

MacGrath Harold

The Pagan Madonna



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CHAPTER I

Humdrum isn't where you live; it's what you are. Perhaps you are one of those whose lives are bound by neighbourly interests. Imaginatively, you never seek what lies under a gorgeous sunset; you are never stirred by any longing to investigate the ends of rainbows. You are more concerned by what your neighbour does every day than by what he might do if he were suddenly spun, whirled, jolted out of his poky orbit. The blank door of an empty house never intrigues you; you enter blind alleys without thrilling in the least; you hear a cry in the night and impute it to some marauding tom. Lord, what a life!

And yet every move you make is governed by Chance – the Blind Madonna of the Pagan, as that great adventurer, Stevenson, called it. You never stop to consider that it is only by chance that you leave home and arrive at the office alive – millions and millions of you – poor old stick-in-the-muds! Because this or that hasn't happened to you, you can't be made to believe that it might have happened to someone else. What's a wood fire to you but a shin warmer? And how you hate to walk alone! So sheer off – this is not for you.

But to you, fenced in by circumstance, walls of breathless brick and stone, suffocating with longing, you whose thought springs ever toward the gorgeous sunset and the ends of rainbows; who fly in dreams across the golden south seas to the far countries, you whose imagination transforms every ratty old square-rigger that pokes down the bay into a Spanish galleon – come with me.

For to admire an' for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide.

First off, Ling Foo, of Woosung Road, perhaps the most bewildered Chinaman in all Shanghai last April. The Blind Madonna flung him into a great game and immediately cast him out of it, giving him never an inkling of what the game was about and leaving him buffeted by the four winds of wonder.

A drama – he was sure of that – had rolled up, touched him icily if slightly, and receded, like a wave on the beach, without his knowing in the least what had energized it in his direction. During lulls, for years to come, Ling Foo's consciousness would strive to press behind the wall for a key to the riddle; for years to come he would be searching the International Bund, Nanking Road, Broadway and Bubbling Well roads for the young woman with the wonderful ruddy hair and the man who walked with the sluing lurch.

Ah, but that man – the face of him, beautiful as that of a foreign boy's, now young, now old, as though a cobweb shifted to and fro across it! The fire in those dark eyes and the silk on that tongue! Always that face would haunt him, because it should not have been a man's but a woman's. Ling Foo could not go to his gods for comparisons, for a million variations of Buddha offered no such countenance; so his recollection would always be tinged with a restless sense of dissatisfaction.

There were other faces in the picture, but with the exception of the woman's and the man's he could not reassemble the features of any.

A wild and bitter night. The nor'easter, packed with a cold, penetrating rain, beat down from the Yellow Sea, its insensate fury clearing the highways of all save belated labourers and 'ricksha boys. Along the Chinese Bund the sampans huddled even more closely together, and rocked and creaked and complained. The inscrutable countenance of the average Chinaman is the result of five

thousand years of misery. It was a night for hand warmers – little jigsawed brass receptacles filled with smoldering punk or charcoal, which you carried in your sleeves and hugged if you happened to be a Chinaman, as Ling Foo was.

He was a merchant. He sold furs, curios, table linen, embroideries. His shop was out on the Woosung Road. He did not sit on his stool or in his alcove and wait for customers. He made packs of his merchandise and canvassed the hotels in the morning, from floor to floor, from room to room. His curios, however, he left in the shop. That was his lure to bring his hotel customers round in the afternoon, when there were generally additional profits and no commissions. This, of course, had been the *modus operandi* in the happy days before 1914, when white men began the slaughter of white men. Nowadays Ling Foo was off to the Astor House the moment he had news of a ship dropping anchor off the bar twelve miles down the Whangpoo River. The hour no longer mattered; the point was to beat his competitors to the market – and often there was no market.

He did not call the white people foreign devils; he called them customers. That they worshipped a bearded Buddha was no concern of his. Born in the modern town, having spent twelve years in San Francisco, he was not heavily barnacled with tradition. He was shrewd, a suave bargainer, and as honest as the day is long. His English was fluent.

To-night he was angry with the fates. The ship was hours late. Moreover, it was a British transport, dropping down from Vladivostok. He would be wasting his time to wait for such passengers as came ashore. They would be tired and hungry and uncomfortable. So at seven o'clock he lit a piece of punk, dropped it into his hand warmer, threw his pack over his shoulders, and left the cheery lobby of the hotel where he had been waiting since five in the afternoon. He would be cold and wet and hungry when he reached his shop.

Outside he called to a disconsolate ricksha boy, and a moment later rattled across the bridge that spans the Soochow Creek. Even the Sikh policeman had taken to cover. When he finally arrived home he was drenched from his cap button to the wooden soles of his shoes. He unlocked the shop door, entered, flung the pack on the floor, and turned on the electric light. Twenty minutes later he was in dry clothes; hot rice, bean curd, and tea were warming him; and he sat cross-legged in a little alcove behind his till, smoking his metal pipe. Two or three puffs, then he would empty the ash in a brass bowl. He repeated this action half a dozen times. He was emptying the ash for the last time when the door opened violently and a man lurched in, hatless and apparently drunk – a white man.

But instantly Ling Foo saw that the man was not drunk. Blood was streaming down his face, which was gray with terror and agony. The man made a desperate effort to save himself from falling, and dragged a pile of embroidered jackets to the floor as he went down.

Ling Foo did not stir. It was not possible for him to move. The suddenness of the spectacle had disconnected thought from action. He saw all this, memorized it, even speculated upon it; but he could not move.

The door was still open. The rain slanted across the black oblong space. He saw it strike the windows, pause, then trickle down. He could not see what had become of the man; the counter intervened. A tingle ran through Ling Foo's body, and he knew that his brain had gained control of his body again. But before this brain could telegraph to his legs three men rushed into the shop. A bubble of sound came into Ling Foo's throat – one of those calls for help that fear smothers.

The three men disappeared instantly below the counter rim. Silence, except for the voices of the rain and the wind. Ling Foo, tensely, even painfully alive now, waited. He was afraid, and it was perfectly logical fear. Perhaps they had not noticed him in the alcove. So he waited for this fantastic drama to end.

The three men rose in unison. Ling Foo saw that they were carrying the fourth between them. The man who carried the head and shoulders of the victim – for Ling Foo was now certain that murder was abroad – limped oddly, with a heave and a sluing twist. Ling Foo slid off his cushion and stepped round the counter in time to see the night absorb the back of the man who limped. He

tried to recall the face of the man, but could not. His initial terror had drawn for him three white patches where faces should have been.

For several minutes Ling Foo stared at the oblong blackness; then with a hysterical gurgle he ran to the door, slammed and bolted it, and leaned against the jamb, sick and faint, yet oddly relieved. He would not now have to account to the police for the body of an unknown white man.

A queer business. Nothing exciting ever happened along this part of Woosung Road. What he had witnessed – it still wasn't quite believable – belonged to the water front. Things happened there, for these white sailors were a wild lot.

When the vertigo went out of his legs, Ling Foo cat-stepped over to the scattered embroidered jackets and began mechanically to replace them on the counter – all but two, for these were speckled with blood. He contemplated them for a space, and at last picked them up daintily and tossed them into a far corner. When the blood dried he would wash them out himself.

But there was that darkening stain on the floor. That would have to be washed out at once or it would be crying up to him eternally and recasting the tragic picture. So he entered the rear of the shop and summoned his wife. Meekly she obeyed his order and scrubbed the stain. Her beady little black eyes were so tightly lodged in her head that it was not possible for her to elevate her brows in surprise. But she knew that this stain was blood.

Ling Foo solemnly waved her aside when the task was done, and she slip-slapped into the household dungeon out of which she had emerged.

Her lord and master returned to his alcove. Ah, but the pipe was good! He rocked slightly as he smoked. Three pipefuls were reduced to ashes; then he wriggled off the cushion, picked up his cash counter and began slithering the buttons back and forth; not because there were any profits or losses that day, but because it gave a welcome turn to his thoughts.

The storm raged outside. Occasionally he felt the floor shudder. The windows ran thickly with rain. The door rattled. It was as if all objects inanimate were demanding freedom from bolts and nails. With the tip of his long, slender finger Ling Foo moved the buttons. He counted what his profits would be in Manchurian sables; in the two Ming vases that had come in mysteriously from Kiao-chau – German loot from Peking; counted his former profits in snuff bottles, and so on.

The door rattled furiously.

Ling Foo could consider himself as tolerably wealthy. Some day, when this great turmoil among the whites subsided, he would move to South China and grow little red oranges and melons, and there would be a nook in the gardens where he could sit with the perfume of jasmine swimming over and about his head and the goodly Book of Confucius on his knees.

A thudding sound – that wasn't the wind. Ling Foo looked over his buttons. He saw a human face outside the door; a beautiful boy's face – white. That was the first impression. But as he stared he saw a man's fury destroy the boyish stamp – gestures that demanded admission.

But Ling Foo shook his head with equal emphasis. He would not go near that door again this night.

The man outside shook his fists threateningly, wheeled, and strode off. Three strides took him out of sight; but Ling Foo, with a damp little chill on his spine, remarked that the visitor limped.

So! This would be the man who had carried the bloody head and shoulders of the unknown.

Oriental curiosity blazed up and over Ling Foo's distaste. What was it all about? Why had the limping man returned and demanded entrance? What had they done with the body? Pearls! The thought struck him as a blow. He began to understand something of the episode. Pearls! The beaten man had heard that sometimes Ling Foo of Woosung Road dealt in pearls without being overcurious. A falling out among thieves, and one had tried to betray his confederates, paying grimly for it. Pearls!

He trotted down to the door and peered into the night, but he could see nothing. He wished now that he had purchased those window curtains such as the white merchants used over on the Bund.

Every move he made could be seen from across the way, and the man who limped might be lurking there, watching.

The man had come to him with pearls, but he had not been quick enough. What had he done with them? The man with the slue-foot would not have returned had he found the pearls on his moribund partner. That was sound reasoning. Ling Foo's heart contracted, then expanded and began to beat like a bird's wing. In here somewhere – on the floor!

He turned away from the door without haste. His Oriental mind worked quickly and smoothly. He would tramp back and forth the length of the shop as if musing, but neither nook nor crevice should escape his eye. He was heir to these pearls. Slue-Foot – for so Ling Foo named his visitor – would not dare molest him, since he, Ling Foo, could go to the authorities and state that murder had been done. Those tiger eyes in a boy's face! His spine grew cold.

Nevertheless, he set about his game. With his hands in his sleeves, his chin down, he paced the passage between the two counters. As he turned for the fifth journey a red-and-blue flash struck his eye. The flash came from the far corner of the shop, from the foot of the gunpowder-blue temple vase. Diamonds – not pearls but diamonds! Russian loot!

Ling Foo pressed down his excitement and slowly approached the vase. A necklace! He gave the object a slight kick, which sent it rattling toward the door to the rear. He resumed his pacing. Each time he reached the necklace he gave it another kick. At length the necklace was at the threshold. Ling Foo approached the light and shut it off. Next he opened the door and kicked the necklace across the threshold. Diamonds – thirty or forty of them on a string.

The room in the rear was divided into workshop and storeroom. The living rooms were above. His wife was squatted on the floor in an uncluttered corner mending a ceremonial robe of his. She was always in this room at night when Ling Foo was in the shop.

He ignored her and carried his prize to a lapidary's bench. He perched himself on a stool and reached for his magnifying glass. A queer little hiss broke through his lips. Cut-glass beads, patently Occidental, and here in Shanghai practically worthless!

In his passion of disappointment he executed a gesture as if to hurl the beads to the floor, but let his arm sink slowly. He had made a mistake. These beads had not brought tragedy in and out of his shop. Somehow he had missed the object; some nook or corner had escaped him. In the morning he would examine every inch of the floor. White men did not kill each other for a string of glass beads.

He stirred the beads about on his palm, and presently swung them under the droplight. Beautifully cut, small and large beads alternating, and on the smaller a graven letter he could not decipher. He observed some dark specks, and scrutinized them under the magnifying glass. Blood! His Oriental mind groped hopelessly. Blood! He could make nothing of it. A murderous quarrel over such as these!

For a long time Ling Foo sat on his stool, the image of Buddha contemplating the way. Outside the storm carried on vigorously, sending rattles into casements and shudders into doors. The wifely needle, a thread of silver fire, shuttled back and forth in the heavy brocade silk.

Glass beads! Trumpery! Ling Foo slid off the stool and shuffled back into the shop for his metal pipe.

Having pushed Ling Foo into this blind alley, out of which he was shortly to emerge, none the wiser, the Pagan Madonna swooped down upon the young woman with the ruddy hair and touched her with the impelling finger.

CHAPTER II

It was chance that brought Jane Norman into Shanghai. The British transport, bound from Vladivostok to Hong-Kong, was destined to swing on her mudhook forty-eight hours. So Jane, a Red Cross nurse, relieved and on the first leg of the journey home to the United States, decided to spend those forty-eight hours in Shanghai, see the sights and do a little shopping. Besides, she had seen nothing of China. On the way over, fourteen months since, she had come direct from San Francisco to the Russian port.

Jane was one of those suffocating adventurers whom circumstance had fenced in. In fancy she beat her hands against the bars of this cage that had no door, but through which she could see the caravans of dreams. Sea room and sky room were the want of her, and no matter which way she turned – bars. Her soul craved colour, distances, mountain peaks; and about all she had ever seen were the white walls of hospital wards. It is not adventure to tend the sick, to bind up wounds, to cheer the convalescing; it is a dull if angelic business.

In her heart of hearts Jane knew that she had accepted the hardships of the Siberian campaign with the secret hope that some adventure might befall her – only to learn that her inexorable cage had travelled along with her. Understand, this longing was not the outcome of romantical reading; it was in the marrow of her – inherent. She was not in search of Prince Charming. She rarely thought of love as other young women think of it. She had not written in her mind any particular event she wanted to happen; but she knew that there must be colour, distance, mountain peaks. A few days of tremendous excitement; and then she acknowledged that she would be quite ready to return to the old monotonous orbit.

The Great War to Jane had not been romance and adventure; her imagination, lively enough in other directions, had not falsely coloured the stupendous crime. She had accepted it instantly for what it was – pain, horror, death, hunger, and pestilence. She saw it as the genius of Vasili Vereshchagin and Émile Zola had seen it.

The pioneer – after all, what was it he was truly seeking? Freedom! And as soon as ever civilization caught up with him he moved on. Without understanding it, that was really all Jane wanted – freedom. Freedom from genteel poverty, freedom from the white walls of hospitals, freedom from exactly measured hours. Twenty four hours a day, all her own; that was what she wanted; twenty-four hours a day to do with as she pleased – to sleep in, play, laugh, sing, love in. Pioneers, explorers, adventurers – what else do they seek? Twenty-four hours a day, all their own!

At half after eight – about the time Ling Foo slid off his stool – the tender from the transport sloshed up to the customs jetty and landed Jane, a lone woman among a score of officers of various nationalities. But it really wasn't the customs jetty her foot touched; it was the outer rim of the whirligig.

Some officer had found an extra slicker for her and an umbrella. Possibly the officer in olive drab who assisted her to the nearest covered 'ricksha and directed the placement of her luggage.

“China!”

“Yes, ma'am. Mandarin coats and oranges, jade and jasmine, Pekingese and red chow dogs.”

“Oh, I don't mean that kind!” she interrupted. “I should think these poor 'ricksha boys would die of exposure.”

“Manchus are the toughest human beings on earth. I'll see you in the morning?”

“That depends,” she answered, “upon the sun. If it rains I shall lie abed all day. A real bed! Honour bright, I've often wondered if I should ever see one again. Fourteen months in that awful world up there! Siberia!”

“You're a plucky woman.”

“Somebody had to go. Armenia or Siberia, it was all the same to me if I could help.” She held out her hand. “Good-night, captain. Thank you for all your kindness to me. Ten o’clock, if it is sunshiny. You’re to show me the shops. Oh, if I were only rich!”

“And what would you do if you had riches?”

“I’d buy all the silk at Kai Fook’s – isn’t that the name? – and roll myself up in it like a cocoon.”

The man laughed. He understood. A touch of luxury, after all these indescribable months of dirt and disease, rain and snow and ice, among a people who lived like animals, who had the intelligence of animals. When he spoke the officer’s voice was singularly grave:

“These few days have been very happy ones for me. At ten – if the sun shines. Good-night.”

The ’rickshas in a wavering line began to roll along the Bund, which was practically deserted. The lights shone through slanting lattices of rain. Twice automobiles shot past, and Jane resented them. China, the flowery kingdom! She was touched with a little thrill of exultation. But oh, to get home, home! Never again would she long for palaces and servants and all that. The little wooden-frame house and the garden would be paradise enough. The crimson ramblers, the hollyhocks, the bachelor’s-buttons, and the peonies, the twisted apple tree that never bore more than enough for one pie! Her throat tightened.

She hadn’t heard from the mother in two months, but there would be mail at Hong-Kong. Letters and papers from home! Soon she would be in the sitting room recounting her experiences; and the little mother would listen politely, even doubtfully, but very glad to have her back. How odd it was! In the mother the spirit of adventure never reached beyond the garden gate, while in the daughter it had always been keen for the far places. And in her first adventure beyond the gate, how outrageously she had been cheated! She had stepped out of drab and dreary routine only to enter a drabber and drearier one.

What a dear boy this American officer was! He seemed to have been everywhere, up and down the world. He had hunted the white orchid of Borneo; he had gone pearl hunting in the South Seas; and he knew Monte Carlo, London, Paris, Naples, Cairo. But he never spoke of home. She had cleverly led up to it many times in the past month, but always he had unembarrassedly switched the conversation into another channel.

This puzzled her deeply. From the other Americans she never heard of anything but home, and they were all mad to get there. Yet Captain Dennison maintained absolute silence on that topic. Clean shaven, bronzed, tall, and solidly built, clear-eyed, not exactly handsome but engaging – what lay back of the man’s peculiar reticence? Being a daughter of Eve, the mystery intrigued her profoundly.

Had he been a professional sailor prior to the war? It seemed to her if that had been the case he would have enlisted in the Navy. He talked like a man who had spent many years on the water; but in labour or in pleasure, he made it most difficult for her to tell. Of his people, of his past, not Bluebeard’s closet was more firmly shut. Still with a little smile she recalled that eventually a woman had opened that closet door, and hadn’t had her head cut off, either.

He was poor like herself. That much was established. For he had said frankly that when he received his discharge from the Army he would have to dig up a job to get a meal ticket.

Dear, dear! Would she ever see a continuous stretch of sunshine again? How this rain tore into things! Shanghai! Wouldn’t it be fun to have a thousand dollars to fling away on the shops? She wanted jade beads, silks – not the quality the Chinese made for export, but that heavy, shiver stuff that was as strong and shielding as wool – ivory carvings, little bronze Buddhas with prayer scrolls inside of them, embroidered jackets. But why go on? She had less than a hundred, and she would have to carry home gimcracks instead of curios.

They were bobbing over a bridge now, and a little way beyond she saw the lighted windows of the great caravansary, the Astor House. It smacked of old New York, where in a few weeks she would be stepping back into the dull routine of hospital work.

She paid the ricksha boy and ran into the lobby, stamping her feet and shaking the umbrella. The slicker was an overhead affair, and she had to take off her hat to get free. This act tumbled her hair about considerably, and Jane Norman's hair was her glory. It was the tint of the copper beech, thick, finespun, with intermittent twists that gave it a wavy effect.

Jane was not beautiful; that is, her face was not – it was comely. It was her hair that turned male heads. It was then men took note of her body. She was magnificently healthy, and true health is a magnet as powerful as that of the true pole. It drew toward her men and women and children. Her eyes were gray and serious; her teeth were white and sound. She was twenty-four.

There was, besides her hair, another thing that was beautiful – her voice. It answered like the G string of an old Strad to every emotion. One could tell instantly when she was merry or sad or serious or angry. She could not hide her emotions any more than she could hide her hair. As a war nurse she had been adored by the wounded men and fought over by the hospital commandants. But few men had dared make love to her. She had that peculiar gift of drawing and repelling without consciousness.

As the Chinese boy got her things together Jane espied the bookstall. American newspapers and American magazines! She packed four or five of each under her arm, nodded to the boy, and followed the manager to the lift! She hoped the lights would hang so that she could lie in bed and read. Her brain was thirsty for a bit of romance.

Humming, she unpacked. She had brought one evening gown, hoping she might have a chance to wear it before it fell apart from disuse. She shook out the wrinkles and hung the gown in the closet. Lavender! She raised a fold of the gown and breathed in rapturously that homy perfume. She sighed. Perhaps she would have to lay away all her dreams in lavender.

A little later she sat before the dressing mirror, combing her hair. How it happened she never could tell, but she heard a crash upon the wood floor, and discovered her hand mirror shattered into a thousand splinters.

Seven years' bad luck! She laughed. Fate had blundered. The mirror had fallen seven years too late.

CHAPTER III

Outside the bar where the Whangpoo empties into the Yang-tse lay the thousand-ton yacht *Wanderer II*, out of New York. She was a sea whippet, and prior to the war her bowsprit had nosed into all the famed harbours of the seven seas. For nearly three years she had been in the auxiliary fleet of the United States Navy. She was still in war paint, owner's choice, but all naval markings had been obliterated. Her deck was flush. The house, pierced by the main companionway, was divided into three sections – a small lounging room, a wireless room, and the captain's cabin, over which stood the bridge and chart house. The single funnel rose between the captain's cabin and the wireless room, and had the rakish tilt of the racer. *Wanderer II* could upon occasion hit it up round twenty-one knots, for all her fifteen years. There was plenty of deck room fore and aft.

The crew's quarters were up in the forepeak. A passage-way divided the cook's galley and the dry stores, then came the dining salon. The main salon, with a fine library, came next. The port side of this salon was cut off into the owner's cabin. The main companionway dropped into the salon, a passage each side giving into the guest cabins. But rarely these days were there any guests on *Wanderer II*.

The rain slashed her deck, drummed on the boat canvas, and blurred the ports. The deck house shed webby sheets of water, now to port, now to starboard. The ladder was down, and a reflector over the platform advertised the fact that either the owner had gone into Shanghai or was expecting a visitor.

All about were rocking lights, yellow and green and red, from warships, tramps, passenger ships, freighters, barges, junks. The water was streaked with shaking lances of colour.

In the salon, under a reading lamp, sat a man whose iron-gray hair was patched with cowlicks. Combs and brushes produced no results, so the owner had had it clipped to a short pompadour. It was the skull of a fighting man, for all that frontally it was marked by a high intellectuality. This sort of head generally gives the possessor yachts like *Wanderer II*, tremendous bank accounts; the type that will always possess these things, despite the howl of the proletariat.

The face was sunburned. There was some loose flesh under the jaws. The nose was thick and pudgy, wide in the nostrils, like a lion's. The predatory are not invariably hawk-nosed. The eyes were blue – in repose, a warm blue – and there were feathery wrinkles at the corners which suggested that the toll-taker could laugh occasionally. The lips were straight and thin, the chin square – stubborn rather than relentless. A lonely man who was rarely lonesome.

His body was big. One has to be keen physically as well as mentally to make a real success of anything. His score might have tallied sixty. He was at the peak of life, but hanging there, you might say. To-morrow Anthony Cleigh might begin the quick downward journey.

He had made his money in mines, rails, ships; and now he was spending it prodigally. Prodigally, yes, but with caution and foresight. There was always a ready market for what he bought. If he paid a hundred thousand for a Rembrandt, rest assured he knew where he could dispose of it for the same amount. Cleigh was a collector by instinct. With him it was no fad; it was a passion, sometimes absurd. This artistic love of rare and beautiful creations was innate, not acquired. Dealers had long since learned their lesson, and no more sought to impose upon him.

He was not always scrupulous. In the dollar war he had been sternly honest, harshly just. In pursuit of objects of art he argued with his conscience that he was not injuring the future of widows and orphans when he bought some purloined masterpiece. Without being in the least aware of it, he was now the victim, not the master, of the passion. He would have purchased Raphael's Adoration of the Magi had some rogue been able to steal it from the Vatican.

Hanging from the ceiling and almost touching the floor, forward between the entrance to the dining salon and the owner's cabin, was a rug eight and a half by six. It was the first object that struck

your eye as you came down the companionway. It was an animal rug, a museum piece; rubies and sapphires and emeralds and topaz melted into wool. It was under glass to fend off the sea damp. Fit to hang beside the Ardebil Carpet.

You never saw the rug except in this salon. Cleigh dared not hang it in his gallery at home in New York for the particular reason that the British Government, urged by the Viceroy of India, had been hunting high and low for the rug since 1911, when it had been the rightful property of a certain influential maharaja whose *Ai, ai!* had reverberated from Hind to Albion over the loss. Thus it will not be difficult to understand why Cleigh was lonely rather than lonesome.

Queer lot. To be a true collector is to be as the opium eater: you keep getting in deeper and deeper, careless that the way back closes. After a while you cannot feel any kick in the stuff you find in the open marts, so you step outside the pale, where they sell the unadulterated. That's the true, dyed-in-the-wool collector. He no longer acquires a Vandyke merely to show to his friends; that he possesses it for his own delectation is enough. He becomes brother to Gaspard, miser; and like Gaspard he cannot be fooled by spurious gold.

Over the top of the rug was a curtain of waxed sailcloth that could be dropped by the pull of a cord, and it was generally dropped whenever Cleigh made port.

It was vaguely known that Cleigh possessed the maharaja's treasure. Millionaire collectors, agents, and famous salesroom auctioneers had heard indirectly; but they kept the information to themselves – not from any kindly spirit, however. Never a one of them but hoped some day he might lay hands upon the rug and dispose of it to some other madman. A rug valued at seventy thousand dollars was worth a high adventure. Cleigh, however, with cynical humour courted the danger.

There is a race of hardy dare-devils – super-thieves – of which the world hears little and knows little. These adventurers have actually robbed the Louvre, the Vatican, the Pitti Gallery, the palaces of kings and sultans. It was not so long ago that La Gioconda – Mona Lisa – was stolen from the Louvre. Cleigh had come from New York, thousands of miles, for the express purpose of meeting one of these amazing rogues – a rogue who, had he found a rich wallet on the pavements, would have moved heaven and earth to find the owner, but who would have stolen the Pope's throne had it been left about carelessly.

It is rather difficult to analyze the moral status of such a man, or that of the man ready to deal with him.

Cleigh lowered his book and assumed a listening attitude. Above the patter of the rain he heard the putt-putt of a motor launch. He laid the book on the table and reached for a black cigar, which he lit and began to puff quickly. Louder grew the panting of the motor. It stopped abruptly. Cleigh heard a call or two, then the creaking of the ladder. Two minutes later a man limped into the salon. He tossed his sou'wester to the floor and followed it with the smelly oilskin.

“Hello, Cleigh! Devil of a night!”

“Have a peg?” asked Cleigh.

“Never touch the stuff.”

“That's so; I had forgotten.”

Cleigh never looked upon this man's face without recalling del Sarto's John the Baptist – supposing John had reached forty by the way of reckless passions. The extraordinary beauty was still there, but as though behind a blurred pane of glass.

“Well?” said Cleigh, trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

“There's the devil to pay – all in a half hour.”

“You haven't got it?” Cleigh blazed out.

“Morrissy – one of the squarest chaps in the world – ran amuck the last minute. Tried to double-cross me, and in the rough-and-tumble that followed he was more or less banged up. We hurried him to a hospital, where he lies unconscious.”

“But the beads!”

“Either he dropped them in the gutter, or they repose on the floor of a Chinese shop in Woosung Road. I’ll be there bright and early – never you fear. Don’t know what got into Morrissy. Of course I’ll look him up in the morning.”

“Thousands of miles – to hear a yarn like this!”

“Clegh, we’ve done business for nearly twenty years. You can’t point out an instance where I ever broke my word.”

“I know,” grumbled Cleigh. “But I’ve gone to all this trouble, getting a crew and all that. And now you tell me you’ve let the beads slip through your fingers!”

“Pshaw! You’d have put the yacht into commission if you’d never heard from me. You were crazy to get to sea again. Any trouble picking up the crew?”

“No. But only four of the old crew – Captain Newton, of course, and Chief Engineer Svenson, Donaldson, and Morley. Still, it’s the best crew I ever had: young fellows off warships and transports, looking for comfortable berths and a little adventure that won’t entail hunting periscopes.”

“Plenty of coal?”

“Trust me for that. Four hundred tons in Manila, and I shan’t need more than a bucketful.”

“Who drew the plans for this yacht?” asked Cunningham, with a roving glance.

“I did.”

“Humph! Why didn’t you leave the job to someone who knew how? It’s a series of labyrinths on this deck.”

“I wanted a big main salon, even if I had to sacrifice some of the rest of the space. Besides, it keeps the crew out of sight.”

“And I should say out of touch, too.”

“I’m quite satisfied,” replied Cleigh, grumpily.

“Clegh, I’m through.” Cunningham spread his hands.

“What are you through with?”

“Through with this game. I’m going in for a little sport. This string of beads was the wind-up. But don’t worry. They’ll be on board here to-morrow. You brought the gold?”

“Yes.”

The visitor paused in front of the rug. He sighed audibly.

“Scheherazade’s twinkling little feet! Lord, but that rug is a wonder! Cleigh, I’ve been offered eighty thousand for it.”

“What’s that?” Cleigh barked, half out of his chair.

“Eighty thousand by Eisenfeldt. I don’t know what crazy fool he’s dealing for, but he offers me eighty thousand.”

Cleigh got up and pressed a wall button. Presently a man stepped into the salon from the starboard passage. He was lank, with a lean, wind-bitten face and a hard blue eye.

“Dodge,” announced Cleigh, smiling, “this is Mr. Cunningham. I want you to remember him.”

Dodge agreed with a curt nod.

“If ever you see him in this cabin when I’m absent, you know what to do.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Dodge, with a wintry smile.

Cunningham laughed.

“So you carry a Texas gunman round with you now? After all, why not? You never can tell. But don’t worry, Cleigh. If ever I make up my mind to accept Eisenfeldt’s offer, I’ll lift the yacht first.”

Cleigh laughed amusedly.

“How would you go about to steal a yacht like this?”

“That’s telling. Now I’ve got to get back to town. My advice for you is to come in to-morrow and put up at the Astor, where I can get in touch with you easily.”

“Agreed. That’s all, Dodge.”

The Texan departed, and Cunningham burst into laughter again.

“You’re an interesting man, Cleigh. On my word, you do need a guardian – gallivanting round the world with all these treasures. Queer what things we do when we try to forget. Is there any desperate plunge we wouldn’t take if we thought we could leave the Old Man of the Sea behind? You think you’re forgetting when you fly across half the world for a string of glass beads. I think I’m forgetting when I risk my neck getting hold of some half-forgotten Rembrandt. But there it is, always at our shoulder when we turn. One of the richest men in the world! Doesn’t that tingle you when you hear people whisper it as you pass? Just as I tingle when some woman gasps, ‘What a beautiful face!’ We both have our withered leg – only yours is invisible.”

The mockery on the face and the irony on the tongue of the man disturbed Cleigh. Supposing the rogue had his eye on that rug? To what lengths might he not go to possess it? And he had the infernal ingenuity of his master, Beelzebub. Or was he just trying Anthony Cleigh’s nerves to see whether they were sound or raw?

“But the beads!” he said.

“I’m sorry. Simply Morrissy ran amuck.”

“I am willing to pay half as much again.”

“You leave that to me – at the original price. No hold-up. Prices fixed, as the French say. Those beads will be on board here to-morrow. But why the devil do you carry that rug abroad?”

“To look at.”

“Mad as a hatter!” Cunningham picked up his oilskin and sou’wester. “Hang it, Cleigh, I’ve a notion to have a try at that rug just for the sport of it!”

“If you want to bump into Dodge,” replied the millionaire, dryly, “try it.”

“Oh, it will be the whole thing – the yacht – when I start action! Devil take the weather!”

“How the deuce did the beads happen to turn up here in Shanghai?”

“Morrissy brought them east from Naples. That’s why his work to-night puzzles me. All those weeks to play the crook in, and then to make a play for it when he knew he could not put it over! Brain storm – and when he comes to he’ll probably be sorry. Well, keep your eye on the yacht.” Cunningham shouldered into his oilskin. “To-morrow at the Astor, between three and five. By George, what a ripping idea – to steal the yacht! I’m mad as a hatter, too. Good-night, Cleigh.” And laughing, Cunningham went twisting up the companionway, into the rain and the dark.

Cleigh stood perfectly still until the laughter became an echo and the echo a memory.

CHAPTER IV

Morning and winnowed skies; China awake. The great black-and-gold banners were again fluttering in Nanking Road. Mongolian ponies clattered about, automobiles rumbled, 'rickshas jogged. Venders were everywhere, many with hot rice and bean curd. Street cleaners in bright-red cotton jackets were busy with the mud puddles. The river swarmed with sampans and barges and launches. There was only one lifeless thing in all Shanghai that morning – the German Club.

In the city hospital the man Morrissy, his head in bandages, smiled feebly into Cunningham's face.

"Were you mad to try a game like that? What the devil possessed you? Three to one, and never a ghost of a chance. You never blew up like this before. What's the answer?"

"Just struck me, Dick – one of those impulses you can't help. I'm sorry. Ought to have known I'd have no chance, and you'd have been justified in croaking me. Just as I was in the act of handing them over to you the idea came to bolt. All that dough would keep me comfortably the rest of my life."

"What happened to them?"

"Don't know. After that biff on the coco I only wanted some place to crawl into. I had them in my hand when I started to run. Sorry."

"Have they quizzed you?"

"Yes, but I made out I couldn't talk. What's the dope?"

"You were in a rough-and-tumble down the Chinese Bund, and we got you away. Play up to that."

"All right. But, gee! I won't be able to go with you."

"If we have any luck, I'll see you get a share."

"That's white. You were always a white man, Dick. I feel like a skunk. I knew I couldn't put it over, with the three of you at my elbow. What the devil got into me?"

"Any funds?"

"Enough to get me down to Singapore. Where do you want me to hang out?"

"Suit yourself. You're out of this play – and it's my last."

"You're quitting the big game?"

"Yes. What's left of my schedule I'm going to run out on my own. So we probably won't meet again for a long time, Morrissy. Here's a couple of hundred to add to your store. If we find the beads I'll send your share wherever you say."

"Might as well be Naples. They're off me in the States."

"All right. Cook's or the American Express?"

"Address me the Milan direct."

Cunningham nodded.

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Dick. I'm sorry I gummed it up."

"I thought you'd be. Good-bye."

But as Cunningham passed from sight, the man on the cot smiled ironically at the sun-splashed ceiling. A narrow squeak, but he had come through.

Cunningham, grateful for the sunshine, limped off toward Woosung Road, grotesquely but incredibly fast for a man with only one sound leg. He never used a cane, having the odd fancy that a stick would only emphasize his affliction. He might have taken a 'ricksha this morning, but he never thought of it until he had crossed Soochow Creek.

But Ling Foo was not in his shop and the door was locked. Cunningham explored the muddy gutters all the way from Ling Foo's to Moy's tea house, where the meeting had taken place. He found

nothing, and went into Moy's to wait. Ling Foo would have to pass the restaurant. A boy who knew the merchant stood outside to watch.

Jane woke at nine. The brightness of the window shade told her that the sun was clear. She sprang out of bed, a trill of happiness in her throat. The shops! Oh, the beautiful, beautiful shops!

"China, China, China!" she sang.

She threw up the shade and squinted for a moment. The sun in the heavens and the reflection on the Whangpoo were blinding. The sampans made her think of ants, darting, scuttling, wheeling.

"Oh, the beautiful shops!"

Of all the things in the world – this side of the world – worth having, nothing else seemed comparable to jade – a jade necklace. Not the stone that looked like dull marble with a greenish pallor – no. She wanted the deep apple-green jade, the royal, translucent stone. And she knew that she had as much chance of possessing the real article as she had of taking her pick of the scattered Romanoff jewels.

Jane held to the belief that when you wished for something you couldn't have it was niggardly not to wish magnificently.

She dressed hurriedly, hastened through her breakfast of tea and toast and jam, and was about to sally forth upon the delectable adventure, when there came a gentle knock on the door. She opened it, rather expecting a boy to announce that Captain Dennison was below. Outside stood a Chinaman in a black skirt and a jacket of blue brocade. He was smiling and kowtowing.

"Would the lady like to see some things?"

"Come in," said Jane, readily.

Ling Foo deposited his pack on the floor and opened it. He had heard that a single woman had come in the night before and, shrewd merchant that he was, he had wasted no time.

"Furs!" cried Jane, reaching down for the Manchurian sable. She blew aside the top fur and discovered the smoky down beneath. She rubbed her cheek against it ecstatically. She wondered what devil's lure there was about furs and precious stones that made women give up all the world for them. Was that madness hidden away in her somewhere?

"How much?"

She knew beforehand that the answer would render the question utterly futile.

"A hundred Mex," said Ling Foo. "Very cheap."

"A hundred Mex?" That would be nearly fifty dollars in American money. With a sigh she dropped the fur. "Too much for me. How much is that Chinese jacket?"

"Twenty Mex."

Jane carried it over to the window.

"I will give you fifteen for it."

"All right."

Ling Foo was willing to forego his usual hundred per cent. profit in order to start the day with a sale. Then he spread out the grass linen.

Jane went into raptures over some of the designs, but in the end she shook her head. She wanted something from Shanghai, something from Hong-Kong, something from Yokohama. If she followed her inclination she would go broke here and now.

"Have you any jade? Understand, I'm not buying. Just want to see some."

"No, lady; but I can bring you some this afternoon."

"I warn you, I'm not buying."

"I shall be glad to show the lady. What time shall I call?"

"Oh, about tea time."

Ling Foo reached inside his jacket and produced a string of cut-glass beads.

"How pretty! What are they?"

"Glass."

Jane hooked the string round her neck and viewed the result in the mirror. The sunshine, striking the facets, set fire to the beads. They were really lovely. She took a sudden fancy to them.

“How much?”

“Four Mex.” It was magnanimous of Ling Foo.

“I’ll take them.” They were real, anyhow. “Bring your jade at tea time and call for Miss Norman. I can’t give you any more time.”

“Yes, lady.”

Ling Foo bundled up his assorted merchandise and trotted away infinitely relieved. The whole affair was off his hands. In no wise could the police bother him now. He knew nothing; he would know nothing until he met his honourable ancestors.

From ten until three Jane, under the guidance of Captain Dennison, stormed the shops on the Bunds and Nanking Road; but in returning to the Astor House she realized with dismay that she had expended the major portion of her ammunition in this offensive. She doubted if she would have enough to buy a kimono in Japan. It was dreadful to be poor and to have a taste for luxury and an eye for beauty.

“Captain,” she said as they sat down to tea, “I’m going to ask one more favour.”

“What is it?”

“A Chinaman is coming with some jade. If I’m alone with him I’m afraid I’ll buy something, and I really can’t spend another penny in Shanghai.”

“I see. Want me to shoo him off in case his persistence is too much for you.”

“Exactly. It’s very nice of you.”

“Greatest pleasure in the world. I wish the job was permanent – shooing ’em away from you.”

She sent him a quick sidelong glance, but he was smiling. Still, there was something in the tone that quickened her pulse. All nonsense, of course; both of them stony, as the Britishers put it; both of them returning to the States for bread and butter.

“Why didn’t you put up here?” she asked. “There is plenty of room.”

“Well, I thought perhaps it would be better if I stayed at the Palace.”

“Nonsense! Who cares?”

“I do.” And this time he did not smile.

“I suppose my Chinaman will be waiting in the lobby.”

“Let’s toddle along, then.”

Dennison followed her out of the tea room, his gaze focused on the back of her neck, and it was just possible to resist the mad inclination to bend and kiss the smooth, ivory-tinted skin. He was not ready to analyze the impulse for fear he might find how deep down the propellant was. A woman, young in the heart, young in the body, and old in the mind, disillusioned but not embittered, unafraid, resourceful, sometimes beautiful and sometimes plain, but always splendidly alive.

Perhaps the wisest move on his part was to avoid her companionship, invent some excuse to return by the way of Manila, pretend he had transfer orders. To spend twenty-one days on the same ship with her and to keep his head seemed a bit too strong. Had there been something substantial reaching down from the future – a dependable job – he would have gone with her joyously. But he had not a dollar beyond his accumulated pay; that would melt quickly enough when he reached the States. He was thirty; he would have to hustle to get anywhere by the time he was forty. His only hope was that back in the States they were calling for men who knew how to manage men, and he had just been discharged – or recalled for that purpose – from the best school for that. But they were calling for specialists, too, and he was a jack of all trades and master of none.

He knew something about art, something about music, something about languages; but he could not write. He was a fair navigator, but not fair enough for a paying job. He could take an automobile engine apart and reassemble it with skill, but any chauffeur could do that.

“Hadn’t we better go into the parlour?” he heard Jane asking as they passed out.

“We’ll be alone there. It will be easier for you to resist temptation, I suppose, if there isn’t any audience. Audiences are nuisances. Men have killed each other because they feared the crowd might mistake common sense for the yellow streak.”

Instantly the thought leaped into the girl’s mind: Supposing such an event lay back of this strange silence about his home and his people? She recalled the ruthless ferocity with which he had broken up a street fight between American and Japanese soldiers one afternoon in Vladivostok. Supposing he had killed someone? But she had to repudiate this theory. No officer in the United States Army could cover up anything like that.

“Come to the parlour,” she said to Ling Foo, who was smiling and kowowing.

Ling Foo picked up his blackwood box. Inwardly he was not at all pleased at the prospect of having an outsider witness the little business transaction he had in mind. Obliquely he studied the bronze mask. There was no eagerness, no curiosity, no indifference. It struck Ling Foo that there was something Oriental in this officer’s repose. But five hundred gold! Five hundred dollars in American gold – for a string of glass beads!

He set the blackwood box on a stand, opened it, and spread out jade earrings, rings, fobs, bracelets, strings. The girl’s eagerness caused Ling Foo to sigh with relief. It would be easy.

“I warned you that I should not buy anything,” said Jane, ruefully. “But even if I had the money I would not buy this kind of a jade necklace. I should want apple-green.”

“Ah!” said Ling Foo, shocked with delight. “Perhaps we can make a bargain. You have those glass beads I sold you this morning?”

“Yes, I am wearing them.”

Jane took off her mink-fur collaret, which was sadly worn.

Ling Foo’s hand went into his box again. From a piece of cotton cloth he drew forth a necklace of apple-green jade, almost perfect.

“Oh, the lovely thing!” Jane seized the necklace. “To possess something like this! Isn’t it glorious, captain?”

“Let me see it.” Dennison inspected the necklace carefully. “It is genuine. Where did you get this?”

Ling Foo shrugged.

“Long ago, during the Boxer troubles, I bought it from a sailor.”

“Ah, probably loot from the Peking palace. How much is it worth?”

Murder blazed up in Ling Foo’s heart, but his face remained smilingly bland.

“What I can get for it. But if the lady wishes I will give it to her in exchange for the glass beads. I had no right to sell the beads,” Ling Foo went on with a deprecating gesture. “I thought the man who owned them would never claim them. But he came this noon. Something belonging to his ancestor – and he demands it.”

“Trade them? Good heavens, yes! Of all things! Here!” Jane unclasped the beads and thrust them toward Ling Foo’s eager claw.

But Dennison reached out an intervening hand.

“Just a moment, Miss Norman. What’s the game?” he asked of Ling Foo.

Ling Foo silently cursed all this meddler’s ancestors from Noah down, but his face expressed only mild bewilderment.

“Game?”

“Yes. Why didn’t you offer some other bits of jade? This string is worth two or three hundred gold; and this is patently a string of glass beads, handsomely cut, but nevertheless plain glass. What’s the idea?”

“But I have explained!” protested Ling Foo. “The string is not mine. I have in honour to return it.”

“Yes, yes! That’s all very well. You could have told this lady that and offered to return her money. But a jade necklace like this one! No, Miss Norman; my advice is to keep the beads until we learn what’s going on.”

“But to let that jade go!” she wailed comically.

“The lady may keep the jade until to-morrow. She may have the night to decide. This is no hurry.”

Ling Foo saw that he had been witless indeed. The thought of raising the bid of five hundred gold to a thousand or more had bemused him, blunted his ordinary cunning.

Inwardly he cursed his stupidity. But the appearance of a witness to the transaction had set him off his balance. The officer had spoken shrewdly. The young woman would have returned the beads in exchange for the sum she had paid for them, and she would never have suspected – nor the officer, either – that the beads possessed unknown value. Still, the innocent covetousness, plainly visible in her eyes, told him that the game was not entirely played out; there was yet a dim chance. Alone, without the officer to sway her, she might be made to yield.

“The lady may wear the beads to-night if she wishes. I will return for them in the morning.”

“But this does not explain the glass beads,” said the captain.

“I will bring the real owner with me in the morning,” volunteered Ling Foo. “He sets a high value on them through sentiment. Perhaps I was hasty.”

Dennison studied the glass beads. Perhaps his suspicions were not on any too solid ground. Yet a string of jade beads like that in exchange! Something was in the air.

“Well,” said he, smiling at the appeal in the girl’s eyes, “I don’t suppose there will be any harm in keeping them overnight. We’ll have a chance to talk it over.”

Ling Foo’s plan of attack matured suddenly. He would call near midnight. He would somehow manage to get to her door. She would probably hand him the glass beads without a word of argument. Then he would play his game with the man who limped. He smiled inwardly as he put his wares back into the carved box. A thousand gold! At any rate, he would press the man into a corner. There was something about this affair that convinced Ling Foo that his noon visitor would pay high for two reasons: one, to recover the glass beads; the other, to keep out of the reach of the police.

Ling Foo considered that he was playing his advantage honestly. He hadn’t robbed or murdered anybody. A business deal had slipped into his hands and it was only logical to make the most of it. He kotowed several times on the way out of the parlour, conscious, however, of the searching eyes of the man who had balked him.

“Well!” exclaimed Jane. “What in the world do you suppose is going on?”

“Lord knows, but something is going on. You couldn’t buy a jade necklace like that under five hundred in New York. This apple-green seldom runs deep; the colour runs in veins and patches. The bulk of the quarried stone has the colour and greasy look of raw pork. No; I shouldn’t put it on just now, not until you have washed it. You never can tell. I’ll get you a germicide at the English apothecary’s. Glass beads! Humph! Hanged if I can make it out. Glass; Occidental, too; maybe worth five dollars in the States. Put it on again. It’s a great world over here. You’re always stumbling into something unique. I’m coming over to dine with you to-night.”

“Splendid!”

Jane put the jade into her hand-bag, clasped the glass beads round her neck again, and together she and Dennison walked toward the parlour door. As they reached it a tall, vigorous, elderly man with a gray pompadour started to enter. He paused, with an upward tilt of the chin, but the tilt was the result of pure astonishment. Instinctively Jane turned to her escort. His chin was tilted, too, and his expression was a match for the stranger’s. Later, recalling the tableau, which lasted but a moment, it occurred to Jane that two men, suddenly confronted by a bottomless pit, might have expressed their dumfounderment in exactly this fashion.

In the lobby she said rather breathlessly: “You knew each other and didn’t speak! Who is he?”

The answer threw her into a hypnotic state.
“My father,” said Dennison, quietly.

CHAPTER V

Father and son! For a while Jane had the sensation of walking upon unsubstantial floors, of seeing unsubstantial objects. The encounter did not seem real, human. Father and son, and they had not rushed into each other's arms! No matter what had happened in the past, there should have been some human sign other than astonishment. At the very least two or three years had separated them. Just stared for a moment, and passed on!

Hypnotism is a fact; a word or a situation will create this peculiar state of mind. Father and son! The phrase actually hypnotized Jane, and she remained in the clutch of it until hours later, which may account for the amazing events into which she permitted herself to be drawn. Father and son! Her actions were normal; her mental state was not observable; but inwardly she retained no clear recollection of the hours that intervened between this and the astonishing climax. As from a distance, she heard the voice of the son:

"Looks rum to you, no doubt. But I can't tell you the story – at least not now. It's the story of a tomfool. I had no idea he was on this side. I haven't laid eyes on him in seven years. Dinner at seven. I'll have that germicide sent up to your room."

The captain nodded abruptly and made off toward the entrance.

Jane understood. He wanted to be alone – to catch his breath, as it were. At any rate, that was a human sign that something besides astonishment was stirring within. So she walked mechanically over to the bookstall and hazily glanced at the backs of the new novels, riffled the pages of a magazine; and to this day she cannot recall whether the clerk was a man or a woman, white or brown or yellow, for a hand touched her sleeve lightly, compelling her attention. Dennison's father stood beside her.

"Pardon me, but may I ask you a question?"

Jane dropped the fur collaret in her confusion. They both stooped for it, and collided gently; but in rising the man glimpsed the string of glass beads.

"Thank you," said Jane, as she received the collaret. "What is it you wish to ask of me?"

"The name of the man you were with."

"Dennison; his own and yours – probably," she said with spirit, for she took sides in that moment, and was positive that the blame for the estrangement lay with the father. The level, unagitated voice irritated her; she resented it. He wasn't human!

"My name is Cleigh – Anthony Cleigh. Thank you."

Cleigh bowed politely and moved away. Behind that calm, impenetrable mask, however, was turmoil, kaleidoscopic, whirling too quickly for the brain to grasp or hold definite shapes. The boy here! And the girl with those beads round her throat! For the subsidence of this turmoil it was needful to have space; so Cleigh strode out of the lobby into the fading day, made his way across the bridge, and sought the Bund. He forgot all about his appointment with Cunningham.

He lit a cigar and walked on and on, oblivious of the cries of the 'ricksha boys, importunate beggars, the human currents that broke and flowed each side of him. The boy here in Shanghai! And that girl with those beads round her throat! It was as though his head had become a tom-tom in the hands of fate. The drumming made it impossible to think clearly. It was the springing up of the electric lights that brought him back to actualities. He looked at his watch.

He had been tramping up and down the Bund for two solid hours.

And now came, clearly defined, the idea for which he had been searching. He indulged in a series of rumbling chuckles. You will have heard such a sound in the forest when a stream suddenly takes on a merry mood – broken water.

To return to Jane, whom Cleigh had left in a state of growing hypnosis. She was able to act and think intelligently, but the spell lay like a fog upon her will, enervating it. She grasped the situation clearly enough; it was tremendous. She had heard of Anthony Cleigh. Who in America had not?

Father and son, and they had passed each other without a nod! Had she not been a witness to the episode, she would not have believed such a performance possible.

Through the fog burst a clear point of light. This was not the first time she had encountered Anthony Cleigh. Where had she seen him before, and under what circumstance? Later, when she was alone, she would dig into her storehouse of recollection. Certainly she must bring back that episode. One thing, she had not known him as Anthony Cleigh.

Father and son, and they had not spoken! It was this that beat persistently upon her mind. What dramatic event had created such a condition? After seven years! These two, strong mentally and physically, in a private war! She understood now how it was that Dennison had been able to tell her about Monte Carlo, the South Sea Islands, Africa, Asia; he had been his father's companion on the yacht.

Mechanically she approached the lift. In her room all her actions were more or less mechanical. From the back of her mind somewhere came the order to her hands. She took down the evening gown. This time the subtle odour of lavender left her untouched. To be beautiful, to wish that she were beautiful! Why? Her hair was lovely; her neck and arms were lovely; but her nose wasn't right, her mouth was too large, and her eyes missed being either blue or hazel. Why did she wish to be beautiful?

Always to be poor, to be hanging on the edge of things, never enough of this or that – genteel poverty. She had inherited the condition, as had her mother before her – gentlefolk who had to count the pennies. Her two sisters – really handsome girls – had married fairly well; but one lived in St. Louis and the other in Seattle, so she never saw them any more.

Tired. That was it. Tired of the war for existence; tired of the following odours of antiseptics; tired of the white walls of hospitals, the sight of pain. On top of all, the level dullness of the past, the leaden horror of these months in Siberia. She laughed brokenly. Gardens scattered all over the world, and she couldn't find one – the gardens of imagination! Romance everywhere, and she never could touch any of it!

Marriage. Outside of books, what was it save a legal contract to cook and bear children in exchange for food and clothes? The humdrum! She flung out her arms with a gesture of rage. She had been cheated, as always. She had come to this side of the world expecting colour, movement, adventure. The Orient of the novels she had read – where was it? Drab skies, drab people, drab work! And now to return to America, to exchange one drab job for another! Nadir, always nadir, never any zenith!

Her bitter cogitations were interrupted by a knock on the door. She threw on her kimono and answered. A yellow hand thrust a bottle toward her. It would be the wash for the jade. She emptied the soap dish, cleaned it, poured in the germicide, and dropped the jade necklace into the liquid. She left it there while she dressed.

Dennison Cleigh, returning to the States to look for a job! Nothing she had ever read seemed quite so fantastic. She paused in her dressing to stare at some inner thought which she projected upon the starred curtain of the night beyond her window. Supposing they had wanted to fling themselves into each other's arms and hadn't known how? She had had a glimpse or two of Dennison's fierce pride. Naturally he had inherited it from his father. Supposing they were just stupid rather than vengeful? Poor, foolish human beings!

She proceeded with her toilet. Finishing that, she cleansed the jade necklace with soap and water, then realized that she would not be able to wear it, because the string would be damp. So she put on the glass beads instead – another move by the Madonna of the Pagan. Jane Norman was to have her fling.

Dennison was in the lobby waiting for her. He gave a little gasp of delight as he beheld her. Of whom and of what did she remind him? Somebody he had seen, somebody he had read about? For the present it escaped him. Was she handsome? He could not say; but there was that in her face that was always pulling his glance and troubling him for the want of knowing why.

The way she carried herself among men had always impressed him. Fearless and friendly, and with deep understanding, she created respect wherever she went. Men, toughened and coarsened by danger and hardship, somehow understood that Jane Norman was not the sort to make love to because one happened to be bored. On the other hand, there was something in her that called to every man, as a candle calls to the moth; only there were no burnt wings; there seemed to be some invisible barrier that kept the circling moths beyond the zone of incineration.

Was there fire in her? He wondered. That copper tint in her hair suggested it. Magnificent! And what the deuce was the colour of her eyes? Sometimes there was a glint of topaz, or cornflower sapphire, gray agate; they were the most tantalizing eyes he had ever gazed into.

“Hungry?” he greeted her.

“For fourteen months!”

“Do you know what?”

“What?”

“I’d give a year of my life for a club steak and all the regular fixings.”

“That isn’t fair! You’ve gone and spoiled my dinner.”

“Wishy-washy chicken! How I hate tin cans! Pancakes and maple syrup! What?”

“Sliced tomatoes with sugar and vinegar!”

“You don’t mean that!”

“I do! I don’t care how plebeian it is. Bread and butter and sliced tomatoes with sugar and vinegar – better than all the ice cream that ever was! Childhood ambrosia! For mercy’s sake, let’s get in before all the wings are gone!”

They entered the huge dining room with its pattering Chinese boys – entered it laughing – while all the time there was at bottom a single identical thought – the father.

Would they see him again? Would he be here at one of the tables? Would a break come, or would the affair go on eternally?

“I know what it is!” he cried, breaking through the spell.

“What?”

“Ever read ‘Phra the Phœnician’?”

“Why, yes. But what is what?”

“For days I’ve been trying to place you. You’re the British heroine!”

She thought for a moment to recall the physical attributes of this heroine.

“But I’m not red-headed!” she denied, indignantly.

“But it is! It is the most beautiful head of hair I ever laid eyes on.”

“And that is the beginning and the end of me,” she returned with a little catch in her voice.

The knowledge bore down upon her that her soul was thirsty for this kind of talk. She did not care whether he was in earnest or not.

“The beginning, but not the end of you. Your eyes are fine, too. They keep me wondering all the time what colour they really are.”

“That’s very nice of you.”

“And the way you carry yourself!”

“Good gracious!”

“You look as if you had come down from Olympus and had lost the way back.”

“Captain, you’re a dear! I’ve just been wild to have a man say foolish things to me.” She knew that she might play with this man; that he would never venture across the line. “Men have said foolish things to me, but always when I was too busy to bother. To-night I haven’t anything in this wide world to do but listen. Go on.”

He laughed, perhaps a little ruefully.

“Is there any fire in you, I wonder?”

“Well?” – tantalizing.

“Honestly, I should like to see you in a rage. I’ve been watching you for weeks, and have found myself irritated by that perpetual calm of yours. That day of the riot you stood on the curb as unconcerned as though you had been witnessing a movie.”

“It is possible that it is the result of seeing so much pain and misery. I have been a machine too long. I want to be thrust into the middle of some fairy story before I die. I have never been in love, in a violent rage. I haven’t known anything but work and an abiding discontent. Red hair – ”

“But it really isn’t red. It’s like the copper beech in the sunshine, full of glowing embers.”

“Are you a poet?”

“On my word, I don’t know what I am.”

“There is fire enough in you. The way you tossed about our boys and the Japs!”

“In the blood. My father and I used to dress for dinner, but we always carried the stone axe under our coats. We were both to blame, but only a miracle will ever bring us together. I’m sorry I ran into him. It brings the old days crowding back.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh, I’ll survive! Somewhere there’s a niche for me, and sooner or later I’ll find it.”

“He stopped me in the lobby after you left. Wanted to know what name you were using. I told him rather bluntly – and he went on. Something in his voice – made me want to strike him!”

Dennison balanced a fork on a finger.

“Funny old world, isn’t it?”

“Very. But I’ve seen him somewhere before. Perhaps in a little while it will come back... What an extraordinarily handsome man!”

“Where?” – with a touch of brusqueness.

“Sitting at the table on your left.”

The captain turned. The man at the other table caught his eye, smiled, and rose. As he approached Jane noticed with a touch of pity that the man limped oddly. His left leg seemed to slue about queerly just before it touched the floor.

“Well, well! Captain Cleigh!”

Dennison accepted the proffered hand, but coldly.

“On the way back to the States?”

“Yes.”

“The *Wanderer* is down the river. I suppose you’ll be going home on her?”

“My orders prevent that.”

“Run into the old boy?”

“Naturally,” with a wry smile at Jane. “Miss Norman, Mr. Cunningham. Where the shark is, there will be the pilot fish.”

The stranger turned his eyes toward Jane’s. The beauty of those dark eyes startled her. Fire opals! They seemed to dig down into her very soul, as if searching for something. He bowed gravely and limped back to his table.

“I begin to understand,” was Dennison’s comment.

“Understand what?”

“All this racket about those beads. My father and this man Cunningham in the same town generally has significance. It is eight years since I saw Cunningham. Of course I could not forget his face, but it’s rather remarkable that he remembered mine. He is – if you tear away the romance – nothing more or less than a thief.”

“A thief?” – astonishedly.

“Not the ordinary kind; something of a prince of thieves. He makes it possible – he and his ilk – for men like my father to establish private museums. And now I’m going to ask you to do me a favour. It’s just a hunch. Hide those beads the moment you reach your room. They are yours as

much as any one's, and they may bring you a fancy penny – if my hunch is worth anything. Hang that pigtail, for getting you mixed up in this! I don't like it.”

Jane's hand went slowly to her throat; and even as her fingers touched the beads, now warm from contact, she became aware of something electrical which drew her eyes compellingly toward the man with the face of Ganymede and the limp of Vulcan. Four times she fought in vain, during dinner, that drawing, burning glance – and it troubled her. Never before had a man's eye forced hers in this indescribable fashion. It was almost as if the man had said, “Look at me! Look at me!”

After coffee she decided to retire, and bade Dennison good-night. Once in her room she laid the beads on the dresser and sat down by the window to recast the remarkable ending of this day. From the stars to the room, from the room to the stars, her glance roved uneasily. Had she fallen upon an adventure? Was Dennison's theory correct regarding the beads? She rose and went to the dresser, inspecting the beads carefully. Positively glass! That Anthony Cleigh should be seeking a string of glass beads seemed arrant nonsense.

She hung the beads on her throat and viewed the result in the mirror. It was then that her eye met a golden glint. She turned to see what had caused it, and was astonished to discover on the floor near the molding that poor Chinaman's brass hand warmer. She picked it up and turned back the jigsawed lid. The receptacle was filled with the ash of punk and charcoal.

There came a knock on the door.

CHAPTER VI

Now, then, the further adventures of Ling Foo of Woosung Road. He was an honest Chinaman. He would beat you down if he were buying, or he would overcharge you if he were selling. There was nothing dishonest in this; it was legitimate business. He was only shrewd, not crooked. But on this day he came into contact with a situation that tried his soul, and tricked him into overplaying his hand.

That morning he had returned to his shop in a contented frame of mind. He stood clear of the tragedy of the night before. That had never happened; he had dreamed it. Of course he would be wondering whether or not the man had died.

When Ling Foo went forth with his business in his pack he always closed the shop. Here in upper Woosung Road it would not have paid him to hire a clerk. His wife, obedient creature though she was, spoke almost no pidgin – business – English; and besides that, she was a poor bargainer.

It was hard by noon when he let himself into the shop. The first object he sought was his metal pipe. Two puffs, and the craving was satisfied. He took up his counting rack and slithered the buttons back and forth. He had made three sales at the Astor and two at the Palace, which was fair business, considering the times.

A shadow fell across the till top. Ling Foo raised his slanted eyes. His face was like a graven Buddha's, but there was a crackling in his ears as of many fire-crackers. There he stood – the man with the sluing walk! Ling Foo still wore a queue, so his hair could not very well stand on end.

“You speak English.”

It was not a question; it was a statement.

Ling Foo shrugged.

“Can do.”

“Cut out the pidgin. Your neighbour says you speak English fluently. At Moy's tea-house restaurant they say that you lived in California for several years.”

“Twelve,” said Ling Foo with a certain dry humour.

“Why didn't you admit me last night?”

“Shop closed.”

“Where is it?”

“Where is what?” asked the merchant.

“The string of glass beads you found on the floor last night.”

A sense of disaster rolled over the Oriental. Had he been overhasty in ridding himself of the beads? Patience! Wait a bit! Let the stranger open the door to the mystery.

“Glass beads?” he repeated, ruminatively.

“I will give you ten gold for them.”

Ha! Now they were getting somewhere. Ten gold! Then those devil beads had some worth outside a jeweller's computations? Ling Foo smiled and spread his yellow hands.

“I haven't them.”

“Where are they?”

The Oriental loaded his pipe and fired it.

“Where is the man who stumbled in here last night?” he countered.

“His body is probably in the Yang-tse by now,” returned Cunningham, grimly.

He knew his Oriental. He would have to frighten this Chinaman badly, or engage his cupidity to a point where resistance would be futile.

There was a devil brooding over his head. Ling Foo felt it strangely. His charms were in the far room. He would have to fend off the devil without material aid, and that was generally a hopeless job. With that twist of Oriental thought which will never be understood by the Occidental, Ling Foo laid down his campaign.

“I found it, true. But I sold it this morning.”

“For how much?”

“Four Mex.”

Cunningham laughed. It was actually honest laughter, provoked by a lively sense of humour.

“To whom did you sell it, and where can I find the buyer?”

Ling Foo picked up the laughter, as it were, and gave his individual quirk to it.

“I see,” said Cunningham, gravely.

“So?”

“Get that necklace back for me and I will give you a hundred gold.”

“Five hundred.”

“You saw what happened last night.”

“Oh, you will not beat in my head,” Ling Foo declared, easily. “What is there about this string of beads that makes it worth a hundred gold – and life worth nothing?”

“Very well,” said Cunningham, resignedly. “I am a secret agent of the British Government. That string of glass beads is the key to a code relating to the uprisings in India. The loss of it will cost a great deal of money and time. Bring it back here this afternoon, and I will pay down five hundred gold.”

“I agree,” replied Ling Foo, tossing his pipe into the alcove. “But no one must follow me. I do not trust you. There is nothing to prevent you from robbing me in the street and refusing to pay me. And where will you get five hundred gold? Gold has vanished. Even the leaf has all but disappeared.”

Cunningham dipped his hand into a pocket, and magically a dozen double eagles rolled and vibrated upon the counter, sending into Ling Foo’s ears that music so peculiar to gold. Many days had gone by since he had set his gaze upon the yellow metal. His hand reached down – only to feel – but not so quickly as the white hand, which scooped up the coin trickily, with the skill of a prestidigitator.

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