

Fenn George Manville

# Stan Lynn: A Boy's Adventures in China



George Fenn

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### Chapter One

#### “Can you use a Sword?”

“Yes! What is it?”

“Hist, boy! Jump up and dress.”

“Oh, it’s you, father!” said the newly aroused sleeper, slipping out of bed – or, rather, off his bed, for the heat of an Eastern China night had made him dispense with bedclothes.

He made a frantic dash at his trousers, feeling confused and strange in the darkness, and hardly knowing whether he was dreaming or awake, as he whispered:

“Is anything the matter?”

There was no reply, and the lad became conscious of the fact that his father had passed out of the room after awakening him.

Dressing in the darkness is not pleasant. Buttons have a habit of making for the wrong holes, socks and collars and ties of slipping off the bedside chair and hiding underneath anywhere; while if it is very dark, elbows come in contact with pieces of furniture, and the back of the hair-brush is liable to come rap against the skull, instead of the yielding, bristly front.

Stanley Lynn went through divers experiences of this kind as he hurried on his clothes, wondering what was the matter the while, and coming to the conclusion that Uncle Jeff must have been taken ill and wanted the doctor.

The lad had just come to this decision when a faint click told him that the door had been reopened – proof of which came in the shape of a whisper:

“Dressed, boy?”

“Yes, father. Is Uncle Jeff ill?”

“Hi? No, my boy. But be very quiet; they don’t know that we are stirring.”

“Who don’t, father?”

“Bah! Don’t ask questions, boy,” said his father in an impatient whisper. “There, there! of course you want to know. Here, Stan, can you fight?”

“A little, father,” said the boy in a tone full of surprise. “I had two or three sets-to at school.”

“Pooh! Absurd! Look here, boy; your uncle Jeff was alarmed by sounds down by the warehouse entry, and looking out cautiously, he saw men at work by the big doors.”

“Robbers, father?” said the boy excitedly.

“Yes, robbers – river pirates.”

“And you want me to go for the police?”

“No, boy; I want you to help us to keep the wretches at bay. We shall be only three with you, and we can’t afford to reduce our numbers to two. Can you load and fire a pistol?”

“Yes, father; Tom Dicks and I used to go rabbit-shooting with one – ”

“Then you ought to be able to hit a man if you can shoot rabbits.”

The thought flashed across the boy’s brain that, though he and his fellow-pupil had gone shooting on the Clovelly cliffs times enough, they had never once hit a rabbit; but there was no time to communicate this fact to his father. “And besides,” he thought, “I dare say firing the pistol will be enough; the noise will frighten the men away.”

“Can you use a sword, Stan?”

“Yes, father. You know I had fencing lessons.”

“Bah!” muttered his elder impatiently. “Poking about a square skewer with a leather-covered button at the end! I mean a service sword – cut and thrust. There! you must try. Catch hold and come along. Loaded, mind.”

The last words were uttered as the boy felt the butt of a revolver thrust into one hand, the handle of a sword into the other.

“Tread softly, boy,” whispered his father. “This way.”

Stanley Lynn felt more confused than ever, for he had only returned from England two days before, after six years' absence and work at a big school; and the home he had now come to in Hai-Hai was a very much larger and more important place than that he had quitted at Canton years before. Everything had seemed strange, even by day, in the big, roomy, lightly built place connected with the great warehouse and wharf, while the lower part of the former building was used as offices and sampling-rooms. He had not half mastered the intricacies of the place by the previous evening, while now in the darkness – woke up from a deep sleep – everything seemed puzzling in the extreme.

“Got him?” said a familiar voice out of the darkness.

“Yes.”

“That's right. Don't be alarmed, Stan. The rascals are breaking into the office, but I think if we keep up a little revolver-shooting they'll soon go back to their boats.”

“Eh?” cried Stanley's father. “Then they came in boats?”

“I've not seen them; but of course they came in boats. Hist!”

There was no need for the warning, for all held their breath and listened to a low, scratching, tearing noise suggestive of some tool being used to break open a door.

“They're at the big side-entry,” said Stanley's father.

“No; it's the little office door, I'm sure,” said the gentleman whom Stanley's father addressed as Jeff. “Now then, what shall we do? Go down and fire through the door, or give them a dose out of one of these windows?”

“It all comes of building a place so far from help,” said Stanley's father, ignoring his brother's question.

“Don't grumble, man,” was the reply. “Why, in another year we shall be quite shut in.”

“Will that save us now?” said Stanley's father bitterly.

“No, Noll, old fellow,” said his brother cheerfully. “We shall have to save ourselves this time – independently. – Like fighting, Stan?” he continued, turning to the boy.

“No, uncle; hate it,” said the lad laconically.

“Ha! I dare say this is not the only time you will be called upon to do things you don't like. – Now, now, what is it to be – downstairs, and a few shots through the panels?”

“I suppose so – Take care, Stan; they are savage beasts to deal with.”

“Yes, the brutes!” said Uncle Jeff; “but he need not expose himself. We'll do the work if he hands us the tools.”

“That I shan't!” muttered the boy, gripping sword and pistol tightly. “Father doesn't wish me to do that.”

“Come along,” said Uncle Jeff. “Shall I lead, Noll?”

“Yes; go on. – Take care how you come, Stan. And mind this, boy: if the enemy do begin to fire, throw yourself flat on your face at once.”

“Yes, father,” was the reply; and the next minute, as Stan judged, they were standing in a wide passage, listening to the scraping, tearing noise, which sounded dull and smothered, till all at once, after a faint rustling which indicated that Uncle Jeff had unlocked, unbarred, unbolted, and thrown open a door, the cracking and tearing sounded quite loud.

“Bless 'em!” whispered Uncle Jeff, “they mean silk. Never mind; we'll give them lead instead. Be ready! Silence! They don't know we're here.”

As he spoke Uncle Jeff moved towards the spot from which the noise came, and Stan felt his arm grasped above the elbow by his father and guided in one particular direction till he touched his uncle in the dark.

In the brief moments which ensued, Stan, now fully awake not only to what was going on but to the danger of his position, seemed to see a group of rough-looking, semi-savage Chinese – with whose stolid, half-cunning, half-treacherous countenances he had become acquainted during his short sojourn in port – standing just outside the office door, looking on while three or four were plying crowbars and trying to prise open the stout door, which seemed to be bravely resisting their efforts, till all at once there was a sharp crack and the falling inside of a piece of wood.

As the wood fell with a soft, clattering sound all became silent, the attacking party evidently listening for the occupants of the house to raise an alarm, or at all events to make some sign.

But no one inside stirred until, after quite ten minutes – which seemed to Stan like sixty – the cracking and breaking of wood was heard again.

Then Uncle Jeff turned to his brother and whispered:

“Hold your hand. I’ll try what a shot by way of warning will do. If we fire and wound the wretches they will be furious, and we are very weak.”

Stanley’s father whispered back two words which did not in the least accord with the position of the listeners, for he said:

“Very well.”

The next moment Stan saw a bright flash of light cut the darkness, showing by its diagonal direction that the pistol had been fired towards the ceiling.

The report sounded loud, and was followed once more by perfect silence.

The lad’s heart gave a leap, and a feeling of profound relief and satisfaction came over him.

“Frightened them away!” he said to himself; and the horrible thoughts which had attacked him like a nightmare, of the atrocities of which the marauding Chinese were reported to have been guilty, were dying slowly away, when the lad’s spirits sank again to zero, and he felt as cold, for all at once a savage burst of yells arose, followed by a fierce attack upon the door. All attempt at concealment was now at an end, and the attempt became perfectly open.

“Won’t this bring help, father?” said Stan in a voice that sounded rather choking.

“No,” said Uncle Jeff shortly. “People will think it is some Chinese row, and by the time the right sort of help comes it will be too late if we don’t take care. – Now then, Oliver, it means business. We must hold the place till help does come. Make ready, and let’s give them three shots through the door. I don’t suppose it will do any harm to them, but it may scare them off. Now then! – You will fire too, Stan?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Quick, then! Aim straight at the spot where the noise is loudest. Ready! – Fire!”

Three revolver-shots sounded almost like one, and this was followed by a low, fierce snarl. The beating and breaking of the woodwork ceased, and there was an angry, passionate cry, with a deep, hurried growling as of many voices.

“Some one hit,” said Stanley’s father.

“And serve the wretch right!” cried Uncle Jeff fiercely. “Come, Oliver, old fellow, it is no time for being squeamish; it’s our lives or theirs.”

“Yes,” said Stanley’s father firmly. “Forgive me if I had a few minutes’ hesitation. We must fight, Jeff, and do our best. Help must come at last.”

“But can’t I go and fetch help, father – uncle?”

“No, boy – no,” said his uncle impatiently. “Do you want to be hacked to pieces?”

“No, uncle. They wouldn’t see me in the dark.”

“Perhaps not, boy, but they’d feel you. There are dozens of them, and you may rest assured that they have surrounded the place. Help must come from without. All we can do is to hold out and fight as savagely as they do.”

“Hush! what’s that?” said Stanley’s father sharply.

“I can hear it: hammering somewhere at the back,” said Stanley excitedly.

“It’s what I expected,” said his uncle. “They are trying to break in there. Let’s give them a couple of rounds, and then get out of here and barricade the door.”

“I don’t like giving up till they force a way in,” said Stanley’s father; and the lad felt that he was right, until his uncle spoke.

“Are we fit to meet such an onslaught as they will make?” he said angrily. “They’ll rush in with spear and sword – you know their reckless way. We should be overpowered at once. Come, Oliver, leave all to me. Firing is our only chance.”

“Yes,” said Stanley’s father. “Give the word.”

It was given, and another little volley was delivered, filling the office with light for a moment, and the dense, dank smell of burnt gunpowder for long enough.

This volley did more mischief, for much of the woodwork of the panels had been cut away; but the result was only to enrage the attacking party more and more, making them hack furiously at the door, and with such effect that the proximity of the sounds indicated that it could not be long before it was broken right away.

“Be ready for the retreat,” said Uncle Jeff. “Can you find your way, Stan?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Then, when I give the word, pass through first and stand aside while I bolt and bar the inner door. – Ah! it’s time to move. Now then, fire, and then dash through into the lobby.”

It was none too soon, for all at once, after a thundering crack or two, the remains of the door gave way. The marauders rushed in with a yell, but to be met with another little volley; and as they came on, yelling savagely, and making a rush for the position occupied by the defenders, as indicated by the flashes of the revolvers, yet another volley was fired, checking them for the moment, and giving Uncle Jeff time to slam the inner door in their faces, and to lock and bolt it rapidly in the black darkness.

“There!” he said; “that will take them some time to get through, and every minute is of value now.”

Stan could hear the enemy raging round the office they had just quitted; and then, after a little shouting, the shape of the door became visible, marked out as it was by faint lines of light, while from the keyhole came a vivid ray which cut through the black passage and formed a dull spot upon the wall at the end.

“Let’s go up now,” said Uncle Jeff, “and do a little firing from one of the upstairs windows.”

“Do you mean to come down here again?” asked Stanley’s father.

“Not while these ruffians are near. – What do you say, Stan?”

“It would be like throwing our lives away, uncle.”

“Quite right, my boy. No; we will lock the door at the top of the stairs and then barricade it. We shall be pretty safe then from attack made below.”

“They will try to reach us by one of the first-floor windows.”

“Yes; but they will only be able to come up one at a time, and so long as the ammunition lasts I think we can keep them back. – Why, Stan, my lad, this is a queer experience for you,” continued Uncle Jeff as, taking everything quite coolly, he helped his brother to lock and carefully secure what was literally the front-door of their dwelling, although it was entered by means of a flight of steps, and was on the first floor of the newly built house.

“Yes, uncle, it is strange,” said the boy quietly: “but it seems very horrible for you and my father.”

“Eh?” said Uncle Jeff dryly. “Well, yes, it is rather horrible, but mostly so for the Chinamen. There! let’s get to one of the windows, and – ”

“Yes, uncle – quick! That one to the left. Oh, pray make haste!”

“Why?” said Stan’s father, impressed by his son’s sudden display of excitement.

“I saw the top of a ladder faintly showing against the sky.”

As the lad finished speaking, proof of his assertion came in the shape of a little shower of splintered glass driven out of one of the window-sashes to fall tinkling into the dark room.

Almost at the same moment Stan obeyed the first dictates of his common-sense as called forth by the emergency; for, without waiting to be told, he raised the pistol he held and took a quick aim in what he considered to be the right direction.

A loud yell was the result, and as Stan’s father rushed to the window to follow up the shot with another, he held his hand, and stood looking down into the dimly seen group below. He was just in time to make out faintly the top of a ladder describing an arch above the crowd beneath, while, clinging to it and crying for help, there, like a bundle of clothes, was the figure of the man who had first attempted the escalade.

Stanley caught a glimpse of the figure too, and rushed to the window, just in time to see the crowd in motion and the luckless, already wounded Chinaman come heavily down among his friends.

“Will they try again, father?” whispered Stan, as if in fear of his words being heard through the broken window.

“Unless help comes,” was the reply, given in a tone which seemed to Stanley to suggest that the enemy would be sure to return, and before long.

“But if they do try to raise the ladder again, Stan, my boy,” said Uncle Jeff cheerily, “why, you must show your skill with the pistol once more. Why, boy, I couldn’t have shot like that!”

“Jeff,” said Stan’s father hurriedly, “I can hear them busy below.”

“Trying to get up? Well, they have got their work cut out. But, hullo! what’s that? Smashing up the office furniture.”

“Yes; that’s it, uncle. Listen; you can hear it quite plainly.”

“Poor, child-like beggars!” said Uncle Jeff contemptuously. “How I should like to have the lot trapped by a company of foot, and then see them thoroughly caned like schoolboys! Yes, they are smashing things up pretty well. Bad job, Oliver, for we shall have to furnish the whole office again, and rebuild it, too, with the rest of the place.”

“Oh, not so bad as that, Jeff!” said Stanley’s father.

“Yes, my lad; you may make up your mind for the worst. Don’t you grasp why they are breaking up the things?”

“Fire?” cried Stanley excitedly.

“Right, my lad. They’re going to burn us out.”

Stanley’s father stamped heavily upon the floor in the impotent rage he felt.

“What’s to be done, Jeff?” he said. “They’ll beat us now.”

“Fire for fire, brother Oliver,” said Uncle Jeff through his teeth. – “Here, Stan, my lad, don’t you begin thinking that your uncle is a bloodthirsty wretch, because all he asks for here is to be let alone to make his living and a bit to spare. – Do you hear, sir?”

“Yes, uncle,” said Stan, who had more ears for the sounds below than for his uncle’s words.

“That’s right, then. The Chinese can run away if they like, but if they don’t they must take their chance of getting bullets through them. – Now, Oliver, old lad, set the example. We can’t stand here to be roasted to death, for it would be very unpleasant; so shoot as many of the wretches as you can. – And you, Stan, my boy, help him. Ah, look out! They’re raising the ladder again.”

Both Stan and his father saw the peril at the same moment, and they rushed forward, Stan following his father’s example and beating out a pane of glass with the butt of his revolver so as to make room to fire.

They were invisible to the attacking party, but the noise made by the falling glass directed the attention of the mob to their presence, and they were saluted by a savage burst of yelling and a shower of missiles, which did no more harm than to destroy a pane or two of glass.

It was different with the fire the enemy drew: for, feeling that they were regularly fighting for their lives, and growing desperate, Stan and his father watched the moving ladder, whose end came with a sharp rap against the sill of the window. As soon as the upper part was darkened by the figure of a man, Oliver Lynn fired, there was a yell, and the man stood fast. But another rushed up to his support, and this time Stanley fired. The new arrival let go his hold of the ladder-sides, jerked himself back, and fell headlong on to the people watching his progress.

But the sight of their falling friends only enraged the attacking party, and another man or two rushed up the ladder, just as Uncle Jeff seized and threw the window wide-open, waited his time, and feeling more than seeing that the men were crowding up, stepped out on the sill, seized the top of the ladder, and raising it up a little, made one tremendous heave and thrust, forcing it outward till it was perfectly perpendicular. Then he gave a final thrust and sent it outwards, the mob below yelling, and some of those on the rungs of the ladder beginning to leap off before it went over backwards with a loud crash, but unfortunately taking Uncle Jeff with it, for he found it impossible to recover his balance.

## Chapter Two

### “Keep up the Firing.”

“Gone!” gasped Stan as he looked down into the seething darkness.

“Don’t stand talking, boy!” cried his father angrily. “Fire – fire to keep the enemy off. Be careful – be quick!”

He set the example, keeping up a steady delivery of shots from his revolver, Stan giving shot for shot, but with his hand trembling so that he could not take aim. Then all at once, to his intense delight, the firing seemed to be answered from out of the darkness below, but against the enemy, it being plain after the first shot that Uncle Jeff had regained his feet and had joined in the pistol practice with such effect that for the moment the enemy took to flight.

“Keep up the firing,” shouted Uncle Jeff from out of the darkness; and his order was obeyed, while the speaker seized the ladder lying upon the ground and succeeded in raising it erect and then letting the top lean against the window.

In another minute the sill was reached; and this time, being more upon his guard, Uncle Jeff succeeded in maintaining his balance as he thrust the ladder away again, for it to fall with a heavy, splintering crash which broke it quite in two, just as the mob of assailants came rushing back again, ready to attack the besieged with all their might.

“Howl away, you ruffians!” cried Uncle Jeff as he climbed in again, for just then a yell of disappointment arose from the enemy as they found the ladder broken. But directly after they had seized the longer piece and reared that up, to begin mounting afresh; but, to the great relief of the attacked, it was too short, and the first man could only hold on by the window-sill and try to drag himself up.

He managed to get a good hold with one hand, while with the other, from which a great knife hung by means of a piece of cord, he, after gripping his weapon, smashed in the lower panes of glass, and then began hacking at the window-bars.

“Stand back, Stan,” cried Uncle Jeff, “or he’ll get a cut at you with that knife. Do you hear?”

Stan heard, but too late, for in his excitement he had seized his revolver by the muzzle so as to use the butt like a club, and rushed forward to the rugged opening.

He could see the big Chinaman as he hacked away, but for the moment the man did not see him. Then, with an angry snarl, he threw back the blade of his heavy knife till the top of it touched his shoulder, and struck with all his might at the lad’s unguarded head.

For the moment it seemed as if Stan’s career was at an end. But first blow in fighting means a great deal, and certainly it did here, for the butt of the pistol came down with a crash on the fingers of the Chinaman’s left hand, which was snatched away completely numbed. The cut from the knife fell short, its deliverer dropping sharply downward on to the man close below him, making him give way in turn, and sending the weight of two men upon the third, who involuntarily joined in loading the fourth, who in turn helped to sweep the fifth from the ladder, which the next moment was quite clear.

“Bravo, Stan!” cried Uncle Jeff. – “Now, Oliver, old lad, let’s get the dining-table up edgeways against the window and fire from behind it – Quick! – That’s the way; let it rest with its legs sideways on the floor.”

The heavy wood table made a splendid breastwork, though as soon as it was reared up across the window it shut out half the dim light, which was just enough to enable the defenders to see their way. And now, in obedience to Uncle Jeff’s hurriedly issued command, exhausted cartridge-cases were withdrawn, and the barrels rested upon the edge of the table so as to steady the aim the next time a head appeared.

“What’s to be the next thing?” said Uncle Jeff.

“Fire,” said his brother grimly.

“I hope not,” whispered Stan; “but they’re chopping again below. Hark! you can hear them plainly.”

“Yes, it sounds bad, my boy; but help must come soon. I say, Stan.”

“Yes, uncle.”

“I thought you were done for, and I hardly know now how you managed to escape.”

“It was close, uncle; but I’m afraid I must have crushed the man’s fingers horribly.”

“Poor fellow!” said Uncle Jeff dryly.

“Here, Jeff,” said his brother hoarsely; “do you smell that?”

“Oh yes, I can smell it; I did a minute ago. Look! that’s smoke rising past the window.”

“Yes, I thought it was,” said Stan huskily; “but I was in hopes that it was from our firing.”

“No,” said Uncle Jeff; “it’s from their firing, my lad; and with such an ally we shall be done for. – Oliver, old fellow, we must beat a retreat.”

“How can we? The wretches are at back and front.”

“Yes, it is awkward, Oliver, but we shall not be able to stay here long.”

“We must make for the next floor.”

“All the farther to jump when the bad time comes.”

“Look out, father! – They’re coming up again, uncle.”

The table proved invaluable now, for as the enemy made a fresh attack, swarming up the broken ladder, shots were delivered steadily, and the blows struck by the savage wretches fell vainly upon the stout, hard wood.

Three men fell headlong, but their places were taken directly by others, who were maddened by disappointment, and made the table quiver with the blows they managed to strike with the clumsy axes and swords they bore, till the sharp crack of one of the revolvers tumbled the savage wretches back upon their comrades below, who uttered a chorus of savage yells and threats at every fresh mishap.

But still they came on, till after four final discharges there was a sharp, cracking sound below; glass had evidently been shivered in one of the lower windows, and a rush of flame illumined the smoke that now floated up thickly, while for the first time the besieged had a view of their fierce enemies who paused from their attack and stood back watching the progress of the mischief they had done.

“Don’t show yourselves in the light, either of you,” said Uncle Jeff, doing at once that which he had forbidden.

“Then don’t you!” cried Stan’s father. “Keep back, man – keep back!”

“Directly, old fellow,” said his brother. “I only want to see what they are about to do next. They’re busy about something.”

“I can see,” cried Stan excitedly from where he crouched with one eye over the edge of the table. “They’re carrying the men who have fallen away out of the light.”

“What!” cried Uncle Jeff. “Why, so they are – thirty of them at least, hard at work. Well, they have some humanity in them after all.”

“It’s almost too good to be true, Jeff,” said Stan’s father, “but I believe they are giving us up for a bad job.”

“You’re right, Oliver,” was the excited reply. “That’s it; they find us too hard nuts to crack.”

“They feel that the fire will bring help, and that it is time to be off. Come and help to remove the barricade; we must escape before the fire takes a firmer hold.”

“Wait a moment, both of you,” cried Uncle Jeff. “Yes. Hurrah in a whisper. Don’t shout. It’s all right; they are making off, and we are saved.”

“You forget the fire, Jeff,” said Stanley’s father sadly.

“Not I. Let’s hurry down and see what mischief has been done.”

“No, no,” cried Stan excitedly as the glow from beneath increased; “they are coming back again.”

“What!” cried Uncle Jeff. “No, you are wrong this time; it is a fresh mob from the busy part of the town, coming to see what plunder they can get from the fire.”

“Yes, I think you’re right,” said Stanley’s father – “come to see our ruin.”

“Who’s that talking about ruin?” said Uncle Jeff scornfully as, with Stan’s help, he took down the barricade and unfastened bar and bolt. “Let’s see what mischief the fire has done before we talk of that.”

“Think of saving our lives,” said Stan’s father excitedly. “Never mind the rest.”

“But I do mind the rest,” cried Uncle Jeff. “Come along, Stan. Never say die! I don’t believe the fire has had time to take much hold.”

“What are you going to do?” cried Stan’s father.

“Make a dash for the outer office, where the buckets hang. They’re all full.”

“For heaven’s sake take care! Don’t run any risks.”

Uncle Jeff did not seem to hear him, but ran down the stairs, to find the lobby full of smoke. His first act was to dash out the panes of glass in a fanlight to admit the fresh air, while directly after he threw open the door, whose fastenings Stan had by his instructions loosened.

“Keep back,” cried Stan’s father; “it is madness.”

“Bah!” said Uncle Jeff, who had a better view of the state of affairs. “Take a long breath and follow me.”

In his excitement Stan had just one glimpse of the office interior, where towards the window a great bonfire-like heap was blazing away, licking the side about the opening, and forming a column of fire and smoke which went wreathing and darting out, many-tongued, to rise high in the night air, spreading out towards the wharf, and making the water of the river beyond gleam, while a busy hum of many voices greeted them from beyond the flame and smoke.

“We can do nothing, Jeff,” cried Stan’s father; “only escape for our lives. It is madness to try and do anything.”

“Then let’s be mad, old fellow. – Bah! Nonsense! The draught carries all the fire from us, and we can breathe easily. Rouse up, man!”

“I am roused up,” cried Stan’s father angrily; “but I must think of my boy.”

“Don’t!” roared Uncle Jeff; “he’s big enough to think for himself. – Now, Stan, out through this door and get a bucket of water. Do as I do. – Come on, Oliver.”

“But the ceiling’s catching. The place will be all in flames directly.”

“Of course it will if we stand still and watch it. Come on.”

He led the way through the door before him, making a sudden rush past the blazing heap, and the other two followed, each lifting down a bucket of water from the dozen hanging in a row on the pegs where Uncle Jeff’s foresight had had them placed ready for such an emergency. As soon as he had seized his pair of buckets he stepped back through the brightly illuminated door; and as Stan quickly followed him, the two stood together, the boy feeling the scorching glow of the flames upon his face.

“Let me do the throwing, Stan,” said Uncle Jeff calmly, as he set one bucket on the floor. “Stand back, and look out for the choking steam.”

Then, with a clever whirl of the bucket, he sent its contents in a curve, spreading as it were so much golden liquid metal over the flames, a good sprinkling striking the woodwork on both sides of the window; and in an instant the sharp hissing of the encounter between fire and water was accompanied by a change, the fire still blaring furiously, but a great cloud of steam being formed, the odour of which struck Stan as abominable.

“Bravo!” cried Uncle Jeff. “Smell the hydrogen, my lad?”

As he spoke he set down his empty bucket, took up the full one at his feet, and scattered its contents in the same way and with a similar effect to that which had preceded it.

“Now,” he cried, “set down your two buckets, my lad; take back my empty ones, and bring two more. – Set yours down too, Oliver,” he continued coolly, “and do as the boy does – unless you want to play fireman.”

“No, no; go on,” said Stan’s father. “Splendid, my dear boy! Go on.”

“Yes, I’ll go on,” said Uncle Jeff coolly; “only one mustn’t waste a drop.”

As he spoke he scattered the contents of both Stan’s buckets, and then those of his brother, so deftly over the blazing woodwork that by the time the first six had been emptied the heart of Stan’s father rose with relief, for the change was wonderful. Then, as the second six bucketfuls were being thrown, the first two right upward to the ceiling, whence they began to drip in a steady shower whose drops hissed and crackled where they fell, it became evident that very little further effort would be needed to master the flames. In fact, now that the twelve buckets were nearly all exhausted, Stan found himself able to throw out the empty ones to some of the men who had gathered outside, plenty of willing hands being ready to catch them; and under the directions given in English by a loud voice outside, the men – coolies, most of them – hurried down to the edge of the wharf where the river ran muddily, and a second dozen buckets nearly finished the task.

“Stitch in time saves nine – eh, Stan?” cried Uncle Jeff merrily; “and a tumblerful of water at the beginning of a fire is better than a hogshead at the end. – H’m! there’s plenty of help now, Oliver. We’re not ruined yet, old man.”

“Thank heaven, no, Jeff!” said his brother. “I wish I had your coolness and nerve.”

“And I wish I had your nous, old fellow,” replied his brother quietly. “But there! we won’t have the place flooded. I’ll scatter about a couple of dozen more buckets over the smoking and charred wood; and then, as the mob gathering out there must be thirsty, we will distribute a few strings of copper money among them to make up for the chance of plunder that they have missed.”

Friendly voices by the score were now heard making inquiries; the help was plentiful, and in less than an hour clever carpenters were hammering away, replacing the broken and burned windows with a lattice-work of bamboo. Soon after a late-arriving party of the city guard were pursuing the marauders, while a certain number were posted about the offices and warehouse to protect the rich stores within from “friendly” and unfriendly attack.

But there was no sleep for the Lynns that night, and daylight made such a display of the effects of the night’s business that Stan’s first disposition was to burst out laughing in his uncle’s face.

“Eh? What is it? Why are you grinning at me, sir?” said the object of Stan’s mirth.

“I couldn’t help it, uncle,” said the lad apologetically. “Go and have a wash, and just look at your face.”

“Blackened a bit? Well, it does smart.”

“Why, Jeff,” cried Stan’s father, “your eyebrows, eyelashes, and beard are completely burned away.”

“What!” cried Uncle Jeff angrily. “My beautiful great beard? Oh! that comes of trying to save this wretched old house and store. – Why, you heartless young ruffian,” he roared as he met his nephew’s mirthful eyes, “you are laughing at my misfortune. Do you know what a loss like this means to me?”

“Yes, uncle,” replied Stan: “waiting until it grows again.”

Uncle Jeff’s countenance was a study as he stood staring at his nephew, his forehead all in wrinkles, eyes screwed up, and lips compressed, till all at once the muscles relaxed, his eyes opened widely, and a frank, pleasant smile of satisfaction began to make him look genial and sunny.

“Why, of course!” he cried. “I was going to put it down as a dead loss. I never thought of that, Stan. To be sure, it’s only a bit of waiting for it to grow again. Here, I can’t go out in this state. Call Sin the Wicked, Stan.”

“Yes, uncle,” was the reply, and Stan hurried out.

## Chapter Three

### “A Bloodthirsty Young Ruffian.”

Stan had been long enough in the great port to know something of the habits of the people, and he was in nowise surprised to find that not one of the employees had put in an appearance that morning; nor yet that Pi Sin, the general man-of-all-work of the household, who slept in the house, was nowhere to be found, for the simple reason that he had dropped from one of the windows and made off at the first alarm.

The lad was balked, then, at the offset, and had to return to his uncle for instructions.

“Gone – eh?” said Uncle Jeff. “Of course he would go. It doesn’t take much to scare one of his kind. You’ll have to fetch the barber for me, Stan. Know where he lives?”

“No,” said Stan.

“Keep along the wharf-side till you come to the big pagoda half and mile along the river, and then go down the narrow lane under the pagoda walls till you come to his place, just opposite the gate. You’ll see his shop. Tell him to come at once.”

“Can he speak English?”

“After a fashion; and half-a-dozen other languages too. Tell him he must come back with you. He’ll say he can’t leave home, but you say the one word ‘Dollar’ and he’ll come at once.”

“I understand, uncle,” was the reply; and the boy started off, feeling as if all the previous night’s experience had been a dream, and as if he were still only half-awake.

He was glad to escape from the dwelling over the offices, with their black, dismantled look, where all was charred wood, wet with the little deluge of water that had been poured thereon.

The lad sniffed two or three times involuntarily as he made his way out to pass through a crowd of staring idlers of all sorts and sizes, dressed in blue cotton jackets and trousers, save those whose costume half-way down was a pigtail only, the other half to the ground consisting of a pair of baggy, much-washed cotton trousers, tight at the ankles, and tucked into clumsy shoes with thick white soles. They were all staring vacantly at the damaged office and shattered windows; while the broken ladder, propped up in two pieces, was placed against the front of the house, and formed the greatest attraction of all, till Stan appeared, when about two hundred and fifty pairs of beady, piggish eyes were turned upon him, and there was a quiver of pigtailed of all lengths, from a few inches to those of the finest growth, which tapped against the owners’ heels as they walked.

“I suppose I shall get to know one face from another in time,” thought Stan as the crowd made way for him, “but at present they all seem to be alike. My word! I do feel glad to get out. The place smelt like a school bonfire put out for fear of risk, or as the kitchen did when the cook upset part of the soup into the fire and made the rest taste just the same as this smells. – Oh, do get out of the way, some of you!” he said aloud impatiently. “Can’t you see that I’m in a hurry?”

“You wantee Sin?” said a high-pitched voice close behind; and Stan stopped short to face a particularly meek-looking, full-moon-countenanced Chinaman in the cleanest of cotton clothes, and without a wrinkle of trouble in his placid face.

“Wantee you? Yes,” said Stan angrily, for wakefulness, over-exertion, and hunger combined had put his nerves in a state of compound irritation. The sight of the man, too, brought up ideas of breakfast, as well as bitter annoyance against him for his desertion of them in their time of peril. “Why did you run away last night?”

“Lun away? Sin no lun away. Dlop down flat and clawl away so lobbie man not see.”

“Well, it’s all the same,” cried Stan. “Oh, you were a coward to desert us like that!”

The Chinaman smiled feebly, and there was a look of apology in his eyes as he said meekly:

“Plentee bad man makee Sin all aflaid. One man enough one man fight. One man can'tee fight gloat many. Only one Sin takee big knife and chop off head.”

“But you went away instead,” growled Stan sourly. “Look here, sir, I've a good mind to kick you.”

“What good? Stan-lee kick Sin, Sin go `way and cly. No good cookee bleakfast.”

“Then I won't kick you,” said the boy, who felt mollified by the suggestion of hot tea and cake contained in the man's speech. “Here! run off and fetch the barber. Bring here.”

“No come. Shavee many man.”

“You say ‘Dollar,’ and bring him along.”

The Chinaman grinned and nodded.

“Come now,” he said, and turned to go, but stopped short directly to look curiously at his young master.

“Well,” said Stan, “why don't you go?”

“Wantee go? Stan-lee wan tee man to shave him?”

“To shave me? Nonsense! To shave my uncle.”

“What good shave uncle? Uncle killee. All loasted `way in big fi’.”

“Nonsense! He wasn't hurt.”

“Not killee?”

“No.”

“Not Mistee Lynn killee?”

“What! My father?”

The man nodded quickly.

“No; we fought the enemy and beat them off.”

“Sin velly glad,” said the man, smiling. “All say Mistee Jefflee and Mistee Lynn allee kill dead and loast black. Velly good job fo' Sin. No go find new mastee. Sin lun fas' now.”

He set off at a very slow dog-trot, and the lad looked after him for a few moments before walking back through the staring crowd, who had caught from Sin the refutation of their news, and were chattering eagerly, and, as it seemed to Stan, looking disappointed at the fact that neither of the English merchants had been killed. In fact, the information just received had reduced a serious catastrophe into nothing better than a pitiful fire and the breaking of a few windows; but the crowd stopped and stared all the same, just as persistently as a London gathering would round a house where something or another had happened.

“You've been pretty quick, Stan,” said his father as the lad entered the room where the brothers were discussing the night's proceedings, with their loaded revolvers lying upon the table.

Uncle Jeff turned sharply and stared.

“You haven't been?” he said as he passed his hand slowly over his singed face.

Stan told of his meeting with their Chinese cook and general man.

“The cowardly ruffian!” cried Uncle Jeff angrily. “Did he say anything about leaving us in the lurch last night?”

Stan told him.

“Of course. Velly much aflaid. Just like a Chinaman; but they're brave enough when they're fifty to one, as they were last night. He ought to have stood by us, Stan. We've behaved well to him.”

“He's a very good servant, Jeff,” said Stan's father, “and works well for us. Don't bully the man for what he cannot help.”

“I'm not going to, Oliver. I know, and I'll forgive him if he'll only make haste back, bring that precious barber, and get us some breakfast. I'm starving.”

As it happened, the unhappily named man came hurrying back with the razor-wielder; and soon after the latter had performed his task, turning Uncle Jeff into a bluff-looking middle-aged man with closely cut hair, smooth chin, and a short, fierce moustache, Sin made his appearance at the door,

to smilingly announce that “bleakfast” was “leady,” and then stood fast, wide-open of eyes, extended of lips, and shaking gently.

“You scoundrel!” cried Uncle Jeff. “If you dare to laugh at my misfortunes I’ll kick you downstairs.”

“Pi Sin no laugh at Mistee Jeff’s misfoltunes,” said the man piteously. “Him laugh see mast’ look so ’live and well when Sin tink um dead and bellied. Gleat pity didn’t make shave all head and weah long tail.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” said Uncle Jeff, who was mollified by the man’s words, “Well, what’s for breakfast?”

“Coffee, hot cake – ”

“What!” cried Uncle Jeff. “You’ve had no time to make hot cakes.”

“Pi Sin buy um all leady at bakee when he go fetch shave-man.”

“Oh, that’s how you managed – eh?” said Uncle Jeff Sin smiled.

“Make poke-pie yes’day. Nice cold.”

“That’ll about do – eh, Stan?” said Uncle Jeff.

“Capitally, uncle.”

“Got any appetite after your fighting?”

“Oh yes, uncle; it has made me terribly hungry.”

“Then come along.”

“Hah!” said Uncle Jeff, about a quarter of an hour later, as he wiped his lips with a paper napkin. “Who’d ever have thought we should be having such a breakfast as this in the old place – eh, Oliver?”

“I for one fully expected that we should be buried in its ashes,” said Stan’s father.

“Humph!” said Uncle Jeff; “then next time you think such dolorous things keep them to yourself, and don’t say them to spoil your son’s breakfast.”

“They don’t spoil my breakfast a bit, Uncle Jeff. More pie, please.”

“You’re right, Stan. Sin is a good cook, even if he is no use as a fighting-man.”

“Splendid, uncle.”

“And we’ll forgive him – eh?”

“Certainly, uncle.”

Five minutes later the object of these remarks appeared, to say that a party of gentlemen had arrived.

It was a deputation from the foreign merchants of the port, to offer condolences and help to their brethren; and on finding how little the Lynns had suffered, they did not hesitate to tell them that they might have expected the fate that befell them, which was like a judgment upon them for erecting their warehouse and stores so far away from their brother-merchants, and prophesied more evil to them if they failed now to remove to a safer position.

“Likely!” said Uncle Jeff. “Who’s going to pull a great place like this down and build another?”

This after their friends had gone.

“It is impossible, of course, Jeff,” said Stan’s father sadly. “We must content ourselves with strengthening this a little more, and hope to escape by being more ready for an attack.”

By this time clerks and warehousemen – the latter Chinese – were busy at work over their daily avocations, just as if nothing had happened, though the remarks among themselves were many. The native craftsmen, too – carpenters, painters, and glaziers – were busy repairing damages, just as if, Stan thought, it was a town in old England, instead of in the far east of Asia, when a Chinese messenger arrived, a round-faced, carefully dressed, middle-aged man, who had come in charge of a consignment of silk from the collecting *hong* of Lynn Brothers’ house down south on the Mour River; and one of the passages in the letter the man brought from their manager was the cause of a good deal of perplexity at such a time.

Stan entered the room after a quiet inspection of the messenger, who smiled at him blandly and then began to carefully trim and polish the nails of his forefingers, each of which was long and sharp and kept in a thimble-like sheath of silver; while, to indicate his higher position in life than the cook, the new arrival's dark-blue frock was of silk.

"It's very, very awkward," said Stan's father.

"Very," said his brother. "Quite impossible for me to go now."

"It is not so much help he asks for as a companion," said Stan's father.

"Some one trustworthy whom he can leave in charge for a short time while he is away buying or visiting at one or other of the *hongs* up the river."

"Yes, that is the sort of man; but how are we to get such a person without sending to England?"

"But he wants him now, by return boat," said Uncle Jeff testily. "The fellow must be mad. Here, I have it," he whispered, leaning across the table.

"You are busy, father. Shall I go?" said Stan, who noticed the movement.

"No," cried Uncle Jeff sharply, answering for his brother. "Sit down a bit. Perhaps we shall want you. – Here, Oliver," he whispered; "why not send Stan?"

"What! Oh, he's too young and inexperienced."

"Not a bit too young, and the experience will come."

"But it's so far away, and there may be risks."

"Risks? Do you think it's going to be half so risky as staying here? Because if you do, I don't."

"There is something in that," said his brother.

"Of course there is; and we can't slave Blunt to death. I meant to have stayed with him a couple of months to lighten his work; but, as we have said, it is quite impossible. Stan would be the very fellow."

The lad's father tapped the table with the tips of his fingers and frowned.

"Very well," he said suddenly. "He proved that he could play the man last night. – Here, Stan."

"Yes, father."

"Your uncle and I want you to go south to the Mour River – to our branch collecting-house there, under the charge of our Mr Blunt."

"Very well, father," said the lad, the news coming like a shock after the events of the past night.

"You'll find Blunt rather rough – such a man as ought to be named Blunt – but a good fellow at bottom," said Uncle Jeff.

"I'm afraid you'll find it rather solitary, my boy," said Stan's father; "but it will be a fine lesson in business, and you'll learn a great deal."

"Very well, father," said the lad again coldly.

"Hullo, young man!" cried his uncle. "What's the meaning of this? You ought to be jumping for joy at the thought of going to a new place, and you look as if you don't want to go," said Uncle Jeff.

"I don't, uncle," said the lad.

"And pray why?" said his father.

"Because you are going to send me away, father, as you don't think it is safe for me here; and I don't want to leave you both in trouble."

There was a dead silence, and the brothers exchanged glances, the eyes of both looking dark, before the senior spoke, holding out his hand to grasp that of his son.

"On my word of honour, no, Stan," he said in a voice slightly affected by the emotion he felt. "Indeed, it is because we are – your uncle and I – in a difficulty about responding to our Mour manager's demand. Your uncle was to go, but after last night's attack it would be impossible for him to leave me here alone."

Stan gazed sharply from his father to his uncle and back again, with doubt shining out of his eyes; then he said in an eager, excited way:

"Then it isn't because I seemed cowardly last night, father?"

“Cowardly!” cried the brothers in a breath.

“And because you want to send me where I shall be safe?”

“No, my dear boy – no,” cried his father warmly.

“Not a bit of it, Stan, old chap,” cried Uncle Jeff. “Why, we’d give anything to keep such a proved soldier with us. It’s because we can’t help ourselves that we want to send you.”

“Yes, Stan; your uncle is speaking the simple truth. But we will not press you if you feel that you would rather stay here with us.”

“Yes, father,” said the boy. “I know it is dangerous, but I would rather stay here with you.”

“Hark at the bloodthirsty young ruffian!” cried Uncle Jeff, with something like a tremble in his voice. “He wants to stop here and shoot down pirates by the score.”

“I don’t, uncle!” cried the boy angrily. – “I want to be of use to you now, father, and not to think only of myself. I’m going to this place on that river, wherever it is, but I’m afraid I shan’t be of so much use as you expect. I haven’t learnt to be business-like at school, and I don’t think classics and mathematics will do much good where you want me to go.”

“Don’t you be too sure of that, my lad,” said Uncle Jeff. “Your school studies have made you more business-like than you think, boy, and a chap who is good at mathematics can’t help being good and exact over a merchant’s books. Then you mean to go for us, sir?”

“Of course, uncle. When does the boat start?”

“Just hark at him!” cried Uncle Jeff. “He’s ready to be off at once.”

“But he isn’t going so soon as that,” said Stan’s father, wringing the boy’s hand warmly, and seeming loath to let it go. – “I dare say you’ll not start for three or four days. There are plenty of vessels sailing, but it isn’t every one that touches at the port from which you must go up the river in a trading-junk. But Wing will see to all that, and get you both passages in the first steamer that suits. Wing is a very good man for arrangements of that kind. In the meantime you must pack a portmanteau with just the necessaries you require – the simpler the better.”

“And before you go, my young pepper-pod, we’ll try if we can arrange for another piratical display with fireworks on the same scale as last night’s. Will that do you?”

“Now you’re beginning to laugh at me again, uncle,” said Stan in a reproachful tone.

“No, no, no, my dear boy,” cried Uncle Jeff warmly; “if I talk lightly it is only to hide what I feel. I’d been looking forward to all kinds of expeditions up-country with you, whenever your father would let two such idlers go out for a run; but now we must wait till you come back with one of our boatloads of silk and tea and dyewoods. – Here, Oliver, we’re in luck to have such a representative. – But I say, Stan, don’t take any notice of my face being so bare, but set to work and grow a respectable beard of your own.”

“I shan’t do that for years yet, uncle,” replied Stan, laughing.

“What! You don’t know, boy. It’s a wonderful climate out here for making your hair grow. Look at the Chinamen’s tails!”

“Oh, but a lot of that’s false, isn’t it?”

“In some cases, my boy, but generally it is all real; and if it were unplaited it would be longer. But don’t you imitate John Chinaman. You don’t want a long tail. You turn the hair-current from the back of your head on to your chin and let it grow there, so as to make you look big and fierce, ready for dealing with the Chinese merchants.”

“But I shall seem boyish for years to come, I’m afraid,” said Stan sadly. “I look very young.”

“And a splendid thing, too,” said Uncle Jeff. “Who wouldn’t be you, to look young and feel young? – Eh, Oliver? – Oh, you young masculine geese who are always wishing that you were men, if you only knew what you are treating with contempt, how much better it would be for you! Why, I’d give – That’ll do; I’ve done. Here, I’m coming with you to your room to go over your togs and odds and ends with you. I think I can give you a bit of advice as to what to take and what to leave behind. Perhaps, too, I can give you two or three useful things. Haven’t got a revolver of your own, I suppose?”

“No, uncle.”

“Then I’ll give you that one – mine. It hits anything, to a dead certainty, if you hold it straight. Got any fishing-tackle?”

“Yes, uncle; hooks and lines with leads.”

“That’s right. You may like to catch a few fish to make a change in your diet when it grows too regular. Wing cooks a little, but nothing like so well as Sin. – I suppose we can’t spare him to go with Stan here, can we, Oliver?”

“No; it would not be possible,” said the latter, smiling; but his voice had a suggestion of sternness in its tones as he added, “And I’m sure that Stan will be quite content to rough it for a while with Mr Blunt, and as long as he gets plain, wholesome food, will not worry himself about the cook.”

“Hear him, Stan?” cried Uncle Jeff. “That’s the way your father snubs me because I like nice things, and refuse to insult my inside by giving it any kind of hugger-mugger mess that is put before me. – Well, I confess I do like a good dinner, Oliver, and I don’t see much harm in it. Well, of course Stan will do his best for us. The Lynns always try to do their best – they can’t help it. There I come along and let’s see to your kit.”

“Don’t be in a hurry, Jeff,” said Stan’s father. “Let’s have in Wing and ask him about the return boat. He’s a very methodical fellow, and I dare say his plans are already made.”

“To be sure; let’s have him,” replied Uncle Jeff, who rose, went to the door, and called to one of the clerks to send the Chinaman in. “I dare say that he has something up his sleeve about starting. Plenty of room there for any amount of plans – eh, Stan?” he added; with the result that when the man entered, bowing and smiling in his apologetic way, Stan’s eyes immediately sought and searched the long, soft, blue silk appendages which hung well over the hands, revealing just the tips of the fingers, while from one hung out the corner of a pocket-handkerchief, and from the other the end of a fan.

A little conversation ensued, in which the Chinaman announced that he had arranged for two berths in the steamer on its return journey – either on its first, which would be in three days’ time, or, if Stan were not able to go then, on the second, which would be in a month – allowing for its sailing to the Mour River, loading up, and returning again.

“It is a very short time,” said Stan’s father, with a sigh; “but he must not wait for a month, Jeff.”

“Certainly not,” was the reply, followed by an echo of the brother’s sigh. – “You’ll have to be off, Stan, short as the time is. – As for you, Wing, your people say they hate us foreign devils, as they call us.”

“Wing no fool, Mistee Jefflee,” said the Chinaman coolly.

“I know that, Wing. You are more of a rogue than fool, as the old saying goes. But what do you mean?”

“Wing no fool ’nuff call good mastee foleign devil. That what fool say.”

“That’s true, Wing. We have always behaved well to you and paid you honestly.”

“Why Wing stay. Mastee Olivey, Mastee Jefflee good man. Topside mastee. Wing stop long time. You wantee Wing takee plop’ ca’e young Lynn?”

“Yes; help him, and fight for him if it is necessary,” said Stan’s father.

“Light. Wing bling him back some day. Mind nobody bleak him.”

“There, Stan!” cried Uncle Jeff bluffly, as he roared with laughter. “Wing’s going to take as much care of you as if you were a piece of choice china.”

“Yes; takee gleet ca’e young Lynn, young mastee. Bling him back some day.”

“Yes,” said Uncle Jeff; “but mind this, my fine fellow: if you come back some day without him, and say you couldn’t bring him because you’ve got him broken, why, then – ”

He stopped short as if to think out what punishment he would award, while the Chinaman’s face expanded in a broad grin.

“Wing not fool, Mastee Jefflee,” he said. “No come back no young Lynn, fo’ mastee killee Wing.” Then, turning very serious: “Young Lynn bloken, Wing bloken allee same. Young Lynn killee, bad man killee Wing too.”

“I see what you mean, my man,” said Stan’s father gravely. “You will fight for my son to the end.”

“No,” said the Chinaman, shaking his head and frowning; “Wing can’t tee fightee. Wing tly helpee young Lynn lun away. Pl’aps bad man killee both. Plentee bad man on Mou’ Livah. Wing takee gleet ca’e young Lynn.”

“Yes; that’s all right, Wing. We always trust you.”

The Chinaman nodded, smiled, and then approached Stan, taking his hand, bending down, and holding the back against his forehead.

“There, Stan,” said his father; “you will find Wing a faithful servant, and you can trust him to help you out of difficulties, for his knowledge of his fellow-countrymen will enable him to give you warning of things which would be hidden from you. – Do you fully understand, Wing, what I am saying to my son?”

The Chinaman bowed, and was soon afterwards dismissed.

The next three days were pretty well taken up in watching the repairs of the lower part of the great warehouse, and in making the final preparations for the start to Mour River; and during that time Stan had the satisfaction of learning that the principal merchants of Hai-Hai had joined in asking for better protection of their property in the great port – a demand which was responded to by those in authority arranging for a section of the military police force being stationed nightly within easy reach of the hitherto unprotected up-river part where the Lynns’ warehouse was situated. And this was talked over on the morning when Stan and his Chinese attendant and guide stood on the deck of the steamer talking to the brothers Lynn, Uncle Jeff telling the lad that he was to take care of himself and not fidget about them, for they would be safe enough now, a pistol-shot out of a window being warning enough to bring armed assistance in a very few minutes.

“We shall be all right, Stan,” said Uncle Jeff heartily; “it is we who will have to fidget about you.”

“Yes, he is quite right, Stan, my boy,” said the lad’s father, grasping his hand warmly. “Send us a line as often as a boat loads up at the *hong*.”

“And you will write to me, father?” said Stan, whose heart was sinking now that the time of parting was so near.

“Of course – regularly, my boy.”

“And you too, Uncle Jeff?”

“I mean to keep a journal, Stan, and post it up regularly like a day-book, all for your benefit. There! the time will soon slip by, and you’ll be coming home again. Ah! there goes the last bell.”

“So soon?” said Stan excitedly.

His words were almost rendered inaudible by the shouts of “All for the shore!”

It was a hurried scene of confusion then for a few minutes, with repeated warm pressures of the hand in silence, and then Stan’s eyes were being strained after a boat that had suddenly seemed to glide away when the steamer quivered and throbbed and threw up a chaos of foaming water astern. In that boat the brothers Lynn were standing up waving their hats, and the little craft seemed to go faster and faster though the two rowers had not yet lowered their oars.

Stan leant over the rail of the steamer, waving his hat in return, while the boat grew less and less, his father’s features blurred and indistinct, and the great wharf seemed to be flying now while the steamer stood still. Then the boats that had taken people to the shore were all mixed up together in one patch, and the lad felt that his hat-wavings were all in vain, and that it was impossible for them to be seen.

There was something like a solid sigh in Stan’s throat, but he choked it down as he turned his head and looked inboard, to find that Wing the Chinaman, dressed now in blue cotton, was squatted

down on the deck close behind him; and apparently he had been watching his actions all the time, for he nodded now and smiled compassionately in his young master's face.

“Young Lynn velly solly go 'way?” he said.

“Of course I don't like it – at first,” said Stan hurriedly, and feeling ready to resent the compassion of the man who was to be his servant.

“Wing not likee leave him fadee, modee, one time long time off. Don'tee mind now. Young Lynn, Wing mastee, not mind soon. You likee eatee dlinkee?”

“Not now,” said Stan shortly.

“No?” said the Chinaman, as the steamer began to rise and fall steadily. “Young Lynn go velly sickee? You likee lie down? Wing fetch bundle put undee head.”

“No, no,” said Stan quickly. “I'm not going to be ill if it keeps like this. I don't think I should be bad if it were to come on rough.”

“No?” said Wing. “Young Lynn velly good sailor. Good like Wing. Wing velly glad. Not nicee be velly sick when steamship go up, and velly much baddee when steamship go down. Wait see.”

Wing did “wait see,” and as the steamer passed well out of the estuary, and began to run down the coast, they had a little of the vile Chinese weather that takes the form of a gale which piles the water well up and hurls it in cascades over a vessel's bows, making her quiver through and through, and putting her officers' seamanship well to the test. But even at the very worst, during the following day, Stan displayed no disposition to keep below, but went about the deck, holding on, and rather enjoying the grandeur of the scene; while Wing was always close at hand watching him, ready to smile in his face from time to time, and more than once gave vent to his satisfaction by saying:

“Young Lynn velly fine sailoh; 'most good as Wing. You feel leady to go down eatee big dinnee?”

“Yes,” said Stan eagerly; “this cool wind gives me a good appetite;” and he made for the cabin stairs, closely followed by his attendant, who had seen a little, careful procession going on from the galley, a sign that the midday meal was ready for such of the passengers as were ready for it.

## Chapter Four

### “Here! You’d better come ashore.”

Foul weather extended the voyage of the steamer to a length of five days before she reached the little port of destination, where, in the midst of a glorious change, Stan followed his conductor into a great clumsy junk, which was sailed when the windings of the fine, broad Mour River made the wind favourable, and tracked by coolies hauling upon a huge twisted bamboo cable when the breeze was adverse for a couple of days more.

The up-river trip was most enjoyable, through a highly cultivated country teeming with an industrious population and glowing with abundant crops; while the scenery was so glorious, and the novelty of the continuous panorama so great, that Stan felt a chill of disappointment at sunset one glowing evening when Wing, who had crept quietly up behind him, touched his shoulder, and stood pointing towards a village at the foot of a grand stretch of cliff, the houses rising up the beautiful terraced slope, while at the foot was a group of new-looking buildings, at the back of a wharf to which some half-dozen trading-boats were moored.

“Nang Ti,” said Wing, with a broad smile. “Young Lynn big *hong* full silk, full tea, full nicee piecee chop chop all along young Lynn. See big Blunt soon. Young Lynn savee big managee Blunt?”

“No, I have never seen him,” said Stan as he sheltered his eyes from the ruddy orange sunlight and scanned the place.

“Velly big stlong man. Velly good man. Velly big shoutee tongue say ‘Ho!’ and ‘Ha!’ Flighten stlong coolie man; makee wuck. Coolie go dlink much *samshu*, lie down, go sleepee; Blunt come behind, takee pigtail, pullee up, and kickee velly much. Makee coolie cly ‘Oh!’ Makee loll ovey and ovey, and say leady to go wuck and nevey dlink *samshu*, no mo’.”

“Indeed!” said Stan, who began to picture in his own mind what sort of a personage the manager in charge might be. “And then, I suppose, after being kicked for getting tipsy on *samshu*, the men never drink any more?”

“No,” said Wing, grinning more widely. “Velly much flighten. Nevey dlink any mo’ till next time. Poh! Gleast big silly boy, coolie. Gleast stlong man up to head – head like big baby chile. Much flighten when big Blunt come shout ‘Ho! ha!’ Big piecee man, big Blunt. Mastee managee. Young Lynn mastee managee now. Flighten big Blunt.”

“Indeed!” said Stan, smiling. “Well, we shall see.”

“Yes, young Lynn see soon. Lookee! Big Blunt.”

Wing pointed again, and following the direction of the extended index-finger, Stan saw a tall figure in white step out of one of the buildings, make its way to where a crane stretched out its diagonal arm, from which a chain with heavy ball and hooks was suspended over the river, and then stop to gaze at the junk upon whose high stern Stan and his companion were on the lookout.

Just then the *tindal*, or master of the junk, began to shout to his men, one of whom ran forward and began to thump a gong hanging in the bows, sending forth a booming roar whose effect was to bring a little crowd of half-naked coolies out of the buildings ashore, and three or four Europeans in white, while the crew of the junk began to swarm about the great clumsy vessel like bees.

The wind was favourable, and the great matting sails creaked and rustled, while their yards groaned as they rubbed against the bamboo masts as their sheets were tightened and pulled home, sending the heavy boat gliding up-river at an increased pace, soon getting abreast of the wharf, and then gliding along up-stream and leaving it behind.

“What does this mean?” said Stan excitedly. “Doesn’t the captain know we are to stop there?”

“Young Lynn soon see,” replied Wing. “Velly fast lun watey big stleam. Young Lynn wait. Go ’long bit way. Captain know.”

He did know perfectly how to manage his clumsy craft, which, in obedience to his signs to the steersman, was run on in a diagonal course which took it in nearer to the bank from which the cliff ran up. Then, as a few yells were uttered, some of the men seized the ropes, others got out great sweeps, there was a bang on the gong, the two great sails came rattling down upon the deck, the long sweeps began to dip as the junk's pace grew slower and slower, till she finally stopped and began to go back, but so slowly and well-directed that she glided close alongside the wharf, whence men threw ropes; and in a wonderfully short time, considering the clumsiness of the craft and equipage, the junk was moored alongside so closely that it was possible to run a gangway aboard for the occupants to go ashore.

Stan was making ready to approach the gangway, when the figure in white approached the side, and without taking any notice of him, nodded to the Chinese captain shortly, and then turned to Wing.

"Hullo, you, sir!" he shouted in a big, vigorous voice, as if he meant himself to be heard back at the stern.

"Yes. Come back again," said Wing.

"What made you so long?"

"Velly bad wind blow velly much indeed. Steamship no get 'long fast."

"Humph! Bring me any letters?"

"Yes, bling big pack letteys. Got lot."

"Come along, then, ashore; I've no time to waste."

"I shall never like you," thought Stan to himself as he waited patiently for the manager to address him in turn. But the big, keen, masterful-looking fellow did not seem even to glance in the lad's direction, keeping his eyes fixed upon Wing, who seemed to be quite afraid of him, and did not venture to speak till the manager said loudly and sharply, as if to annoy the stranger:

"Who's that boy you've got on board there?"

Wing looked troubled, and glanced first at Stan and then at the speaker.

"Well, sir, why don't you answer?" continued the manager.

"Young Lynn. Come 'long flom Hai-Hai."

"Oh!" said the manager gruffly. "Whose son is he – Mr Oliver's or Mr Jeffrey's? Oh, I remember; Mr Jeffrey isn't married." Then turning his eyes full upon Stan with a searching stare, he said shortly, "How do? Here! you'd better come ashore."

## Chapter Five

### “He’s a Regular Brick.”

“This is pleasant!” thought Stan as he stepped on to the gangway. “If this man is our servant he oughtn’t to speak to me like that. Here! I shall have a to go back by the next boat. Father and Uncle Jeff don’t want me to be treated like this.”

It was a cheerless welcome to the place that was to be his new home for the time, and a feeling of resentment began to grow up within him as he stepped on to the wharf, meeting the manager’s eyes boldly, and gradually feeling more and more determined to maintain his position and not allow himself to be, as he termed it, “sat upon” by this bullying sort of individual.

A fierce stare was exchanged for some moments before the manager spoke again, more gruffly than ever, just as Wing handed him the packet of letters he had brought.

“Better come in here,” he said. – “You, Wing, tell the skipper to make all fast. I won’t have any unloading till the morning.”

He led the way to what seemed to be the office of the great warehouse, for there were desks, stools, and writing implements, while maps hung from the wall, and bills of lading in files decorated the place in a way which made it look more grim and showed up its bareness.

As soon as they were inside, the manager perched himself on a high stool, took a big ebony ruler off the desk, and began rolling it to and fro upon his knees, before opening the principal letter of the batch, one which Stan could see plainly had been written by his uncle.

This missive the manager read through twice before laying it flat upon the table and giving it a bang with his open hand.

“Bah!” he growled. “Stan Lynn – Stan Lynn. What a name for a boy! Why did your people christen you that?”

“They didn’t,” said Stan coolly, though he could feel a peculiar twitching going on along his nerves.

“What!” cried the manager fiercely – quite in the tone he would have used to a contradictory coolie. “Why, look here,” he continued, bringing his hand down on the packet of letters with another heavy bang which made the ink start out of the well. “Why, I have it here, in your father’s handwriting. Um – um – um! Where is it? Oh, here: ‘my son Stan’.”

“Nonsense! Let’s look,” said the boy sharply, and quickly stepping forward to look at the writing. “Tisn’t; it’s ‘Stanley,’ only my father has contracted the ‘ley’ into a dash. It’s a way he has.”

“Then it’s time he began to write plainly. Who’s to know what he means?”

“Any one,” said Stan quite as fiercely. “And look here; you wouldn’t speak of my father’s writing like that if he were here.”

“What!” roared the manager, giving the desk a tremendous bang with the big ebony ruler to frighten Stan, who began to perspire profusely, but not from alarm. His temper, that had been fast asleep, was aroused by the reception he was having, and feeling at once that life with this man would be unbearable, he spoke out at once boldly and defiantly.

“I spoke plainly enough,” he said haughtily, “and you know what I said.”

“Well,” cried the manager, “of all the insolent young coxcombs I ever encountered, you take the prize. Do you know who I am?”

“Yes,” said Stan; “my father’s manager.”

“Yes, sir, I am,” he roared; “and I know how to manage men, let alone cocky, conceited boys. Don’t you think you are coming here to lord it and set up your feathers, and crow and grow scarlet in the comb. I shall soon cut that for you, so just get ready to take your proper place at once. I’d have

you to know that I have as much authority and am as much master in this solitary, out-of-the-way place as if I were a king.”

“Over the Chinese coolies, perhaps,” said Stan firmly, “but not over me.”

“What I – Why, the boy’s mad with conceit.”

“No, I’m not,” said Stan – “not conceited at all; and if you behave properly to me you’ll find that I shall help you in every way I can.”

“Behave properly! Oh, come! this is rich. Here’s a boy who ought to be at school, where he would get the cane if he did not behave himself, vapouring about as if he had come to be master here. There! the sooner we understand each other the better – Mr Stanley – sir.”

There was a mocking sarcasm in the delivery of these last words that made the boy writhe. But he mastered his temper bravely enough, and said coolly:

“I don’t want to be called ‘Mr Stanley’ and ‘sir.’ I was christened Stanley, but my friends looked upon it as being too pretentious. They always call me Stan.”

“Oh, I see! Thank you for the kind explanation,” said the manager sarcastically. “Well, here you are; and now you are here, what do you want? I see you’ve brought a gun. Come snipe and duck shooting?”

“My father has fully explained in his letter, I believe.”

“Explained? Perhaps so; but I have not had time to read it yet, so perhaps you will speak.”

“That is easily done. You wrote to the firm asking for help and companionship.”

“Of course I did; and I took it for granted that Mr Jeffrey Lynn would come and share the burden of my enormously increasing work.”

“It is all explained in the letters, as I told you,” said Stan. “Uncle was coming, but the Chinese made an attack on the place.”

“Eh? What’s that?” cried the manager excitedly; and Stan gave him a brief account of what had passed, while every word was listened to eagerly.

“It was quite out of the question for my father to be left,” ended Stan at last, “and so I am sent to help instead.”

“Humph!” said the manager, looking grave. “It has come to that, has it? Restless, uncontrolled savages. Well,” he added, changing his tone again, “so they’ve sent a boy like you?”

“Yes.”

“And for want of decent help and companionship, I’m to make the best of you?”

“I suppose so,” said Stan coldly, and wishing the while that he was back at Hai-Hai, home, or anywhere but at this solitary *hong*.

“But I don’t think you’ll like the life here, young fellow,” said the manager, with an unpleasant smile. “There’s a very savage, piratical lot of Chinese about on this river. It has an awful character. If you’ll take my advice – Will you?”

“Of course,” said Stan quietly. “You must know better, from your experience here, than I do.”

“That’s right; I do. Well, then, you take it: go back by the next boat. It doesn’t look as if things are very safe at Hai-Hai, but it’s a paradise to this place here.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Stan, “but I certainly can’t go back; I have come to stay.”

“Oh, very well!” said the manager. “I’ve warned you. I wash my hands of the whole affair. But I’ll promise you this: I’ll get your remains together.”

“My remains?” said Stan, aghast.

“Of course; they are sure to hack you to pieces – it’s a way they have. And there’ll be some difficulty, perhaps, in recovering your head. They generally carry that off as a trophy; but I’ll do my best to get you back to the old folks in a cask of Chinese palm-spirit. Will that do?”

During the past few moments Stan had felt a sensation as if cold steel of wondrously sharp edge were at work upon his back and across his neck; but the tone of the question brought him back to himself, and he replied calmly:

“Capitally. But, by the way, if the savage pirates come and treat me like that, where will you be?”

“Eh?” said the manager, staring. “Where shall I be?”

“Yes. Isn’t it just as likely that I should have to do this duty for you?”

“Oh, I see! Yes, of course; but – Ha, ha, ha! Come! you have got something in you after all.

You are pretty sharp.”

“Just sharp enough to see that you are trying to frighten me.”

“Humph!” ejaculated the manager, with a dry smile. “But you’ve had a sample of what these people can do, and I won’t answer for it that they don’t try some of their capers here. Then you mean to risk it?”

“Of course,” said Stan. “My father and uncle sent me to help you.”

“Well, don’t blame me if you get your head taken off.”

“No,” said Stan coolly, and with a peculiar smile; “I don’t think I shall do that – then.”

“More do I,” said the manager grimly. “Well, here you are, and I suppose I must make the best of you.”

“I suppose so,” said Stan.

“You’ll have to work pretty hard – make entries and keep the day-book. I suppose you can do that?”

“I suppose so,” said the lad, “but I can’t say for certain till I try.”

“All right; then the sooner you try the better, because I’ve got enough to do here in keeping things straight; and if you find that you can’t, I shall just pack you off back to your father and uncle. You’re too young, and not the sort of chap I should have chosen for the job.”

“Indeed! What sort of a lad would you have chosen?”

“Oh, not a dandified, pomatumed fellow like you, who is so very particular about his collar and cuffs, and looks as if he’d be afraid to dirty his hands.”

“I don’t see that because a fellow is clean he is not so good for work,” said Stan.

“Oh, don’t you? Well, I’ve had some experience, my lad. I want here a fellow who knows how to rough it. You don’t.”

“But I suppose I can learn.”

“Learn? Of course you can, but you won’t. There! you’ve come, and I suppose, as I said before, I must make the best of you; but next time you see the heads of the firm, perhaps you’ll tell them that I don’t consider it part of my business as manager of this out-of-the-way place to lick their cubs into shape.”

“Hadn’t you better write and tell them so?” said the lad warmly.

“What!” roared the man. “Now just look here, young fellow; you and I had better come to an understanding at once. Whether it’s clerk, warehouseman, or Chinese coolie, I put up with no insolence. It’s a word and a blow with me, as sure as my name’s Sam Blunt.”

“Sam!” said the lad quietly. “What a name! Why did your people christen you that?”

The manager tilted his stool back till he could balance himself on two of its legs and let his head rest against the whitewashed wall of the bare-looking office, staring in astonishment at his visitor. Then leaning forward again, he came down on all four legs of his tall stool, caught up the big ebony ruler, and brought it down with a fresh bang upon the desk, which made the ink this time jump out of the little well in a fountain, as he stared fiercely at the lad, who returned his gaze perfectly unmoved.

“Well, of all,” – he said; he did not say what, but kept on staring.

“What sort of a fellow do you call yourself?” he cried at last.

“I don’t know,” was the cool reply.

“No; I don’t suppose you do. But look here; I’m going to look over that and set it down to ignorance, as you are quite a stranger; and so let me tell you there’s only one man whom I allow to call me Sam Blunt, and I’m that man. Understand?”

The lad nodded.

“There! as you’re the son of one of the principals, and don’t know any better, I won’t quarrel with you.”

“That’s right,” said the lad coolly; and the man stared again.

“Because,” he continued, “I’m thinking that we shall have plenty of quarrelling to do with John Chinaman.”

“Is there any likelihood of our going to war?” said the lad quickly.

“Every likelihood,” said the man, watching his visitor keenly; “and if I were you I’d have a bad attack of fever while my shoes were good.”

“I didn’t know one could have, or not have, fever just as one liked.”

“I suppose not,” said his companion. “But you take my advice: you catch a bad fever at once. And then, as there is no doctor anywhere here, and I’m a horribly bad nurse, I’ll send you back to Hai-Hai at once for your people to set you right.”

“You mean sham illness?” said Stan sharply.

“What! Why, hang me if you’re not a smarter fellow than I took you for! Yes, that’s it; and then you’ll go back and be safe.”

“Safe from what?”

“Being made into mincemeat by the first party of Chinese pirates who come this way. They’re splendid for that, as I hinted to you before. Nothing they love better than chopping up a foreign devil like you.”

“Hadn’t you better have a fever too?” said the lad quietly.

“Oh, come! Better and better!” cried the other. “You’re not such a fool as you look, young fellow! No: I’ve got too much to do to go away from this go-down, and your people know it. That’s why they’ve sent you to get in my way and put me out of temper. I say, though; you’ve heard nothing about the breaking out of war?”

“Not a word since I’ve been in China. I heard something on my voyage.”

“Of course you haven’t, or your father and uncle wouldn’t have sent you down here. But you may take my word for it, there’s trouble coming – and that, too, before long. Did you see many piratical-looking war-junks as you came up the river?”

“N-no,” said Stan. “I saw several big mat-sailed barges with high sterns, and great eyes painted in their bows; but I thought they were trading-boats.”

“So they are, my lad – one day; they’re pirates the next. And perhaps on the very next they’re men-o’-war. Anything, according to circumstances, for I’ve found out that *artful* is the best word for describing a Chinaman. But there! you’ll soon know. Look here; after what I’ve told you, do you mean to stay?”

“Certainly,” said Stan.

“Very well, then. Come and have a look at my quarters. They’re a bit rough, but you say you won’t mind roughing it.”

“No,” said Stan; “I’ve come here to do the best I can.”

“Oh!” said the manager in a tone full of surprise; “that’s what you’ve come for, is it?”

“Of course,” said Stan, wondering at the tone the man had taken.

“Very well, then, we may as well shake hands. I was just thinking of sitting down to dinner when the junk came in sight, so you’ll come and join me – eh?”

“Yes,” said Stan; “I am getting hungry.”

“That’s right. I say, though, squire; you think me a regular ruffian, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said the lad quietly.

“Oh, come! That’s frank, anyhow.”

“It makes you rough and disposed to bully, living a solitary life like this, I suppose.”

“Humph!” said the manager, frowning; “but I don’t know what you mean by solitary. I have English clerks and checking-men, and a whole gang of coolies. Do you call that solitary?”

“But they are under you. I suppose you live a good deal by yourself.”

“Humph! Yes,” said the manager.

“And that, of course, makes you rough.”

“P'raps so. But you won't find me so rough when you get used to me. There! come along and let's see what my cook has got for us this evening. You'll have to take pot-luck. Wing will contrive something better. Come on.”

There was a grim, satisfied smile in the manager's countenance as he rose, took a great stride such as his long legs enabled him to do with ease, and clapping Stan on the shoulder, swung him round and looked him straight in the face.

“Why, youngster,” he said, “your father must have been wonderfully like you in the phiz when he was your age; but in downright style of speaking and ways you put me wonderfully in mind of your uncle Jeffrey.”

“Do I?” said Stan quietly.

“You do; but he's a regular brick of a man.”

“That he is,” cried Stan warmly; “but that means I'm not a bit like him there.”

“Oh, I don't know,” said the manager slowly. “One can't say at the end of half-an-hour, but I'm beginning to think you will not be so very bad after all.”

“I hope not,” said Stan, smiling.

“I thought at first that you would be a regular stuck-up cub. But I don't think so now. Look here, youngster; can you be honest?”

“I hope so.”

“Then tell me what you thought of me.”

“That you were a disagreeable bully.”

“Hah! That's pretty blunt,” said the manager, frowning. “So that's what you think of me, is it?”

“You asked me what I thought of you, not what I think.”

“Right; so I did. Then what do you think of me?”

“That you're going to prove not so bad as I thought.”

“Dinnee all getting velly cold, cookee say, Mistee Blunt,” said Wing in a deprecating voice; and they both started to see that the Chinaman had entered quietly upon his thick, soft boot-soles.

“All right, Wing; coming,” cried the manager shortly. – “Come along, captain; you and I are going to be great friends.”

## Chapter Six

### “He’s just like a Chestnut.”

“Don’t think we are going to be great friends,” said Stan to himself as he sat down that night upon the edge of his clean, comfortable-looking Chinese bed, in a perfectly plain but very clean little room adjoining that occupied by the manager. “He was very civil, though, and took great care that I had a good dinner. He didn’t seem to mind in the least my having spoken as I did.

“Perhaps I oughtn’t to have spoken so,” he continued after a few minutes’ thought about his position. “I don’t know, though; I didn’t come here as a servant, and he was awfully bullying and rude. Phew! How hot it is!”

He rose and opened the window a little wider, to look out on the swiftly flowing river, across which the moon made a beautiful path of light, that glittered and danced and set him thinking about the home he had left, wondering the while whether father and uncle were thinking about him and how they were getting on.

“I shall write and tell them exactly how Mr Blunt treated me; but perhaps it would be only fair to wait and see how he behaves to-morrow and next day. I couldn’t complain about how he went on to-night. ‘Be great friends,’ he said half-aloud after a pause. Perhaps we may; but oh, how sleepy I am! Better leave the window as it is. I’ll lie down at once. I can think just as well when I’m in bed.”

This was not true, for the only thing Stan Lynn thought was that the pillow felt quite hot. Then he was fast asleep, without so much as a dream to deal with; and the next time he was conscious, he opened his eyes in wonder and stared at the open window and the sunshiny sky, fancying he heard a sound.

“Do you hear there, squire?” came, with a sharp rapping at the boarded walls of the room. “Time to get up. There’s a tub in the next room, and plenty of cold water.”

“Yes. Thank you. All right I won’t be long.”

“Don’t,” came back, in company with the sound of gurgling and splashing. “Breakfast early. Busy day for us.” *Bur-r-r!*

“What did he mean by that?” said Stan.

The *bur-r-r!* was repeated, and then there was a rattle which explained the meaning of the peculiar noise.

“Cleaning his teeth,” muttered Stan as he sprang out of bed. He sought and found the tub and other arrangements which proved that the manager had surrounded himself with the necessaries for living like a civilised Englishman, even if he was stationed in a lonely place in a foreign land, and he was just putting the finishing touches to his dress when there was a heavy thump from a big fist on the door.

“Look sharp, Squire Lynn! I’m going to tell them to bring in the coffee.”

“Nearly ready,” cried Stan; and a few minutes later he descended the plain board stairs, which were scrubbed to the whitest of tints.

There was a white cloth on the table, with a very English-looking breakfast spread; and plain and bare as the place was, with nothing better than Chinese mats to act as a carpet, curtain, and blind, there was the appearance of scrupulous cleanliness; and rested by a good night’s sleep, and elastic of spirit in the fresh air of a beautiful morning, Stan felt ready to make the best of things if his host proved to be only bearable.

There he sat – his host – reading hard at a letter, and he made no sign for a few moments, and paid no heed to Stan’s “Good-morning!” but read on, till he suddenly exclaimed, “Very faithfully yours, Jeffrey Lynn,” and doubled the letter up and thrust it in his pocket.

“Morning, squire,” he continued. “Rested? I read all the correspondence before I turned in, and I’ve just run through your uncle’s letter again. I say, he gives you an awfully good character.”

“Does he?” said Stan.

“Splendid. Ah! here’s old Wing. I’m peckish; aren’t you?”

“Yes; I’m ready for my breakfast,” replied the boy as Wing entered, smiling, with a big, round lacquer tray loaded with the necessaries for a good morning meal.

“That’s right. We’ll have it, then, and afterwards see to the unloading. There isn’t much consigned to me this time. After that you’d like to see the warehouses and what we’ve got there, and learn who the different fellows are, before we have an hour or two in the counting-house – eh?”

“Yes; I’m ready,” said Stan, smiling, and having hard work to keep from looking wonderingly at the man who had given him so unpleasant a reception the previous evening.

“Is he a two-faced fellow,” thought Stan, “and doing all this to put me off my guard? Why, he’s as mild as –”

Stan was going to say “mild” again, but at that moment a wild hubbub of angry voices in fierce altercation burst out, the noise coming through the open window from the direction of the wharf beyond which the junk was moored.

“Yah!” roared the manager, springing from his seat and rushing to the open window, his face completely transformed, as he roared out a whole string of expletives in the Chinese tongue. He literally raged at the disputants, whose angry shouts died out rapidly, to be succeeded by perfect silence; and then the manager turned from the window, with his face looking very red and hot, and took his place again.

“That’s the only way to deal with them,” he cried, “when you’re not near enough to knock a few heads together. You’ll have to learn.”

“What was the matter?” said Stan, who felt in doubt about acquiring the accomplishment, and whose better spirits were somewhat damped by this sudden return to the previous evening’s manner.

“Matter? Nothing at all. There! peg away, my lad. Make a good breakfast. I always do. Splendid beginning for a good day’s work. – What!” he roared, as there was the merest suggestion of a fresh outburst, which calmed down directly, “Yes, you’d better tear me away from my bones! You do, and I’ll turn tiger. Ah! you’ve thought better of it. Lucky for you! – Nice row that; just as I said, about nothing. Divide themselves into two parties; my coolies on one side, the junk’s crew on the other. If I hadn’t gone and yelled horrid Chinese threats at them there would have been a fight, and half the men unfit to work for the rest of the day. You’ll get used to them, though, I dare say. Not bad fellows, after all, when they’ve got some one over them who won’t let them bite, kick, and scratch like naughty children. Well, how did you leave the governors?”

“Oh, very well, considering what a scare we had the other night. I thought the villains would kill us.”

“Yes, but you wouldn’t let them. I told your uncle the last time I saw him that he didn’t take precautions enough, but he said he didn’t believe any one would dare to attack a place so near the city. Revolvers are all very well at close quarters, but not heavy enough for a horde of savages who think nothing of fighting to the death. Got a revolver?”

“Yes,” said Stan; “and a gun.”

“That’s right. And after what you said, I suppose you know how to use the pistol?”

“I can shoot with it a little,” said Stan, colouring slightly. “I suppose you have one?”

“What! Living out in this unprotected place? Well, rather! I’ll show you my little armoury after breakfast.”

“Have you ever been attacked?”

“Not yet; but it’s safe to come some time or other, so I hold myself ready. It’s not quite so bad as I said last night.”

“No; I didn’t think it was,” replied Stan coolly; and he was conscious that his host was watching him keenly.

“But without any nonsense, you may have to fight, my lad, if you stay here.”

“I hope not,” said Stan, breaking the top of an egg.

“So do I,” said the manager. “I don’t want my people scared, and the place knocked to pieces or burned. That’s the worst of a wooden building like this. Ah! it’s a risky trade, and your people deserve to make plenty of profit for their venture.”

Little more was said till the breakfast was at an end, when the *ting* of a table-gong brought Wing into the room.

“Take away,” said the manager sharply; “and as soon as you have done, I want you to hire a boat and go up-river to stop at all the villages that were not touched at before you went away. We must do more business with the places higher up. You go and see the headmen of some of the tea-plantations there who have never dealt with us yet. Understand?”

The man nodded sharply, and the manager turned to Stan.

“Now then,” he said; “let’s look at the tools.”

He led the way into a warehouse-like place, one end of which was furnished with an arms-rack holding a dozen rifles, bayonets, and bandoliers. In a chest beside them were a dozen revolvers; and after displaying these, every weapon being kept in beautiful order, a trap-door in the floor was pointed out, regularly furnished with keyhole and loose ring for lifting.

“Key hangs in my room, if you want it when I’m out,” said the manager meaningly.

“I’m not likely to want the key of the cellar,” said Stan, smiling.

“Cellar? Nonsense! That’s the little magazine. Oh no! the cases down there are not cases of wine, but of cartridges for rifle and revolver.”

“Oh!” said Stan thoughtfully, for the announcement was of a very suggestive nature – one which brought up the night of the attack in Hai-Hai.

“There we are, then, if we have to fight,” said Blunt.

“With whom?” asked Stan sharply.

“Ah! who knows?” said Blunt, laughing. “River pirates; wandering bands of Chinese robbers; disbanded soldiers of the Government; anybody. China’s a big country, my lad, and abominably governed, but a splendid land all the same, teeming with a most hard-working, industrious population, eager to engage in trade, and on the whole good, honest folk who like dealing with us, and are free from prejudices, excepting that they look upon us as a set of ignorant barbarians – foreign devils, as they call us. But it doesn’t matter much. We know better – eh?”

“Of course,” said Stan, laughing. “But you have a good many Chinese at work for you here; don’t you ever feel afraid of them rising against you and the English clerks?”

“One way and another, there are about ten of them to one of us; and as in the case of a row the whole countryside would take part with them, you might say they would be a hundred or a thousand to one against us and still be within bounds.”

“It seems very risky,” said Stan thoughtfully; “and of course you and the clerks dread a rising against you.”

“Against us, you ought to say now, my lad,” said Blunt, smiling. “But we are not a bit afraid, and when you have been here a few months you won’t be either.”

Stan flushed a little, and said hurriedly:

“Of course, it is excusable for me to feel a bit nervous at first. You see, I had such a nasty experience the other night.”

“To be sure,” said Blunt. “And mind, I don’t say but what we live in a constant state of alarm about an attack like that, but not of our own people. They wouldn’t go against us.”

“Why?” said Stan.

“Because the round, smooth-faced beggars like me.”

The thought of what he had heard from Wing, and learnt from his own observation of the manager, had such a perplexing effect upon the lad that his countenance assumed an aspect of so ludicrous a nature that Blunt burst into a roar of laughter.

"I see," he cried; "you can't digest that. It doesn't fit with my roaring and shouting at them just now? Well, it doesn't seem to, but it does. You'll see. You'll soon find out that the men all like me very much, and I believe that if we were in great trouble they'd fight to the death for me – to a man. Like to know why?"

"Of course," said Stan.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. I'm master, king, magistrate, doctor, everything to them. They come to me about their quarrels and their ailments; to get their money, and then bank it with me; and the reason I believe in them and they believe in me is because I am just as fair as in me lies. If I find a man skulking and kick him, do you think the others side with him?"

"I should expect them to," said Stan.

"Then you're wrong. They roar with laughter, and enjoy seeing their fellow punished. They're shrewd enough, and know that the idler is putting his share of work upon them. If there's a quarrel amongst them they come to me to settle it. If a man's sick he comes to me, and I try to set him right. Nurse him up sometimes. When they want a treat they come to me to draw out part of their earnings that I have banked for them. Bah! I'm not going to preach a sermon about what I do. I'm just to them, I tell you, and they know it. I trust them, and they trust me. Come along; let's go and see how they're getting on with the unloading. Let's go in here, though, first."

He led the way by stacks of bales and piles of tea-chests, all neatly arranged like a wall – a great cube built up from floor to ceiling – and passing through an opening, went down a narrow alley in the great store-room, with a wall of half-chests built up on either side, and entered an open doorway to where half-a-dozen clerks and warehousemen were busy. The former were making out bills of lading and entries in books, the latter sampling teas – one with little piles of the dried leaves in cardboard trays, which he was testing in rotation; while another sat at a table upon which was a copper contrivance standing upon a slab of granite, with a glowing charcoal fire burning beneath a bright urn, the fumes and steam being carried off by a little metal tube funnel which passed out through the top of an open chimney.

Right and left of this employee was a row of little earthenware Chinese teapots, and as many cups and saucers; the pots being labelled as they were used with cards attached to the handles, and marked with letters and numbers corresponding with those on the little cardboard trays containing the dried tea.

"Mr Stanley Lynn, gentlemen," said the manager sharply. "He has come in his uncle's place to stay with us for a time."

The introduction was brief, and then the lad was hurried out on to the wharf, where the manager made his appearance suddenly. His presence acted like a stimulus, setting every one working at a double rate of speed, in spite of the scorching sun, which was beginning to glow with so much fervour that the strange gum used to caulk the seams of the great junk in process of being unloaded began to ooze out and form brown globules like little tadpoles with tails.

Everything was new and interesting to Stan, and the day passed very quickly, the manager seeming eager to explain everything to his new colleague; and, saving when now and then he burst out into fierce invectives against offending coolies and the *tindal* of the junk, he was mildness itself.

Stan could hardly believe it when closing-time came and the men ceased work.

"Didn't think it was so late?" said Blunt, laughing.

"No; the time has gone like lightning."

"But don't you want your dinner?"

"No," said Stan promptly; "I don't feel – Yes, I do," he cried. "I didn't till you mentioned it."

“Shows that you have been interested, my lad. There! come along; let’s have a wash and brush up, and then we’ll see what the cook has for us. I’m afraid you’ll have to put up with a makeshift meal again, as Wing is on the wing, as one may say, and I don’t expect him back till to-morrow night, for he has a good way to go, and the boat will sail slowly against stream. When he comes back with his report, I expect it will be necessary for me to go up and see some of the little native growers. We might take our guns and get a bit of sport among the snipes in the paddy-fields; what do you say?”

“I shall be delighted,” cried Stan eagerly.

“Like big-game shooting?” said the manager carelessly, but with a twinkle in his observant eye.

“I never had the chance to try,” replied Stan; “and I’m no hand at all with a gun. I had two days’ rabbit-shooting in England just before I came away; that’s all.”

“Hit any of the rabbits?”

“Five.”

“Out of how many shots?”

“About twenty,” said the lad, colouring; “but, you see, I’ve had no practice.”

“You’ll get plenty here, and I’ll teach you the knack of bringing down snipe.”

“But you said something about big game,” said Stan hesitatingly. “What did you mean – pheasants – turkeys?”

“Pheasants – turkeys!” cried the manager scornfully. “There are plenty of pheasants in the woods, but I mean tigers.”

“Tigers?”

“Yes, my lad, tigers; hungry savages who carry off a poor Chinese labourer working in the fields now and then. There! wait a bit, and we’ll mix up a bit of sport with our work.”

That night Stan went to his bedroom and stood looking at the moon silvering the river, thinking that perhaps after all he might end by being good friends with the manager.

“He’s just like a chestnut,” thought the boy – “all sharp, prickly husk outside; good, rich brown skin under the husk; and inside all hard, firm, sweet nut. I say, it doesn’t do to judge any one at first sight. I wonder what he thinks of me. I hope he likes me, but I’m afraid not, for he seems disposed to sneer at me now and then.”

## Chapter Seven

### “You’ll soon learn your Lesson.”

It seemed to be directly after he had lain down that the thumping at the wooden partition-wall came again, and Stan leapt out of bed to hurry to his bath.

Then came a friendly meeting and breakfast, with quite a procession of boats, *nagas* and *sampans*, with an occasional junk, going up and down the river heavily laden with produce, or returning to the plantations bordering the river-bight.

Breakfast ended, Blunt proposed another walk through the warehouses to begin marking off the stock that was to form part of the return cargo in the loading up of the vessel by which Stan had come.

“I want you to get to be at home with all these things,” said the manager quietly, “so that I can leave you in charge while I run up the river now and then on such a journey as I have sent Wing upon this time. By the way, I wonder whether he’ll be back to-day?”

Stan shook his head.

“What makes you think not?”

“I did not mean that,” said Stan quickly. “I was thinking that it will be some time before I am fit to trust with such an important charge as you say.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Mr Modesty. It all depends upon whether you take an interest in the work,” replied Blunt. “There! come along; you’ll soon learn your lesson, I dare say.”

“I shall try hard,” said Stan gravely. “Everything here is so interesting!”

“Glad you find it so, youngster. For my part, it took a precious lot of resolution to make me stick to the work as I have done. My word! it has been dull and lonely sometimes. It has quite spoiled my temper. I might tell you that I was a nice, pleasant, mild-speaking young fellow like you when I was your age, but you wouldn’t believe it,” said the manager, with a laugh.

“No, I don’t think I should,” said Stan as they crossed an open enclosure and entered the warehouse, where the men were busy arranging the packages brought up the river by the *tindal’s* boat.

The manager began giving his orders for a fresh arrangement of certain of the packages, while Stan stood looking on, an opening just in front giving him a good view of all that was being done.

That day went like magic, and the following one too; everything was so fresh and animated, so full of interest; while when Blunt was not falling foul of some of the men, or, as one of his principal overlookers – a bluff, straightforward, manly fellow, who informed the new-comer that his name was Lawrence and his duties that of a Jack-of-all-trades – expressed it to Stan, in a state of eruption, the lad found him most agreeable, and always willing to explain anything.

Stan thanked Blunt in the evening for the trouble he was taking to make him fully acquainted with the routine of the business.

“Humph!” he grunted, with a curiously grim smile; “that’s just like me. I always was an idiot.”

Stan stared.

“I don’t understand you,” he said.

“I thought I talked plainly enough,” was the reply. “I say that’s just like me, to be such an idiot as to tell you everything.”

“Why?” said Stan quietly.

“Because I’m showing you all about the management of the men that it has taken me much study and patience to acquire.”

“I’m sure it must have,” said Stan eagerly.

“Well, then, am I not a donkey to teach you till you know as much as I do?”

“Certainly not,” said Stan warmly.

“Then I think I am, my fine fellow; but we will not quarrel about it.”

“No; for one can’t,” said Stan, laughing, “and I shall not.”

“Nor I, my lad, but I shall think a great deal; but it’s weak all the same. As soon as I have made you fit to manage here, I shall be packed off and you’ll be pitchforked into my post.”

“I don’t think it is likely that my father would put an inexperienced boy to perform the duties of one like you,” said Stan quietly; “and I’m sure neither father nor uncle would behave unfairly to any one.”

“Good boy!” said the manager sharply, and with one of his half-mocking smiles. “Always stick up for your own people. But, to be fair, I think just the same as yourself. They wouldn’t, and I know them better than you do. But to change the conversation. Look here; as soon as old Wing comes back, I’m going to send him right up the country among our trading people upon another expedition. You have to learn, and I’ve been thinking that you may as well begin to pick up business and the knowledge of the people at once. What do you say to going up the river lands and gardens along with him?”

“I should like it,” said Stan. “But I’m afraid that I should be no use to him. What should I have to do?”

“Nothing,” said the manager, laughing. “Only keep your eyes open. You could do that?”

“Oh yes, I could do that,” replied Stan.

“Wing would do the judging of the crops. One does not want to buy tea blindfold.”

“I thought you bought it by tasting.”

“Yes; but we look at it first. That’s settled, then. I tell you what you shall do: sail up the river to the extreme of your journey, and come back overland so as to visit some of the plantations right away from the stream.”

“And stop at hotels of a night?”

“Certainly. Capital plan,” said the manager dryly, “if you can find them.”

“I meant inns, of course,” said Stan, flushing.

“And I shouldn’t advise that. They would not be comfortable. No, no,” added the manager, with a laugh; “you made a mistake, and I began to banter. You will find some of our customers hospitable enough. It is only the ignorant common people who are objectionable.”

“And the pirates,” cried Stan, smiling.

“Oh yes, they’re bad enough,” said Blunt. “The difficulty is to tell which are pirates and which are not. You see, there are so many unemployed or discharged soldiers about. They get no pay, they’ve no fighting to do, and they must live, so a great number of them become regular banditti, ready to rob and murder.”

“This seems a pleasant country,” said Stan.

“Very, if you don’t know your way about. But you are not nervous, are you?”

“What! about going up the country? Not at all.”

“That’s right. Make your preparations, then, just as slight as you can, and it will make a pleasant trip, in which you will have a good view of a beautiful land, and learn a good deal about the people.”

The next morning, to Stan’s surprise, he found that a fresh boat was moored to the wharf – one that resembled a miniature junk – a boat manned by three or four men, and just large enough to display a good cabin aft, with windows and sleeping accommodation, while the crew had an enclosure forward to themselves.

“The boss’s boat,” said the chief warehouseman, Lawrence, as he saw the lad examining the outside. “Nice, comfortable boat for up-river work. Mr Blunt goes up in her sometimes to visit the plantations. Our man Wing came back in her during the night.”

“Oh, has he come back?” cried Stan eagerly.

The words had hardly passed his lips before the pleasant, smiling face of Wing appeared, as he slid back a window and came out of the cabin, looking particularly neat and clean in his blue frock and white trousers, and ready to salute his young master most deferentially.

“Morning, Mr Lynn,” came the next minute in the manager’s harsh voice. “So you’re beforehand with me. Have you arranged with Wing?”

“No; of course not,” was the reply. “I have not said a word.”

“That’s right. – Here, Wing!”

The Chinaman stepped on to the wharf, and a short conversation ensued, during which Stan stepped forward with Lawrence, who chatted with him about the boat and its capabilities.

“Very little room,” he said; “but there are arrangements for cooking, and any one could spend a month in her up the river very comfortably.”

“Wing,” shouted the manager, “we’ve done our business, so we may as well chat over the arrangements for your start.”

“Yes. When will it be?” asked Stan.

“The sooner the better. Wing here is always ready. I should suggest an early dinner, and then making a start so as to get as high up the river as you can before night.”

Wing smiled assent, and then played the part of captain by leading the way on board and doing the honours of the boat.

After this there was a little discussion about stores, which the Chinaman was ordered to obtain, and in half-an-hour Stan found himself within measurable distance of making a start. That afternoon there was a hearty send-off, and Stan was waving his cap in answer to the cheers of the party gathered upon the wharf, while the light boat glided along in obedience to the action of its tall, narrow matting sail, the big building rapidly beginning to look dwarfed; while as soon as the Chinese boatmen had got their sails to draw well they squatted down in the forepart of the boat, one keeping a lookout, and their chief, aft behind the cabin, holding the long steering-oar.

Stan had the main deck (if a portion of the boat in front of the cabin door that had no deck could be so called) all to himself, for Wing was inside, evidently intent upon making his arrangements for his young chief perfect before it was time for the evening meal.

The space was very small, but there was plenty to be seen, and a movement or two on the part of one of the boatmen squatting forward with an earthen pot between his knees taught the lad that he was looking down at the kitchen, and also that the earthen pot was the range – the man, who was arranging some scraps of charcoal in a little basket, being evidently the cook – while soon after the men were doing feats with chopsticks in getting rice into their mouths.

Stan had had some experience of Wing’s catering while on the up-river journey coming from the port, and had seen the man play what seemed to be conjuring tricks with a melon-shaped piece of chinaware which was plaited all over with bamboo basket-work.

This came out of its basket jacket, and disgorged cups, saucers, and a sugar-basin, before turning into a teapot; and a glance at another squarish box with rounded angles was very suggestive of its being fitted up for dinner use, as was afterwards proved.

All in good time, as they glided onward to the glowing west, Stan saw as if in rapid succession, so great was the novelty, his own tea made ready, the men forward seated round a steaming heap of rice, his own supper prepared, and then the night coming on as they made for a wooded part of the bank, off which the sails were lowered and the boat moored; and soon after all was painfully still, only the faint gurgling of the water breaking the silence as it rippled beneath the bows. Then, almost before the lad could realise his position, all was dark beneath the glistening stars, and he felt ready to ask himself whether it was true that he, who used to watch the stars out of the dormitory windows of his school in far-away England, could be now in such a helpless position, right away there on the swift waters of one of the great rivers of the mighty Chinese Empire.

“It doesn’t seem real,” he said. “I could almost fancy that it was all a dream.”

He felt the same soon after, when, for want of something to relieve the monotony of his position, he went into the cabin and lay down on the stuffed bamboo shelf which formed his bed.

“Suppose one of the great dragon-eyed junks coming down the river should run us down,” he thought, after lying awake for some time.

And then he began to think of the consequences, and whether he could manage to reach the surface and strike out for the shore.

Next he began to think of his father and Uncle Jeff; then of the manager, who did not seem such a bad fellow after all; then of himself and his lonely position; and then of Wing, who gave him a broad hint that he was sharing his cabin. Lastly, the lad began to think of nothing at all, not even the huge forces of the mighty river, for a listener would have come to the conclusion that he was trying to mock the remarks made by Wing.

Then it seemed to the lad that it was only a few minutes since he lay down in the darkness.

But it could not have been, for all at once something in a great reed-bed cried “Quack, quack!”

And Stan knew that it was once more morning, with the sun shining brightly, and the boat gliding swiftly up the stream; the men being clever enough in their management, in spite of their stupid looks, and steering close inshore where the current was slack.

## Chapter Eight

### “Come cuttee Head off.”

The night's rest had chased away all the dull feelings that had troubled Stan, and he woke up bright, elastic, and eager for the adventures of the day. Look where he would on either shore, everything was attractive. The country was highly cultivated, and dotted with farms and dwellings belonging to what seemed to be a large and peaceable population.

But his wondering gaze was soon checked by Wing, who came out of the cabin smiling, with the announcement that “bleakfas” was ready – an announcement as pleasant in the confines of Asia as in homely Britain; and, to the lad's delight, he found everything quite as civilised and good.

Wing played the part of body-servant as ably as that of agent at the *hong*; and after the meal was over, and the lad had returned outside to watch the glorious panorama spread on either side of the river, his guide came deprecatingly behind him rubbing his hands.

“Young Lynn wantee Wing?” he asked.

“Yes; tell me,” said Stan, “how far have we to go up the river?”

“Velly long way,” replied the Chinaman, holding up his left hand with the digits spread out, and using his right index-finger for a pointer as he counted, “One, two, flee, fow, fi'. Plap sick if wind no blow.”

“And is it all beautiful?”

“Yes; allee velly beautiful. Wing countly velly fine place.”

“But are we going to sail right on up the river like this?” asked Stan.

“Yes. 'Top many time. Buy cake – buy egg – buy fluit – buy duck – buy chicken – buy lil pig. Plenty good to eat. Got lice, tea, suga'. You likee have gun shoot duck?”

“No,” said Stan; “there's too much to look at without bothering about a gun.”

“You likee ketchee fishee? Boy get line leady, put bait hook, young Lynn ketchee fish? Velly good eat.”

“Not to-day,” replied Stan. “I want to use my eyes.”

“Yes; velly good. Young Lynn use long eyes.”

And before the lad had half-grasped the man's meaning, Wing had shuffled back into the cabin, to return directly with his young master's black leather binocular-case.

“Wing load long eyes – nocklah – leady to shoot?”

“Not yet,” said Stan, smiling, as he took the case, and then seated himself in a squeaking cane chair placed ready for his use, and sat back to continue watching what at times looked to him like so much beautifully painted china on a large scale.

Finding that his services were not required, Wing settled himself down upon a stool just inside the cabin entrance, and at once became busy without attracting his young master's notice, till the boat came abreast of a beautifully shaped pagoda, evidently built with blue and white tiles, and having a marvellously striking effect in the bright sunshine, as it rose from a verdant gorge half-way up a rugged mountain-side whose slope ran steeply down to the river, which bathed its rocky foot.

“What a landmark!” thought Stan. “If one were lost, how easy it would be to look out for that tall temple and make for it!”

The glittering tiers of glazed earthenware rose one above the other, each with its wavy, puckered eaves and points bearing little bells, the topmost stories looking as if the builders had possessed ambitious ideas of making the highest pinnacle pierce the soft blue sky; and as the new-comer kept his admiring eyes fixed upon the beautiful work, the boat glided on, forcing him to turn his head a little more and a little more, till it was wrenched round so much that Wing began to appear at the left-hand corners of his eyes, and interested the lad so much by the busy interest he took in his work

that Stan's gaze became gradually transferred from the temple to the man, who went on with what he was about in profound ignorance of being observed.

It was something fresh to Stan, who more than ever realised the fact that, in spite of being heavy and plain of feature, Wing was a bit of a buck in his way, and one who took great pains to impress upon the common coolies with whom he came in contact that he belonged to a higher grade of native – one of a class who never dreamed of defiling their hands with hard work, and kept up at great trouble by many signs, in the shape of finger-nails, of their being head and not hand craftsmen.

When Stan first caught sight of him, Wing was very carefully taking off what looked like a wooden thimble, which had been formed by scraping and filing down a suitable portion of a joint of bamboo; and as this thimble-like piece was removed, the man again laid bare a long, curved finger-nail, whose point, carefully polished and smoothed, was quite an inch above the quick, and evidently “still growing.”

“What silly nonsense!” thought Stan. “What an absurd idea! Why, if he caught that nail in anything it would break down and become a painful hang-nail.”

But it soon became evident that Wing did not mean to break down that nail, for after a certain amount of scraping and polishing it was carefully covered with its thimble-like sheath, before the index-finger on his left hand was uncovered to go through the same process as its fellow.

As Stan watched he became aware of the fact that the left middle finger-nail had met with a mishap, having in all probability been broken right down, and was now being nursed up again to an aristocratic height.

All at once the man raised his eyes as if to see how his young master was getting on, and started as he saw that he was being watched.

“Are we likely to see any pirates up the river here?” said Stan quietly.

The man shook his head.

“Wing no tell,” he said gravely as he began to cover up his much-petted nails. “Plaps many bad man – plaps not none 'tall. Plenty pilate evely-wheah. Plenty bad soljee. Wing hope nevah see none no mo'. Velly glad leave boat and begin walk back. Plenty pilate on livah; plenty bad soljee way flom livah.”

“Then the discharged soldiers are worse than the pirates, Wing?” said Stan, smiling.

“Not laugh at,” said the man solemnly. “Allee dleadful bad man. Killee people and takee evely-thing away. Lun fass?”

“What do you mean – can I run fast?”

“Yes; lun velly fass?”

“Yes; I think so. Do you think we shall have to run away from some of these men?”

“Yes. Lun away and hide.”

“Oh, I suppose I could run well enough,” replied Stan; “but of course I don't want to.”

“No; Wing don't want lun away, but pilate – soljee makee him. Velly fass; come cuttee head off.”

“This is pleasant!” thought Stan. “It sounds like jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire.”

The consequence of this conversation was that whenever Stan could tear his eyes from the beauty and novelty of the shore on either side he was narrowly scanning the various vessels which came into sight, the greater part being small sailing-boats. But every now and then in the course of the day the tall matting sails of some towering junk would come gliding round a bend, partially hidden, perhaps, by the trees which fringed the banks; and as soon as this was seen, Stan noted that there was a little stir among the quiet, placid-looking boatmen, who began to whisper among themselves. Then, if Wing had not seen the stranger, one of them moved to where he stood and drew his attention to the distant object.

The guide seemed to be gifted with wonderfully powerful sight, which he generally used with the result that every man was placed at his ease at once. But not always. To use a nautical phrase, Wing

was not upon every occasion satisfied with the cut of the stranger's jib, and upon these occasions he turned to his young master.

"Young Lynn lettee Wing look flou' double eyeglass?"

The binocular was handed at once, and after a great deal of focussing, handed back.

"No pilate. Tea-boat. Allee good man."

Or he might speak with a greater tone of reverence as he shaded his eyes:

"Big junk muchee fullee silk. Wing think junk go down whalf see Misteh Blunt."

"Not enemies, then?" said Stan.

"No; velly good fliend."

"But there are the big eyes painted on each side of the bows."

"Yes," said Wing, smiling; "but good boat. No cally stink-pot to flow on boat and set fi'. No big bang gong and lot fighting-man all ovah. No. That velly good boat, and not hu't people. Wing tell when he sees bad boat. Lun away then."

"On shore?"

"Tly go down livah get away. Pilate come too fass. Lun to side and go light away."

"But what will become of the boat?" asked Stan.

"Pilate send man. Take allee good thing. Set fi'."

"Mr Blunt would not like that."

"No. Velly angly. Kick up big low and say Wing gleet fool."

"And what would you say?" asked Stan. "Say velly solly. Gleet pity lose nice topside boat b'long Blunt."

"Of course."

"But much gleet pity let pilate man choppee off Wing head and all men head. Can makee nicee boat again; can'tee makee velly good boatman."

Stan agreed that this was a perfectly sound argument, and during the rest of the little voyage up the river he always felt greatly relieved when his guide was able to announce that the boats they passed were men of peace and not men-o'-war.

But as day succeeded day in lovely weather, and the journey continued through a glorious country, the bugbear pirates died out of the lad's thoughts; and on the last evening, when Wing announced that they would land at a big city in the morning, and leave the boat to go back to the *hong*, Stan was ready to believe that his guide had been playing alarmist a great deal more than was necessary, and told him so. But Wing shook his head. "No," he said; "pilate velly bad sometime."

"But we shall find the land journey no worse – there will be no discharged soldiers wandering about ready to interfere with us?"

"Wing hope allee gone, but can'tee tell. Plenty fliend people heah. Tell Wing when soljee come. Young Lynn and Wing lun away."

## Chapter Nine

### “A Fierce Struggle Ensued.”

Stan altered his opinion the next day when they reached a busy city built on both sides of the river, for Wing gave him a quiet hint to look, and upon turning, the lad found that they were gliding by a towering junk whose deck swarmed with villainous-looking men all well armed, while at intervals they passed four more.

“Allee bad,” whispered Wing. “No lookee; pletend can’t see pilate ship.”

Five more were passed, all of which were given a bad character; but their occupants were lying about, smoking and sleeping, eating and drinking; and being close up to the quays and warehouses of the teeming city, the men were upon their best behaviour, and not disposed to seize and plunder such small fry as the little boat from the *hong*.

Hence it was that Stan’s *sampan* remained untouched, and reached the disembarking place in safety.

Here, evidently so as not to draw attention to his young chief, Wing slung a few necessaries, scale fashion, at either end of a bamboo, balanced his load across his left shoulder, and after giving the boatmen a few instructions which led to their setting off at once on the return journey, he led Stan away from the riverside, right into the busy part of the city, where no notice was taken of them. A short time after the lad found himself at the house of one of the Chinese merchants, who gave him a warm welcome, and talked with him in pidgin-English about his father and uncle.

Stan noticed that he exhibited no little inquisitiveness about his further proceedings, shaking his head and looking very solemn as he hinted that the country was in a very disturbed state.

“But Mr Wing will know how to take care,” he said. “He will know, too, that the farther you keep from the river the less likely you are to meet with pirates or wandering bands of soldiers. You must take care.”

Wing evidently meant to take care, for that evening, after dark, he laid his hand upon Stan’s shoulder and drew him away from the window.

“Too many bad man,” he said, directing the lad’s attention to the rough-looking armed people lounging about the street. “See young Lynn and say, ‘Foleign devil. What want heah?’ No look out window. Go to bed. Sleep.”

Stan laughed at the ultra-precautions taken, but obeyed, and for want of something to occupy himself, lay down quite early, to listen to the shuffling of feet and the loud conversation going on below his window, thinking the while that he would most likely lie awake all night. But before he could make an effort to combat the drowsiness that had seized upon him he was fast asleep, and the next thing he knew was that Wing was shaking his arm.

“What is it?” he cried. “Coming to bed?”

“Get-up time,” replied the Chinaman. “Mollow molning. Come ’long.”

“But,” – began Stan. He said no more, his mouth stretching wide in a portentous yawn; and, still half-asleep, he suffered himself to be led out of the house and along a dark, uneven street, the air of which felt chilly, as if the morning was close at hand.

Twice over he began to question Wing, but received a hurried whisper to be silent, and by degrees it dawned upon him that their land journey had commenced, and that Wing was nervously anxious lest their departure should become known.

“Soljees,” he whispered, and put his hand to his lips.

“Why, there’s not a soul about,” said Stan to himself, feeling sleepy, and out of temper to a degree that made him ready to quarrel with his guide for taking such unnecessary precautions.

But he remained silent, and trudged on close behind his companion, stumbling every now and then in the darkness, and longing the while for the coming of broad daylight, so that he could avoid the rough stones and mud-holes which seemed to be always in his way.

He was surprised, too, at the extent of the city, for no sooner was one devious street passed than they plunged into another, their wanderings lasting for what must have been close upon half-an-hour, before they plunged into a narrower passage than ever – one where the overhanging eaves on either side seemed to nearly touch – while right in front a huge wall towered up, looking jetty black, all but a square patch on a level with their feet.

“Why, this must be a big house into which we are going,” he thought.

But the idea had no sooner crossed his mind than he felt his arm gripped, and Wing checked him so suddenly that he came heavily against his guide's chest.

“What's the matter?” whispered Stan.

“St! Big gate. Plentee soljee fass sleepee,” whispered Wing. “Now come 'long, quick, quick.”

He slipped his hand down to the lad's waist as he spoke, and drew him along past where Stan dimly made out a group of men sitting and lying upon a big bench beneath a great shadowy house.

There was no time to see more before they were out on the other side, with the great building reared up in the gloom behind them, and a feeling of freedom as of an open space in front.

So great a sense of relief came over the lad that he felt bound to speak; but certain sounds behind checked him once more, and he turned cold at the proximity of the danger they had escaped.

For a deep, gruff voice growled out something he could not interpret, and this was replied to by another voice, evidently that of a man newly aroused from sleep.

The brief conversation was carried on angrily, and interrupted again and again as if the speakers kept listening.

This was proved to Stan by the firm pressure of Wing's hand, and the twitches it kept on giving as he stood otherwise quite motionless.

Stan's heart beat till a feeling of suffocation began to oppress him, while with straining eyes he tried to penetrate the dark shadows behind. At last, however, the talking ceased, and he felt the hand which Wing had at liberty pressing upon the top of his head as if to make him stoop down. Grasping his guide's wishes, he bent low, and immediately felt himself drawn onward, the pair stealing along softly in the darkness as silently as possible, and as quickly, for before they had gone many yards Stan was conscious of the fact that there was a long, pale line of light right ahead, and that it was not so dark; for on glancing over his shoulder he could dimly see the gate through which they had come, a huge structure with curving roof and vast eaves, dominating a high wall which went off into the darkness right and left.

“Velly neah ketchee ketchee,” said Wing, with a sigh of relief.

“But suppose they had caught us,” said Stan; “I am an English subject, and you are my attendant. They dared not have kept us.”

Wing uttered a funny little squeak.

“Eh?” he cried. “Wheah Englis' sailoh? No Englis' man-o'-wha, and big gun go bang two time. Chinaman velly much aflaid when Englis' soljee – sailoh heah. Not heah now; Chinaman laugh; say, 'Don't ca'e mandalin button.' Chinese soljee ketchee young Lynn – Wing. Say, 'Don't ca'e nobody.' Puttee in plison. P'l'aps nevah come out again. Velly bad.”

“Ah, well! they didn't see us,” said Stan, “so let's go on faster.”

“Yes; go fastee now. Go long way, have bleakfast. Don'tee want see soljee. Plentee don't ca'e lobbah. Steal dollah. Takee young Lynn gold watch. Velly bad, wicked man.”

“We shan't meet any of them now, I suppose?” said Stan as he gave an uneasy look round at the fast-broadening dawn.

“Wing no know. Velly likely bad soljee come. Velly likely no bad soljee come. Allee same pilate on livah. Don't know quite safe till get home. Wing velly glad get home to *hong*. S'pose get home and

no young Lynn. Misteh Blunt say, 'Where young Lynn?' and Wing say been gone lose young Lynn. Misteh Blunt call Wing dleadful name. Nea'ly kill Wing."

"Then you must not lose me, Wing."

"No; no must lose young Lynn. Takee gleet ca'e young Lynn."

He nodded and smiled as he hurried his companion along, till the great gateway began to grow small in the distance, and the glazed tiles of the roof glittered and flashed and grew confused; while in the distance, far down the rough track, a temple seemed to rise out of a clump of trees, at whose edge a few humble-looking houses appeared beyond where the regularity of the enclosures told of cultivation.

A short time later Wing's next words sent a thrill of satisfaction through Stan, for he laughed, chuckled, and rubbed his hands.

"Good bleakfast," he said. "Plenty eat, plenty tea. Wing know allee people."

Before they had gone much farther Stan was in possession of the information that the place they were approaching was a large tea-farm, with its warehouses, and sheds where tea-chests were made; and that for a long time past the produce of this farm had been sent down regularly to the *hong* by one or other of the trading-junks that bore the up-country produce to the stores of the foreign merchants.

This was interesting enough, and suggestive of the journey now becoming perfectly peaceful. But Stan's main ideas at this time were in connection with the expected meal, so that plenty of energy was brought to bear to get over the intervening distance; while, to make matters better, it soon became evident that they were seen. People came out to stand in the sunshine, shading their eyes and watching the coming visitors. Wing's signals were answered, and a couple of young men came running and recognised the guide, when the visitors were eagerly welcomed to join the morning meal that had been prepared.

The troubles of the early morning were soon forgotten, while, but for the strangeness of his surroundings, there were moments when Stan could have fancied that he was enjoying the hospitality of some farmer's family thousands of miles away in old Devon. But the satisfaction was only short-lived, for the meal was hardly at an end before the door and windows were darkened prior to being thrown open by a crowd of rough-looking men bearing clumsy weapons.

Wing was seated with his back to the door, and at first saw nothing, for Stan, who had the fresh-comers in full view, felt that the best plan would be to sit perfectly calm and unconcerned.

And this he did till Wing, startled by the darkening of the window, looked quickly round and sprang to his feet.

"Lun! lun!" he whispered sharply to his young charge; and catching at his wrist, he tried to drag him towards the door in the back of the place.

He was too late.

A rush was made by the rough-looking soldiers, several of whom literally pounced upon Stan, hurling him down to the floor; and as he, naturally enough, made a brave dash for liberty, a fierce struggle ensued, in which the lad had ample proof of the futility of a half-grown boy trying to resist the united efforts of half-a-dozen heavily built men.

Of course, the struggle did not last many minutes before Stan found himself upon the earthen floor of the Chinese house, with four men seated upon him, leaving him hard work to get his breath, as he stared wildly round to see how his companion had fared.

But he looked in vain, for in the noise and confusion Wing had managed to get behind some of the people of the house, who willingly helped him to pass outside, leaving Stan to his fate.

"A coward!" muttered the boy as soon as he had satisfied himself that Wing had gone.

"No," he added after a few moments' thought; "he couldn't help it, poor fellow! I know: he has escaped. He'll go down the river to warn Mr Blunt, and he'll get help from the port. They'll send men up from one of the ships to get me set at liberty. For these people will not dare to hurt me. I'll be

bound to say that Mr Blunt will soon get to know, and if these scoundrels are not punished severely for this it is strange to me.”

## **Chapter Ten**

### **“Cowardly Brutes!”**

Stan had the stout old tea-farmer who owned the place to thank for the rescue from his extremely awkward position. For, making tremendous use of his tongue, in words which, if interpreted, undoubtedly would have proved to mean, “Let the lad get up, you brutes; can’t you see that you are nearly stifling him?” the farmer supplemented his fierce verbal abuse with blows and thrusts which, in spite of being armed, the invaders made no attempt to resist. They gave way good-humouredly enough, evidently being quite satisfied with their capture; and after taking the precaution to station a spearman at each door and window, they allowed Stan to rise, and then bound him hand and foot to the framework of a cane chair, which they planted full in sight in the middle of the room, before crowding to the well-spread table and making a raid upon the food.

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