopelessly wrinkled up about the feet. And after a moment of this we both stepped back and looked at it. I simply had to stop anyway and mop off my forehead and wipe my spectacles. I was all out of breath.

Then, after a moment, I took off my coat and dropped it on a chair.

“If you don’t mind helping once more,” I began —

She inclined her head.

“ – I’ll have to lift it over those wrinkles.”

So I caught hold and lifted with all my strength. She went around to the other side and threw her weight against it. Together we finally got it back squarely across the doorway.

“I’ve made you a great deal of trouble,” I said, “and I’m sorry.” I could n’t resist adding the question, “Did you move it here before, by yourself?”

She looked at me; then, slowly and guardedly, nodded.

I shook my head, ruefully I think. “You are a strong woman.”

“No,” she said, without any change of expression, with not the slightest animation of manner, “but it did n’t catch in the matting that time.”

I walked toward the door, with my coat thrown over my arm. It was hard to go away like that. I wonder why it is that I seem always to be walking away from women.

At the door I turned and glanced back at her. She was still there by the bureau, watching me go. I felt that she was looking rather intently at the coat on my arm, and it suddenly occurred to me that I must not leave her room like that, in my shirt sleeves. I felt the color come rushing to my face as I struggled into the coat.

I have read in works on the psychology of women that they often tell with a look what they are unable or unwilling to frame in spoken words. Certainly I knew that she had told me to put my coat on, and she knew that I had understood. And so, even as she drove me out of her room there was an understanding between us that was not wanting in subtlety. She had even asked me to make an effort to protect her; and she was no longer angry.

I had my coat on now, and was reaching for the door knob when a sound outside arrested my hand. Men were coming up the stairs to our hall.

She heard them too. She was rigid again, her hand resting on the bureau.

I could hear the Chinese porter talking pidgin-English as he came along the hall. Behind him sounded a ponderous step. Then came another voice, as the heavy step paused right near us – at my door, I thought.

“Here, boy, this is number nineteen.”

It was a loose throaty voice, unlike any other in the wide world. I should have recognized it anywhere, in a drawing-room or blindfolded at the bottom of a mine. It brought rushing to my mind pictures of a ship’s smoking-room where sat an old man with a wrinkled skin and one drooping eyelid who held forth on every subject known to man – pictures of the absurdly Anglo-Saxon hotel at Yokohama, and of a strange evening at the notorious “Number Nine” where an old man had smiled cynically at me.

Sir Robert had arrived at Peking. He had come to this hotel. He was to occupy room number nineteen, directly opposite the closed door behind which I stood, motionless, breathless.

I felt momentarily ill. Which was foolish.

For what is he to me or I to him! But he had stirred a confusion of thoughts in my mind. I saw the face of another man – a strong face, even when flushed with drink – I saw that face with tears on it, working convulsively. And directly behind me stood the woman. There she was, and there, with her, was I myself. I felt the strange, rushing drama of life whirling about me. I suddenly knew that every man is entangled in it – and every woman... Oh, God, why does she have to be so beautiful! And so terribly alone!

The porter was opening the door of number nineteen, just across the hall. Sir Robert was still at my door, swearing to himself.

“Number nineteen this side,” the porter was saying. “That number sixteen.”

So Sir Robert came heavily along the hall and entered the opposite room. We, the woman and I, heard the porter set down his hand baggage. We heard him order hot water. We heard the door close and the porter rustle away in his robe and his soft Chinese shoes and go off down the stairs.

Then, hardly knowing what I was about, I reached for the knob. But she came swiftly across the floor and caught it ahead of me, holding the door shut. Our hands touched. She looked very lovely, and very tired. My eyes wandered aimlessly over the kimono she wore, of gray crepe silk. It was embroidered from neck to hem in a wistaria pattern of the same soft gray color. I never saw such exquisite embroidery.

“Don’t go out there,” she said, low but very positive.

“But,” I whispered lamely, “but – but – ”

“The other door,” she said.

So we went back and moved that cursed bureau again. It was even more of a task this time, as we had to be careful about making any noise.

Again I lingered in our common doorway.

“Do you know that man?” I asked, in the guarded tones we were both employing now.

“No,” she replied simply, “but it is quite evident that you do.”

Still I lingered. And she did not drive me out. She quietly busied herself rearranging the innumerable little articles on the bureau. She was very natural and unconscious about it. There was no hint in her manner that she was aware of the curious interest I felt in all those intimate little accessories of her life. Though I find myself wondering if my crudely concealed masculine emotions are not an open book to her, even so soon. The perceptions of women are finer than ours. I have read that in the psychology books, and I believe it. They feel more deeply and see farther. And it is when they feel most deeply and see farthest that they do and say the inconsequential little things that puzzle us so.

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