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**JOHN P. MARQUAND**

**MING  
YELLOW**

**Boston . Massachusetts . 1935  
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JOHN P. MARQUAND**

**WARNING HILL  
HAVEN'S END  
MING YELLOW**

# MING YELLOW

## CHAPTER I

There must have been a dozen guests applying for rooms at the Hôtel de France et Chine. They had just arrived from the railroad station beyond the Tartar wall. But a quick glance in their direction convinced Rodney Jones that none of them was the man he was there to find. Those newcomers stood among the transplanted Gallic conventions of the hotel lobby in an uneasy condition of maladjustment which marked them instantly as strangers to Peking and to the East—tourists to whom every sight and sound beyond the door of that hotel was utterly unfamiliar, utterly strange.

Rodney Jones could sympathize with that feeling still because he had experienced it himself eighteen months before, when they had sent him out from New York. He could remember the naïve vividness of those first impressions. He could recall how they had burst upon him in a reel of unfamiliar vistas, but now he knew that the first sight of China was probably the same for every one who had come there, from Marco Polo on. It amazed, and then before you knew it, it engulfed you in a warm wave of oblivion.

The hotel manager was hurrying by—a wiry, tan little man in his morning coat.

Rodney raised a hand and stopped him. "Monsieur Paul," he said.

"Ah!" said M. Paul. "Meester Jones, good afternoon. But I am busy now."

Rodney smiled and his face broke into angles. "Naturally you're busy," Rodney said. "Any other bandit would be. Don't worry, you'll get their money, M. Paul. I only want to know—did Mr. Newall come? Mr. Edward Newall?"

"Yes," said M. Paul; "he's to have the main suite on the seventh floor."

Jones glanced toward the lift. "Is he up there now?"

The manager shook his head. "I do not know," he answered. "I am in a hurry, but there is his daughter standing by the desk. Why do you not ask her?"

Rodney Jones glanced sharply across the lobby. Blue-gowned, shaven-headed Chinese merchants were opening bundles of their wares to attract the tourists. Embroidered silks and meretricious jades were covering the tables. Rodney Jones straightened his mouth and eyes into a suave expression and pulled the creases from his coat, and then walked quickly toward the desk. He did not see the girl's face until he spoke. Her back was toward him, but he glanced at it appraisingly.

"She's too thin," he said to himself. "Probably she's got a nasty temper."

She was talking to a man with bushy yellow hair in a brown tweed suit and something she was saying evidently had puzzled him, because he was frowning. "For heaven sakes, Paul," she was saying, "once and for all I wish you'd get this straight: I can look out for myself exactly as well as you can." Her voice was level and it had that cool curious quality that had always made Jones ill at ease, because it was the voice of a world of which he knew almost nothing—a world of security and ease. It seemed to him that there were diamonds in her voice, and sleekly groomed hunters, and dresses and perfumes from the Rue de la Paix. It was a voice that sounded like ice in a glass—pleasant but completely aloof.

The man in tweeds was speaking. "Now, that's all right, Mel," he was saying, and his words were slow and puzzled, like his face, "but I wouldn't let any woman—not even my cook—go out in this place alone."

"I'm not your cook!" she answered.

"I know you're not," the other answered patiently. "I didn't say you were."

"You did," she answered. "That's exactly what you said. You said it distinctly. I heard you. You said I was your cook."

"For God's sake, Mel!" the other answered. It was clear enough she had hurt him, because his voice became thick, almost unsteady. For a moment there was something between those two which removed them from that lobby and seemed to tie them reluctantly together. "Why do you twist up everything I say?" he asked. "Why do you always twist it? I'm not quick like you. Don't you know I love you, Mel?"

Her shoulders moved beneath her light coat, but it was impossible to tell whether she was startled or whether the words had made her laugh. "Save it for the moonlight, Paul," she said. "There's a time and place for everything."

"I'd love you in any place," the other answered. "You ought to know that by now!"

Then Rodney Jones became aware that he was listening to something which he had no business to hear. Suddenly he knew that he was standing there, caught in the current of two lives. He could feel their emotions and desires, and the strange and utter mystery of the way of a man with a maid. Right there in the lobby he had beheld a sight which must always be amazing. He had seen that heavy, tweed-suited, shoebrush-haired man throw his heart at a girl's feet. Any one could tell he loved her, but the way of a woman was different, always new and strange at such a time as that. Did she love him? Rodney could not tell. He only knew it was no time to speak to her, but something in the situation amused him ironically. He moved a step nearer. "I beg your pardon," he said. His words, precise and literal, sounded almost startling. They came between those two like something more than sound. He could almost believe he saw them moving in the air.

The man turned toward him a face almost devoid of comprehension, as though he had stepped from the dark into sudden light. For an instant Rodney Jones examined the stranger with an interest that was personal, almost friendly. He saw the face of a man not yet out of his twenties, a heavy jaw, a large expressive mouth, a short blunt nose, blue eyes. It was the face that stared out weekly from the rotogravure sections of the papers back at home—the face of an athlete and of an objective type. Jones rather wished he, too, looked like that; perhaps because he was perfectly sure that he did not. Jones felt the other stare at him. The blue eyes came into focus quickly with an athlete's coordination, the forehead wrinkled slightly, the corners of the lips straightened. "Huh?" the stranger said, but his eyes were bewildered. His eyes were saying, "Who the deuce are you?" but all he said was "Huh."

Jones smiled. Suddenly self-conscious, he could feel his lips draw up in conventional politeness, and he said again, "I beg your pardon."

And then the girl turned toward him quickly, nervously, and he became aware of her, startlingly aware of her as soon as her head was turned. Afterwards, when he tried to think, he could never remember what she wore except that her coat was blue. It was hard for him always to recall another single concrete detail, for something had happened to him when she turned which was indescribable. It was metaphysical, uncanny. It was something to do with destiny. He could swear that he had been meant to meet her, just like that. There was a fulfillment about the thing and a perfection of logic. She was like some one he had always known although he had never seen her until then. He wondered if she realized it too. She was like him, he knew; like some one lonely, like some one always quite alone. She had his own restlessness; she had his own high temper. Her eyes were telling him so frankly, curious greenish eyes that changed from dark to light. "I'm alone," her eyes were saying—"entirely alone." And he could hear his own mind speaking, although he did not say a word. "She's beautiful," his mind was saying. "Lord, she's beautiful! But still she's just like me." Then he wondered if she loved that man. There was no reason why she should not, every reason why she should. Then he heard his own voice speaking, although it did not sound like his. "Would you mind telling me, are you Miss Newall?" he was asking.

"Yes," she said. "What of it? Who are you?"

He put his hands in the pockets of his coat. "My name is Jones," he answered. "I represent the Composite Press Service here. I wonder if you'd tell me where I might find your father, Miss Newall."

"So you're a newspaperman," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "That's how I make my living. I wanted to interview your father, Miss Newall. I suppose the rest of the Press will be down here pretty soon."

"Oh," she said, "will they? Can't my father go anywhere without being interviewed?"

"Probably not." Rodney Jones smiled slightly. "Your father's a very important man."

"Well," she said, "you're not, are you?"

"Not what?" he asked.

"Not important."

"No," he answered, "not at all." Then he was aware that the conversation was growing absurd. The color of her eyes was growing dark. The line of her lips was growing thin. And then the man beside her interrupted her.

"You let me handle this, Mel," he said. "My name's Steuben, Mr. Jones. Mr. Newall is out here for a rest—that's all Miss Newall meant."

"It isn't what I meant," the girl answered. "It isn't what I meant at all." And suddenly she smiled at Rodney Jones. It seemed to him she touched him when she smiled. For a part of a second, just as her lips curled up, her eyes were warm and friendly. "Father's in the bar, having a drink. He isn't tired. He's never tired. He's all right. But you won't get anything out of him."

Rodney Jones found himself smiling. "You don't mind if I try?" he asked.

"No," she said suddenly. And suddenly she reached her hand out and touched his shoulder. He never knew just why, and probably she never did either. "If he isn't nice, you call me, Mr. Jones. Good-by."

As he walked away, he could still feel that light touch on his shoulder and it made the room seem blurred. It made everything seem pleasant, very pleasant. "Lord," his mind was repeating, "but she's beautiful! Don't be a fool, Jones: it's just the North China air again. She's not for you, Jones, but she's beautiful." Then he knew he was being a fool and he turned quickly past the tables of jade and ivory, and walked toward the bar.

It often seemed to Rodney Jones that old residents of that amazing city blamed everything which was inexplicable upon the air they breathed. They blamed the air of North China for their nervousness and irritability; they excused excessive drinking and mild chicanery, and men for running off with the wives of other men, because of the wind which blew across Peking from the greatest solitudes on earth. Sometimes it was laden with fine yellow dust; again it was so clear and pure that the sunlight refined it into crystal white. There was a mysterious stillness sometimes in that limpid air, as though the remoteness of the Gobi desert and the Mongolian plateau had not entirely left it.

Some of that stillness was in his own mind when he heard a voice call him just as he turned to the corridor that led to the barroom. It was a Chinese voice inured to a range of enunciation compared to which spoken English was barbaric in its simplicity. The words flowed together, each syllable adroit and perfect. "Mr. Jones," some one was saying, "you remember me, I hope?" A young Chinese was speaking who might have been any one of the Europeanized Chinese who drank their tea and cocktails at the hotel of an afternoon. The stamp of the West was on him. He must have been turned out by an English tailor, judging by the white suit he wore. The suit and the Panama which he carried in his right hand both were good and unobtrusive. Yet neither of them belonged with his face and hands. Once you saw his face, you might have thought of one of those formal portraits done on yellowing silk in meticulous hairline strokes, beside which the work of Holbein would seem impressionistic. His face was long and oval and tinted yellow-brown like old ivory. His lips were mobile and serene. His dark eyes were slightly protruding, half courteous, half inquisitive.

"Wait a minute," said Rodney Jones. The Chinese before him, he estimated, was one of those who lived on the intellectual fringe of his race, half shut off from his own people by his contact with the Western world. His kind filled the

treaty ports, the colleges, the business offices and the bureaus of the Nanking Government. He had probably learned his first English from a missionary school, which had led him, perhaps, through college in America.

"I remember you now," said Rodney suddenly. "I saw you in Nanking. You were in uniform."

"Thank you," the Chinese said. "It is so kind of you to recollect me. My name is Liu. Philip Liu. Will you excuse me if I ask you something? I saw you speaking to a lady a moment ago. Would you mind telling me, was that Miss Newall?"

The question was unusual enough to make Rodney Jones curious. "Why do you want to know?" Rodney asked. "Are you from the police?"

"Oh, no," Liu answered. His manner was ingenuous, and only his dark eyes were vague. "I'm out of work just now, Mr. Jones. I'd like to see Mr. Newall. About work. Could you tell me where he is?"

Rodney felt inexplicably uneasy. Without allowing his face to change a muscle, Rodney Jones found himself lying smoothly. "He's upstairs in his room, probably. He won't see anybody, Mr. Liu. I'm going to the bar for a whisky-soda. Will you join me?" Rodney knew that the invitation was a safe one, since very few Chinese had a head for European liquor.

"Oh, no, thanks." Philip Liu smiled slightly. "Would you do me a favor, please?" he asked. "If you should see Mr. Newall. He may be looking for an interpreter. I'm a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and I hold recommendations from Shanghai. That is the only reason for my questions. You'll excuse them, will you please?"

Rodney Jones looked at him closely and Philip Liu looked back. In spite of the carefully cut white suit and the Panama, they were gazing at each other from a distance of tradition as wide as the Pacific.

Philip Liu smiled brightly and waved his slender hand. It was a trite Western gesture of farewell which the delicacy of the hand made Eastern. His thin fingers moved through the air like the brush strokes of a Chinese character, all the time that his face was lighted by that sudden facile smile.

"Well, O.K.," said Philip Liu, "and if you should see him would you excuse my suggesting something? They tell me he is difficult with journalists, but there is one subject that might interest him, I think. I should speak with him about porcelains—particularly the monochrome yellows of the Mings. This is my thanks, you understand, because you will say a word for me. Well, bye-bye."

"Here," called Rodney, "wait a minute. How did you— What makes you say that? Has any New York dealer sent word over—"

Philip Liu stopped and turned back with a sharp sort of glance.

"What makes you ask?" he inquired.

"I'm asking," Rodney's astonishment made him frank, "because I happened to hit upon that idea myself, without any information. I know a bit about Ming Yellow."

Later, when Rodney thought back over that dialogue, he could never avoid the idea that his last words had changed some balance—that Philip's glance had grown sharper and less cordial from that minute.

"Well," the young Chinese said, and he seemed about to add something, and then to think better of it, "well, bye-bye."

Rodney Jones felt vaguely confused when he started down the corridor again in the direction of the bar—a familiar-enough feeling with him when his mind had encountered a Chinese intelligence. He could never entirely explain it away by saying that psychology was the same wherever human beings gathered, not when he met the astute and conventionalized relationships of China. He had lied to Philip Liu because he did not wish to be interrupted in his talk with Mr. Newall, and they both had understood perfectly that he was lying. Instead of being offended, the Chinese had

been confidential, up to a certain point. Rodney stopped in the corridor and put his hands in his coat pockets.

"That boy wants something," he said. "And he wanted to use me, and then he dropped me when I said I knew a bit about Ming Yellow. Now, what does he want, I wonder?"

Somehow the whole idea disturbed him, and there was something in the adroitness of Philip Liu which disturbed him, although the Newalls were no affair of his. Then, without recourse to any sort of logic, he thought of Miss Newall again. She had been very beautiful.

The bar was dark and shady. A calendar and an advertisement for the Calcutta Sweepstakes were hanging on the wall, and two white-robed Chinese attendants stood impassively behind the mahogany counter. The room was deserted by patrons except for a single man seated at one of the dark wood tables. Rodney Jones knew that he must be Edwin Newall.

The light from the window struck his face as he sat staring into a half-empty glass.

Though he was past middle age, though his face was set stonily by the years which were on it, Rodney could see an immediate resemblance to the girl he had just left. There were the same nervous do-as-I-tell-you features, the same greenish tint to the eyes. There was the same thin restlessness about the bony shoulders, which time had not burned out. Some thought must have disturbed Mr. Newall, because he moved his head impatiently as Rodney Jones came in. The shoulders moved just as hers had. The light struck on his thick white hair, which needed brushing, and he drummed his fingers on the table. "Boy," he said, "is that clock right?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said the bar boy. "Clock always right."

Mr. Newall laughed shortly. "A lot you know," he answered. "It's always too fast."

"Oh, no, sir," the boy said. "Clock all time very good. No go too fast."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Newall, "but it goes too fast for me."

While that half-weary old man at the table was amusing himself in the belief that he was alone, his eyes had not left his half-filled glass; and Rodney Jones was aware that for the second time that afternoon he was listening to something no one else was meant to hear. "Good afternoon, Mr. Newall," he said, and the eyes of the other moved slowly from his drink. For a second the thought, whatever it was, which lay behind them kept the eyes vague; then they sharpened into a forbidding stare.

"Ah," said Mr. Newall, "a gentleman from the Press."

"Composite Press," said Rodney Jones, and laid his card on the table. "How did you know that?"

Mr. Newall's voice was gentle but far from cordial. "Because I've lived on my wits, Mister-what's-your-name," he said. "If you weren't from the papers, you wouldn't look businesslike coming into a barroom, and you're too impatient to work in an office. I wouldn't have you in my office for ten thousand dollars. What else would you be out here—a missionary? Oh, no, you're not a Y.M.C.A. organizer. Newspaper's all over you, and it won't do you any good. I've never given an interview in my life, and you'd know it if you'd ever lived in New York."

"I left New York eighteen months ago," said Rodney Jones. "I was with the papers there long enough to know you never talk. I think you've said more now than you've ever said to any one, and that's almost a story."

Mr. Newall sighed. "You're telling the truth about New York," he said. "You have that contagious technique." His voice grew harder. "Well, I'm not talking. Understand?" Then his glance flickered and he betrayed a momentary interest. "Who told you I was here?"

"Your daughter told me," Rodney said. "I asked her where you were."

Mr. Newall glanced up sharply. "Then she must be going mad," he answered. "She knows I never talk." He picked up Rodney Jones' card, glanced at it, and flicked it with his thumb. "I came here so I wouldn't be disturbed. Got any more to say?"

Rodney Jones found himself thinking quickly. He set his hands on the table where Mr. Newall was sitting and leaned halfway across it. "There isn't much good Ming Yellow in Peking," he said. "I don't suppose that's strange because there isn't much in the world." For a second time that afternoon Rodney Jones could believe that his words were solid concrete objects. They had touched Mr. Newall's tired face, had taken the years away from it, had filled it with surprise.

"Here," he said, "wait a minute. What do you know about Ming Yellow?"

"Not much," said Rodney Jones. "But I know that you have one of the best Chinese porcelain-collections in New York. Naturally, I'm curious why you came to China, as all the correspondents will be. If you had been interested in a government loan, you would have gone directly to Nanking, but you stopped off here instead. I knew there had been orders for Ming Yellow from New York. I spend a good deal of my spare time here around the shops. There's a Yellow bowl that's being saved for some one. I guessed it was you, Mr. Newall, as soon as you showed up here."

Mr. Newall's voice had changed as much as his face.

"Have you seen it?" he asked softly.

"Yes," Rodney Jones told him. "The mark looks right, but I think the glaze is wrong. I like Ming Yellow, Mr. Newall."

Mr. Newall moved restlessly. His eyes had brightened with the restlessness in them, and Rodney Jones knew that his mind was the sort that never stopped. "Listen, Jones," said Mr. Newall, "can we see that piece to-day?"

Rodney Jones nodded. "If you like, you can have it brought to your room," he explained. "I don't need to tell you to be careful, Mr. Newall. If the dealers find you're looking for Yellow—"

Mr. Newall's lips curled up exactly as his daughter's had done. "I've run enough stock pools to know what would happen," he said. "I never breathed it to a soul that I was looking out for Yellow. My name has been out of it all along the line. You're the first one who guessed it, Jones."

Rodney Jones looked carefully about the room, but all the while he felt Mr. Newall's glance upon him, a glance which sudden interest had made appraising. The intensity of that interest explained in a measure why Edwin Newall had been known for twenty years in Wall Street. He had that heaven-sent gift of reading minds and using them accurately and perfectly for his own immediate ends. At that moment Edwin Newall was considering using him. He was weighing him, appraising him, but Rodney Jones did not mind. There was a chance that he might see that girl again, if he could be of use to her father.

Mr. Newall hunched his shoulders forward and drummed his fingers on the table.

"How do you know about Ming Yellow?" he asked gently. "Isn't it rather out of your line?"

Rodney Jones shook his head. "I suppose it is unusual, but out here at this end of the world it's rather important to cultivate an interest, I think." He smiled and his eyes wrinkled. "It keeps you out of a lot of trouble, Mr. Newall, and there are one hundred easy ways of getting into trouble in Peking. Besides, being an old Imperial city, Peking is an amazing place for hobbies. No one in the world has understood leisure or has been able to cultivate it like a Chinese gentleman. The trouble with us Westerners, Mr. Newall, we're all too busy. We're all afraid of time."

The man before him moved uneasily. "Maybe some of us have a reason. But don't let me interrupt," he said.

Rodney Jones continued because he knew the other man was interested. "Everything which requires leisure to appreciate and purchase has been gathered at Peking, to amuse the old Court, and much of it is still here. Some people



amuse themselves with fighting and singing crickets. Then there is goldfish breeding. You have never seen such fish as the ones the Manchus breed. Have you ever seen the heaven-aspiring fish, with their popeyes looking up like telescopes?"

"No," said Mr. Newall, "and I don't want to much, but go ahead."

"Then there are the chrysanthemums. You should see them in the autumn in a Chinese garden—or you can concentrate on the bronzes, if you care about them. There are jade merchants in the Chinese city whose families have dealt in jade for five hundred years. There are textiles if you want, but personally I prefer the porcelains. Peking has some of the best fakers of old porcelain of any city in the world, great artists who will sell their work for ten dollars Mex. Be careful of them, Mr. Newall. Personally, I prefer the monochrome Yellow. There must have been a reason why yellow was selected as the Imperial color of China, Mr. Newall. It goes with the air and sun, and when it comes to Yellow, the Ch'in glaze is good enough, but it's a crude and superficial thing compared to Ming. And when it comes to the Yellow of the Nine Years of the Süen-tê reign—" He paused, surprised by his own loquacity, uncomfortably aware that his words and his enthusiasm were more than he intended. He was afraid that Miss Newall's father might think that he was trying to make a cheap impression by a show of superficial knowledge. "Excuse me," he ended. "I didn't mean to go on like this, but the Ming Yellow is rare. I have heard scholars say that it was only used for Imperial religious ceremonies. How did you hear of Ming Yellow, Mr. Newall?"

As soon as he had asked, he realized that it was none of his affair how Mr. Newall might have heard, but the other did not seem annoyed. Instead, there was a momentary companionship between them which pleased Rodney Jones unreasonably.

Mr. Newall was still drumming his fingers on the table softly, and instead of answering, asked another question: "How many pieces of this Yellow do you estimate exist to-day, Mr.—er—Jones?"

Rodney shook his head, thinking that the inquiry was peculiarly characteristic of a stranger.

"It's hard to be specific about anything in China. I've been here just long enough to realize that," he replied. "Pieces may be hidden away in a dozen provincial cities, in all sorts of odd places. When the Ming Empire fell, a great deal of the imperial treasure was carried off by officials—no one knows just where, even to-day. If you want my guess,—and mind you it's only a guess,—I don't believe there are a hundred whole pieces of Ming Yellow extant in the world. I've asked the same question and that's the answer I've received."

Mr. Newall nodded. "How much do you think it's worth?" he asked.

It was just the sort of question to be expected from a man all of whose life had been lived in terms of money. "The value depends upon demand," Rodney answered. "Up to this year, Ming Yellow has been collected almost entirely by Chinese connoisseurs. Now that America's heard of it,"—he looked at Mr. Newall,— "the sky may be the limit." There was a moment's silence while Rodney Jones could feel Mr. Newall weigh him and balance him.

"All right," said Mr. Newall suddenly, "cough it out. Have you got a piece to sell?"

Rodney Jones never knew why the inquiry made him angry, unless it was the discourtesy in the other's voice, but it did. He pushed back his chair, rose quickly. "I'm not a salesman," he said, "and I'm not one of the people you'll see around town looking for commissions, either. If I could afford a piece of Ming Yellow, which I don't suppose I ever shall, I'd keep it for myself. I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time. Good afternoon, Mr. Newall"—and he had turned toward the door when Mr. Newall called him.

"Come back here," the old man said. "Don't let your temper run away with you. If you had money you'd be suspicious too. Excuse me, Mr. Jones." He paused and laughed softly. It was the first time that Rodney Jones had seen him laugh or smile, and the laugh was not entirely agreeable. It was almost noiseless, hardly more than a whisper. "Listen to me, Jones; I believe in luck. I've counted on it always, and I believe my luck's come back. Sit down. I'm glad I've met you, Jones."

Rodney Jones sat down less from his own volition than because he had encountered a character stronger than his

own, one that took consent for granted. It was clear that Edwin Newall had been testing him and trying him and that now he wanted him for something.

"Have you ever heard of the Rose collection in New York?" Mr. Newall was asking him. "Have you ever seen it?"

Rodney Jones nodded. "Only once, two years ago, when part of it was on loan at the Metropolitan."

"Yes," said Mr. Newall. "Well, I'm being frank with you. I don't like Rose. Those K'ang Hsi reds of his should have come to me, if he hadn't broken a promise. But never mind that." He lowered his voice. "Now Rose is after Ming monochrome Yellow. That's why I'm here." He paused and looked at Rodney Jones almost apologetically. "I suppose you think that's childish of me?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "I do, rather." Later, the idea of Mr. Newall and Mr. Rose competing with each other for porcelain always seemed to him one of the most grotesque parts of an adventure that was beginning then without his knowing it. But any one could have understood it, if he had seen Edwin Newall sitting there, for every line in his face spoke of an acquisitiveness which was not entirely greed. It was the acquisitiveness of competition, sharpened by years of contact with other determined individuals. That acquisitiveness was shining in his eyes and twisting at his lips.

"I've always been after something," Mr. Newall said, "and I suppose I always will be,"—he paused and glanced up at the clock, "until I die. I'm out of the stock market. I was sent out here,"—he laughed that whispering laugh of his—, "for rest. Do you think a man like me can rest?"

"It wouldn't hurt you if you did," said Rodney Jones.

Mr. Newall glanced at the clock again. "Perhaps I haven't so much time to rest," he said. "No, Jones, I'm always after something. Aren't your Chinese, with their chrysanthemums and fighting crickets? Aren't you after something, Jones?" Those level green eyes were on Rodney Jones, and he felt his face redden.

"No," he answered, "not exactly, Mr. Newall."

"Before you deny it," he said, and he laughed, "think it over. Now listen, Jones. I'm out here to lick Rose. A whim, if you want to call it that. If there's any of this Ming Yellow in China, I'm going to get it and he isn't. Naturally, I'm doing it under cover. I know what will happen if they know I'm in the market." He drew a card from his pocket. "You know that Chinaman's address?"

"Yes, I know it," Rodney Jones answered, "but call them Chinese, not Chinamen. It hurts their feelings to be called Chinamen."

But Mr. Newall was not interested in the last remark. "You were speaking about a Yellow bowl. That's where it is, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Rodney Jones.

"Well, I'm not fool enough to have anything sent to my room. If I go to the shop this afternoon, I go as a casual tourist. It might be even better if you take me. Have you got time to go there now? I'll pay you for your time."

Rodney Jones could not help but admire him, now that all the pieces of the puzzle had come together. "Have you ever been to China before?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Newall. "And I've only been long enough this time to get up from Shanghai."

"Have you ever traded with Chinese, Mr. Newall?"

"Yes," said Mr. Newall: "dealers in New York."

"I imagine that's quite different," Rodney Jones replied. "I have a theory that America dulls their perceptions. You

want to go to the shop of a curio dealer named Mr. Wong. The Wongs have probably dealt in porcelains for the last three centuries. I have an idea that Mr. Wong will know who you are."

"I'll take a chance on that. Will you go with me?" Mr. Newall said.

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "and you needn't pay for my time. I know what you're thinking, Mr. Newall, but I'm not planning to take a squeeze out of Wong, either. In case you're interested."

"Thanks," said Mr. Newall. "How do we go? Automobiles?"

"It's in the Chinese city," Rodney Jones replied. "A rickshaw will be easier."

Mr. Newall frowned. "Another city?" he remarked. "How many cities are there in Peking?"

"The Forbidden City," said Rodney Jones, "The Imperial City, The Tartar City, and The Chinese City, all surrounded by their own walls."

"That sounds like a lot of walls," said Mr. Newall, rising. A bar attendant moved forward with the check, his cloth slippers padding almost noiselessly across the floor.

Rodney Jones looked at his neat white gown. "Yes," he said. "They break down easily, but there's always another wall."

They walked out the street door of the bar into the clear white sunlight of late afternoon. A tram car was going down the street; its bell was ringing; the horn of a motor tore through the sunlight like a sound of ripping cloth. A crowd of rickshaw coolies came running up, gathering around in a circle, balancing the shafts of their ridiculous bicycle-tired conveyances. Their trousers were tied at their ankles, above their black cloth slippers. Their close-shaven heads were perspiring in the sun.

"Mr. Gentlemen," they were saying, "you take me, Mr. Gentlemen, please. I run nice. I speak English good." Their voices chattered like birds through a heavy wave of garlic.

"Am I going to ride in one of those things, Jones?" Mr. Newall asked.

"Yes," said Rodney Jones. "Take that pock-marked boy. He's strong." Then, just as he was stepping into his rickshaw, with his own boy in the shafts, he heard a voice behind him.

"Bye-bye, Mr. Jones," the voice was saying. Philip Liu was standing on the hotel's white driveway, beneath the flowering locust trees, but Rodney was hardly disturbed. He had been convinced that all along Philip Liu knew that he and Mr. Newall had been talking.

## CHAPTER II

Once they were through the gates and in the Chinese City, they met a wave of sound. Once through the gate, the ageless, steady life of China flowed over them like a wave. Humanity rose against the Tartar City wall like a tide. It swirled in a current of dark indigo about the gray watch tower which stood before the gate. In spite of the noise, Rodney Jones was always aware of an integrated peace and of progression there, inevitable and calm, from birth to death. Festoons of carved woodwork decorated the shops, and banners hung from them with bold mysterious characters. Brassware, tin and pewter, clothing, were heaped outside the doors. Rickshaws flitted by, bearing fat old women and wispy-mustachioed men, seemingly oblivious, lost in contemplation. A wheelbarrow bearing water in covered wooden pails, with its huge wheel revolving through the center of the load, went creaking past. A slight boy at the handles staggered beneath its weight, his neck bent by a rope around his shoulders. A low cart was going past filled with lumps

of coal, drawn by sweating bare-torsoed men spread out fan-wise, each bent forward and pulling at a rope. An old man in rags with a basket on his shoulders was gathering manure with a long-handled ladle. Men with round boxes suspended from the ends of poles walked slowly by, calling in plaintive voices for the crowd ahead to give them room. A beggar woman was kneeling; her feet were tiny and pointed from bending. She stretched out her hands and pounded her forehead in the street dust. "*Laoyeh!*" she called, "*Laoyeh!*"

The two snarling marble lions, guarding each side of the Tartar-wall gate, their sides worn smooth from their centuries of contact with humanity, gazed south with the blank eyes of the blind beggars. The green-glazed figures on the angles of the green tower roofs stared out to the country beyond the walls.

The shop of Wong Yung-kuei was on one of those side streets, as narrow as a South China alley, lying to the right of the broad Ch'ien Men. The closeness of the buildings and the banners overhead gave the illusion of entering a narrow room, even before an apprentice boy opened the Wong shop door. The rickshaw runners, their jackets wet with sweat, their shaved heads glistening, and their breaths sharp, turned and lowered their shafts. Mr. Newall stepped slowly onto the street's worn flagging, while Rodney Jones watched him curiously.

"This is the shop," he said. "Now Wong inside here can't speak English or else he won't, so you'll have to let me do the talking."

Mr. Newall's eyes bored into him uncomfortably.

"I've been told Chinese is the most difficult language in the world," he remarked.

"Oh, I'll make an idiot of myself, probably," Rodney agreed, "but I know a little Mandarin. I've had a teacher five hours a day for nearly a year, and I can get around, but I'll never catch the tones or the inflections, because I haven't got the ear."

The front room of the shop was dark and narrow, with the shelves on the wall crowded with an assortment of objects good and bad. Old Wong, the proprietor, stood against a background of vases, cups, jars, saucers, platters, porcelain figures of men and gods and horses and dragons. Something was there for every one; he could answer the wishes of the collector or of a traveling Pacific Coast school-teacher searching for an inexpensive souvenir. He could gratify those wishes with an unvarying imperturbability and an impersonality which, Rodney more than suspected, was tinged with a mild contempt.

Old Wong was in a black silk gown—an old man with a thin, lined face and a drooping mouth. Like all old men of China, even in his shop he had an air of benevolent despotism. It was natural in one who ruled the lives of a wife, a concubine, his children and his children's children. Wong himself had kept that shop when the gates of the Forbidden City were closed, and when yellow sand was strewn twice yearly on the street outside the alley, for the Emperor's progress to the blue-roofed Temple of Heaven. Wong had seen the Boxer troubles; he had seen an empire die. He smiled at Rodney Jones, bowed and clasped his hands together in the conventional welcome. Then he spoke the usual words of greeting, so hard to translate, in a mild cracked voice that sent words and syllables revolving dizzily, while Mr. Newell stood watching. It amused Rodney Jones to see those two men watch each other, one molded in shrewd restive lines; the other seemingly lost in perfect peace.

"This humble one," said Rodney Jones, "has dared to bring his friend in order that he may see fine things."

Wong bowed and smiled and clasped his hands together.

"He does this poor one honor," he said. "He comes, I think, from the Excellent Country."

"He says you come from the Excellent Country. He's spotted you for an American," said Rodney Jones.

Mr. Newell smiled icily, while his green eyes met the dark ones of Mr. Wong.

"Tell him I'm pleased to meet him," he replied, and held out his hand.

"No, don't shake hands," said Rodney Jones softly. "He would probably rather not touch you."

"What?" said Mr. Newell. "Not shake hands?"

"Better not," said Rodney Jones. "He is an old man, who hasn't learned the new ways. It would be different if young Wong were here, but he isn't. He's asking us to take tea now."

"All right," Mr. Newall answered. "I'm willing to take my time."

They walked to a door in the back of the shop, through a small courtyard to another smaller room. There was a shining black lacquer table against the wall, with three square stools beside it. There were two scrolls of Chinese verse on the wall and nothing more. Their Chinese characters stood out sinuously and without immediate meaning. A small boy had appeared with a teapot and three thin cups.

Mr. Newall drummed his fingers on the lacquer as Rodney Jones watched him from the corner of his eye. All the while Rodney Jones and Mr. Wong were speaking of this and that, Jones awkwardly, Wong smoothly, in words which sounded aimless and bird-like.

"How is trade this year?"

"Not so good as last year."

"I am sorry."

"How many persons are there in your home?" Mr. Wong was asking.

"Four persons."

"What is your position in your family?"

"I am only second brother at home," said Rodney Jones.

Mr. Wong nodded benignly. "Arrived home," he said, "inquire for peace—Tao chia t'i."

Rodney Jones pondered over the assortment of words for a moment before he understood that Mr. Wong was sending his polite regards to all at home, and home had seldom been so far away. There was a pause and he felt his patience leaving him, as it always did eventually, when he conversed with the Chinese. Nothing had apparently happened—absolutely nothing. Old Wong sat placidly beside his untouched teacup. He could have gone on talking tirelessly all night and saying absolutely nothing. Finally Rodney Jones spoke bluntly, painfully aware of his own crudeness, and conscious that he and Mr. Newall were barbarians beside the technique of Mr. Wong.

"I have told my friend that your porcelain is fine. He is a stranger to porcelain. I have told him about your Yellow bowl which is being saved for an exalted personage. If you do not laugh at my request too much, might we beg to see it?"

"It is too poor a thing," said Mr. Wong.

Mr. Newall drummed impatiently on the table. "This may be fun for you, Jones," he said, "but are you going to chew the rag all night?"

"We're through," said Rodney Jones quickly. "It's coming now; look as though you'd never touched anything finer than a soup plate."

"Leave that to me," said Mr. Newall. "Jones, I'm not a fool."

A clerk in his black cotton robe brought in a silk-covered box, fastened with ivory hasps which he set on the table. He opened it deftly, turned back the lid noiselessly and removed a second covering.

"A poor thing," Mr. Wong said softly. "Offer your friend my deep apologies. I might have shown him better a week ago," and he lifted out a flat yellow bowl, holding it in both hands toward Mr. Newall and bowing.

The room was a fine place to show that bowl. Its yellow glowed against the black lacquer table and the plain walls when Edwin Newall took it in his hands. It was a fine rich yellow, which grew to a deeper tone where the flow thickened perfectly at the base.

Mr. Newall balanced it in his hands and glanced curiously at the mark beneath, while Mr. Wong watched impassively, but Rodney Jones saw that Wong's eyes were on his fingers, not his face.

The American handed the bowl back and was silent for a moment. "The marks are excellent, Jones," he said. "It was a genuine white Ming bowl six months ago. It's clever faking, but it isn't worth a dime."

"I wouldn't talk so much," said Rodney Jones.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Newall. "I've been watching him. He doesn't understand English. Tell him I like it. Ask him if he can find any more."

Rodney Jones spoke quickly and then he turned to Mr. Newall with an amusement he could not suppress. "Mr. Wong says there were three other pieces in Peking," he told him, "but these were purchased a week ago for a customer from the Excellent Country—an order from New York."

Then Mr. Newall's calm left him. "Damnation," he said, "those weren't for me. Rose got 'em. All right, Jones, let's be getting home."

There was no doubt that Edwin Newall was angry. Once they were on the street, Mr. Newall spoke again, apparently to himself. "I thought I could handle Rose," he said. "I hope those three were no better than that one."

And Rodney Jones grinned at him, because there was nothing formidable about Edwin Newall then. "Do you want me to tell you something that may surprise you, Mr. Newall?" he asked. "Wong may not understand English, but I saw him watch your hands. I saw him watch when you put down that bowl. I think he knows who you are, Mr. Newall. By to-morrow morning every dealer in Peking will know you're looking for Ming Yellow."

Mr. Newall laughed, or rather he made the soundless motions of laughter. "I doubt it, Jones," he said.

"I don't," said Rodney Jones. "Every move you make in China is watched and analyzed. Every Chinese is born to bargain. You put that bowl down too quickly. You drew your hands away too fast. Do you think many foreigners would know enough to place that piece as spurious? Not one in a thousand! He'll never make the mistake of showing you a bad piece again."

"He won't see me again," said Mr. Newall. "He wasn't interested. I'm easy on that score."

"On the contrary," Rodney Jones replied, "he'll come to call on you to-morrow morning and he'll bring you a handsome present."

Mr. Newall did not answer for a little time. Somber thoughts seemed to have come over him which held him motionless in the alley beside his waiting rickshaw. He stood staring at nothing, thinking of Mr. Rose, perhaps, although it seemed impossible that porcelain could make a man's mind somber. Then he pulled himself back from his thoughts abruptly, straightened his narrow shoulders and gave his head a shake. "I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Jones," he said. He was suddenly, unexpectedly courteous. "If you're not too busy, won't you come back to the hotel? You must be thirsty now. I am."

Rodney Jones glanced at his wrist watch and saw that the hour was five-thirty. It was time for him to get back to his house to see if there were any news dispatches. He had no right to return to the hotel. "Thanks, I'd like to very much," he said, and he gave the orders to the coolies.

He knew the suite on the seventh floor. There was a long sitting room with French windows and a balcony that looked over the yellow roofs of the Forbidden City out toward the western hills. The seventh-floor servants called and ran, and the Number One Boy, bowing, flung the door open quickly. Rodney Jones was not surprised to find that Miss Newall was waiting there. What pleased him less was the sight of the heavy man in tweeds, who started up when the door opened. Those two had been sitting close together, looking through the open window out across the city. It was the girl who spoke first, not altogether convincingly.

"Father," she was saying, "we've been worried. We've been asking for you everywhere, and then we heard you'd gone out." She looked at Rodney Jones and her voice became conventional and indifferent. "I'm glad you had sense enough at least to go with some one."

"This is Mr. Jones," said Mr. Newall. "He's a curious contradiction. A newspaper man who knows porcelain. The lady is my daughter Mel, Mr. Jones. The capable-looking gentleman is Paul Steuben from my office, and he is capable. He's been as good as running the business for the last year, and he deserves anything he can get from me.... I have to have a keeper these days, don't I, Mel? But you didn't keep me this time, Paul. You've let me out and I've been licked again. That shyster Rose licked me. Will you have a whisky-soda, Mr. Jones? Mel—" he stopped. There was a knock on the door and the Number One Boy entered softly and closed it.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said to Mr. Newall. "He send his card. His name is Mr. Liu. He say he come to see you about Ming Yellow."

Rodney Jones could never explain why his heart missed a beat when he saw Mr. Newall standing looking at that card. It must have been premonition, since the call was only to be expected.

"Are you going to see him, Mr. Newall?" he asked. For no reason which he might advance, he could not escape a belief that there was something, somewhere, wrong. An invisible net was in that room, drawing together all of them except the Number One Boy standing by the door. Mr. Newall was fiddling with the card; his face looked thinner and the lines were deeper around his mouth and eyes.

"Philip Liu," he read slowly, "interpreter, guide, agent. Graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He puts enough on his card, doesn't he? What do you think, Jones? Had I better see him? What do you think, Jones?"

The Number One Boy was listening impassively by the door.

"Boy!" Rodney Jones raised his voice sharply. "Go outside. I don't think anything, Mr. Newall, except that the dealers have spotted you. This Philip Liu was asking me about you this afternoon, as a matter of fact. There's no use showing them that you're over-anxious. Why not tell him to wait until to-morrow morning?" A long while afterward Rodney Jones remembered the moment that followed—one of those clear beats of time which occasionally stand out in life, as a prelude to something new. He could always bring the scene back in clear cold focus: the comfortable upholstered furniture done in light green brocade, vases on console tables, a French clock ticking on a mantelpiece, a plain gray carpet, and the tall windows looking across the roofs of the Forbidden City. The evening sun on the roofs made the tiles shine like silk, a soft earthy yellow. A gust of breeze from the north-west blew the window curtain inward.

Edwin Newall, tall and angular, was still thumbing the card. His daughter was standing near him like a vision of the old man's youth. His fire was burning in her, fresh and new. Rodney remembered the dress she wore. A blue dress. The folds of it clung to her and moved with the breeze from the window. He could believe that her body moved with it in the light air and that she was brought nearer to him. Suddenly he was acutely aware of her nearness. Paul Steuben in his brown tweed suit was standing in the background, but Rodney Jones knew that he too was strongly conscious of that girl. Steuben was scowling slightly, trying to understand. That was how they all stood in that second's clear tableau.

Then Paul Steuben spoke and the balance trembled out of plumb. "Yes, sir, why not let him wait until to-morrow?"

Little things were the ones that could change a life just as Steuben's voice changed it then. Mr. Newall's nerves must have been exactly in tune and ready for that voice to shatter them. His reaction was enough to show that he was not entirely well or the interruption would not have shaken him as deeply as it did. "Why not?" the old man said. "Do you

think I'm tired? Do you think I ought to have a nap before dinner?"

Paul Steuben's jaw grew hard. "As a matter of fact, I do, sir," he answered. "We've all had a hard day."

"And I'm not as young as I used to be," said Mr. Newall, "am I, Paul? And I can't see people when I want to see them. Maybe not, Paul, but all the same, you're not going to keep me shut up here, and Mel isn't either. I haven't got the time."

"Father!" Mel spoke quickly. "Father! Mr. Jones is here."

"Jones is all right," said Mr. Newall. "I wish I'd seen Jones sooner. Boy!" he called. "Send that fellow in."

The door opened immediately and the breeze from the window struck them harder. Philip Liu seemed to be a part of the North China air as he stepped into the room. Rodney Jones was not surprised that he had been waiting directly outside the door. Philip Liu walked in with an impeccable confidence which Rodney Jones took the time to envy, neither stiffly nor casually, neither respectfully nor familiarly.

"Excuse me," he began in that flawless voice of his. "This may seem rather sudden."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" said Rodney Jones.

When Philip Liu glanced toward him, Rodney thought of him for the first time as a person of a different race who did not wish to remain a stranger. "I've been anxious to see Mr. Newall," the Chinese said, "because I know of something that might interest him." He lowered his voice confidentially, friendly. "Ming Yellow." The words as he said them were a part of the yellow of those tiles outside the window. They rang on the air like bells.

Mr. Newall was looking carefully at Philip Liu, examining his face and his immaculate white suit as he might have examined some one from another planet. "What about Ming Yellow?" he asked.

Philip Liu smiled engagingly. "It is so fortunate. I am very glad," he said, "I know where there are ten perfect pieces, and I think they can be bought."

Mr. Newall did not hesitate. "Where?" he asked.

Philip Liu was not overanxious. "I have heard them say," he remarked, "that it dates from the Süen Tê reign. That is the best Yellow, is it not, sir? If you have the time, I can tell you something about it. There are at least ten pieces, five different shapes in pairs."

Edwin Newall moved his shoulders. "Yes, I've got the time," he said. "Where is it?"

Philip Liu paused before he spoke and his glance met Rodney Jones'. "They're in a town called Ho Hsien," he said. "I'm afraid it's rather far from here."

"That does not matter," said Mr. Newall. "How does one get there?"

Rodney Jones answered that question. The map of China, the almost limitless reaches of China spread across his mind. As he reviewed the names of towns he had heard of, he recalled the name of the town of which Philip had spoken. There had been some trouble in Ho Hsien, he could not remember what—something about troops. "You can't go there," Rodney said. "It isn't safe out there."

"Why?" said Philip Liu evenly. "It's very peaceful there. My family, the Lius, have lived near there for nine hundred years."

"You can't go there," repeated Rodney Jones. "It's five days off the railroad."

Philip Liu smiled slightly. "It could be arranged," he said. "And if Mr. Newall cared to purchase, of course they would be cheaper there than here." There was another pause, while Mr. Newall stood thinking.



Rodney Jones could tell exactly what he was thinking. The word had gone out that he was in Peking and that he was buying porcelain. If the dealers learned about Liu's Yellow, there would be bids against him and he would pay heavily. "How many people know about this Yellow?" he asked.

Philip Liu smiled disarmingly. "The pieces are in safe hands," he said. "They were found only recently. I think I'm the only one in this city who knows of them."

Mr. Newall seemed to come to a decision.

"Paul," said he, "will you go into the other room and unpack my papers? And close the door.... Mel, you and Mr. Jones go out. I don't care where.... Jones, show her the sights or something. Take her to dinner if you want. Don't come back until you're ready. I want to talk to Mr. Liu alone."

"You can't go to Ho Hsien," said Rodney Jones earnestly. "It doesn't make sense."

Edwin Newall laughed noiselessly. "Can't I?" he said. "I'll see you later, Jones."

### CHAPTER III

Rodney waited for Mel Newall downstairs, wondering if she would come and feeling that she would not, that the whole thing was utterly impossible. Every one in the hotel knew him, but that afternoon he felt conspicuous and embarrassed, as he stood there waiting. The gray-robed clerks at the desk and the khaki-clad doorboys seemed to be watching him amusedly. The tables had filled up as guests drifted in for tea. The merchants were standing patiently by their wares, but in his own self-consciousness Rodney Jones was the center of the picture. "She's beautiful," his mind was saying. "Beautiful!" And he wondered what he would say to her if they should ever be alone together. He had never realized before that he was diffident and shy, nor had he ever been so aware of his own inadequacies. He saw in a mirror near him an incorrectly postured, lanky man, whose gray suit was in wrinkles, whose thin face was a jaundiced yellow. The mouth was too large and the nose too long. As he was asking himself who it might be, he realized that he was staring at his own image and he turned wearily away. Then he forgot about himself because he saw her moving toward him, slim and straight, entirely aloof from every one else in that place.

"Well," she said, as she joined him, "that's that."

"What's what?" asked Rodney Jones.

She moved her shoulders and smiled at him, as though she had known him for a long while. "You know well as I do," she answered. "My father's off again."

"Oh, that—" said Rodney Jones.

"Yes, that. Well, what are you going to do with me? He threw me at you."

"Not exactly," Rodney answered. "Maybe we were made to be thrown at each other. I don't know."

"What are you going to do with me, now that we're thrown?" she asked. "Looking at the clock won't help."

She had seen his expression as he looked at the clock. The hour was half-past six.

"I've got to file a story for my office," he said. "It should have gone half an hour ago. Everything's down at my house. I almost forgot the deadline."

"You have a house?" she asked, and she seemed surprised.

"Yes," he said. "A house and servants. It doesn't cost any more than a Greenwich Village flat. Don't worry. I'm not living beyond my income."

"If you want to know," she answered, "you don't worry me at all. You're the first thing I've seen in China that hasn't worried me. Well, why don't we go there? Or isn't it proper in Peking?"

Rodney Jones began to laugh. "Lady," he said, "nearly anything's proper in Peking. No one will be surprised."

"You wouldn't compromise me, Mr. Jones?" she asked. "You're a perfect stranger, aren't you, Mr. Jones?"

"Absolutely perfect," said Rodney Jones. "Don't worry; no one is ever compromised in Peking. If you are, just blame it on the North China air."

His house was ten minutes by rickshaw, north from the hotel. It stood on one of those almost countless residential streets in the city where high gray walls with grim red doorways in them shut out every vestige of life. Even when the doors were open, the entrance-ways were screened, allowing life, whether of poverty or grandeur, to go on completely hidden from the street.

Rodney's Number One Boy Liang pulled the gate open. According to the tradition, Liang was a boy, though he was ten years Rodney's senior and the father of a family. He was a large-limbed, spare man, whose broad and bony face spoke of the Manchu and Mongol invasions that had left their history in his blood. "Telegram boy wait, Master," he said. Then he bowed to Mel Newall, smiling with a suspicion of meaning which embarrassed Rodney Jones. "I get tea and cocktails for Missy quick," he said.

"In the back court," said Rodney Jones.

They walked across the stone-flagged front court, through a small room, and out into a second courtyard, where a bed of peonies was blooming against a background of carefully arranged rocks. Rodney was pleased that she seemed happy when they entered the house. Liang was bringing out a table and two chairs, which he placed in the shade of a tree.

"Liang seems used to Missies," she said.

"Liang's a man of the world," he answered. "Every Chinese is a man of the world. If you'll excuse me for half an hour, Liang will get you tea or a cocktail, if you want." Rodney Jones walked into his workroom, took off his coat and put a piece of paper into the typewriter, then stared at the blank page for a long while without concentrating on what he was to write. Mel Newall was sitting in the courtyard waiting, but she might have been in the room beside him, for she did not leave his mind. Actually he knew nothing about her nor had he said anything to her which had made sense, yet there she was. He was still conscious of her, conscious of the way she moved her hands, of the curve of her neck, of the bracelets on her wrist, of the perfume in her hair. She had trusted him or she would not have come alone to his house. "You can't be falling in love," he said to himself. "Pull yourself together, Jones." Then he remembered how she had looked when she was sitting beside Paul Steuben; he had seen the same look on other women's faces.

He wrote:

Edwin Newall, banker, Wall Street operator, on arrival here today refused to disclose the purpose of his visit, except to say he was not here for business or political reasons. Adhering to his long-established rule of not speaking for publication, Mr. Newall, looking thin and tired, declined to discuss his impressions of China or to give any opinion of the economic situation. He is accompanied by his daughter, Melvina Newall and by Paul Steuben, a junior partner of Newall and Company.

Rodney Jones pulled the sheet from the machine and put it carefully on one side. The dispatch, he felt, was as adequate as any that would be obtained by his competitors. He had not inserted a sentence that Mr. Newall was engaged in adding to his collection, because that was off the record. He put another sheet in the machine and began to write again.

According to information from General Wang Chung, Commander of the Third Army, the guerilla troops of Liu Hei Ch'i, "Black Seven Liu," are now being surrounded and their complete elimination is believed to be near. Other information, however, reports them moving to the borders of Chi-li and word has also been received at military headquarters here that their ranks have been increased to five thousand by local bandits and that the entire body is moving northwest. General Wu has dispatched cavalry to reconnoiter from Ho Hsien.

That was where he had heard the name "Ho Hsien." The keys of his typewriter continued a terse dispatch of generals, troops and names. When he had finished, he read it over. It was his job. The dispatch was what he was employed to send, but he knew it would mean little at home, even to the cable editors. The name of Liu Hei Ch'i would mean nothing, and certainly not General Wu. They were only unsubstantial names and places speaking vaguely of the chaos that shook China. What was China? Did any one know? He wondered. He had seen enough of it. He had traveled through it, following two of those petty sectional wars between upstart generals who were only names at home. China was like a pulsing heart. Her four hundred million people moved in the unconscious order of corpuscles in a blood stream. Yes, there was an order, a form, even in the midst of chaos. Generals were rising and generals were falling in inexplicable bloodless conflict. Generals were turning traitor and generals were bribing and being bribed. Politicians were talking of a new China in glib Westernized phrases while old China was still alive. Farmers were being taxed to death; towns were being looted; provinces were starving and still the pageant moved on; an enigmatic pageant which nothing seemed able to influence. Would a new order come rising from Nanking? He doubted it. The missionaries were busy at their work, building social centers and speaking of regeneration, but would China respond?

There was no one to give an answer. China was moving through his thoughts like one of those storms of blinding yellow dust.

"Boy!" he called. "Telegram!" Even as he called, he realized a foreigner's ultimate helplessness in that country. Those noiseless servants made one helpless by their perfect anticipation of one's wants.

Liang moved behind him, straight and dark like a statue in a temple. "Missy stay for dinner?" he asked.

"Perhaps," he said. "I'll ask her."

"You have dinner inside," Liang said. "Big dust storm pretty soon." His glance became sympathetic. "Missy stay all night?" he asked.

"No," said Rodney Jones. "Why the devil should she?"

Liang was imperturbable, polite. "Just think maybe. Other Missies stay," he said.

"Well, you think wrong," said Rodney Jones. "Hand me my coat."

The implication behind his servant's words did not cause Rodney Jones the tolerant amusement which it might have a day before. He thought of the whisky-burned features among the men whom he saw at the club bar in the evening. Life in China might easily creep up behind you and catch you in the end. The sense of limitless time and the futility of individual human effort, where the life span was infinitesimal in China's stream of years,—these would gather about you destructively if you did not watch your step. He realized that he was growing soft already, and that Liang was encouraging him to be soft by pandering to his laziness and his appetites in that persistent endeavor of a Chinese servant finally to rule his master. Liang was a good boy and Rodney could understand his wish to be indispensable, because in Liang's position he would have done the same. Though he put the idea from his mind, he had a definite suspicion that when their wills clashed, Liang was consistently the winner.

"Missy wait. Cocktail outside for you, please." Liang had appeared again.

"Don't want a cocktail," said Rodney Jones, but he knew that he would drink it when he heard Liang reply impersonally, without eagerness. Liang had changed his speech from English to Chinese. "It is a very nice cocktail. The exact kind that the Old One likes best. Missy is waiting."

Once in the courtyard, a new and heavier feeling in the air made him look up at the sky. The breeze was setting the small dark-green leaves of the courtyard tree into ceaseless dancing motion and the sky to the west had grown reddish-yellow and hazy. There would be a dust storm in an hour. He understood exactly why he had been ill at ease when he saw Mel sitting there waiting beneath the tree. Everything about her was so completely satisfactory that he understood the impossibility of there being anything between them. The very simplicity of her blue dress spoke of money, and the sharp delicacy of her profile, like the profile in a Bronzino portrait, made her a visitor from another world. She was examining him with an interest that was close to curiosity, as though she had discovered something about him which was new.

"Finished?" she asked. "You're very quick."

"There's nothing much to do," he answered. He sat in the wicker chair beside her, moving it so that he might watch her face. "We're just put out here on low wages to wait for the world to explode."

She looked across the court to the open door of the living room, where Liang and the coolie were laying a white cloth on the table. "But you're comfortable," she said.

"Yes," he answered truthfully. "too comfortable. Do you know of any other place in the world where it would be possible to live like this on approximately forty gold dollars a week? I have my house, my rickshaw boy, my Number One and a cook and a coolie, all well-trained servants. I don't know how I can adjust myself if I ever leave this place. Here's looking at you, Miss Newall. Will you have another drink?"

"No, thanks," she said.

"Well, I'll have one. Liang," he called, "more cocktails!"

She was watching him thoughtfully, but he was not restless any longer now that he had a drink. The gin and the vermouth pulled his mind together and brought out a fixed sad idea that he might never see her again and a melancholy certainty that it would only be for this once that they would be alone.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "I mean—eventually? What do you want to do?" Her interest seemed so genuine that he was surprised. She was asking a question which he had deliberately placed in the back of his mind for a long while, because he had not wished to parade it before his conscience.

"I don't exactly know," he answered. "I used to have a lot of bright ideas which might be politely called ambitions. Of course every newspaper man has the thought that he'll write something sometime, but I have hardly any illusions left on that score. I used to want to see the world and I suppose that still stays with me. Since I've been here, I've been to Mongolia and Jehol and out to the southwest, where they were having a little war. Liang came to me as a traveling servant and he's good on the road. No, I don't know what I'm going to do. I suppose I'll stay right here and send back fifty-word dispatches. It doesn't appeal to you, does it?"

"No," she answered, "because I have an idea that you might do a good deal better."

It seemed to him that she had no particular reason to be sitting there in criticism. At any rate, her answer annoyed him.

He leaned farther back in his chair and looked at her from under half-closed eyelids, lighted another cigarette and began deliberately:

"Frankly, I've never seen a girl like you except from a distance. I wouldn't naturally, would I, since you're socially

out of the salaried class? I wonder how much you know about anything. Not much, I think. I've put my cards on the table. I admit they don't look very well, but what are you going to do with yourself, sister, now we're on the subject?"

The question appeared to disturb her much as hers had him. She moved her hand up and down the arm of her chair and then she said, "You might pour me another cocktail. I can't let you drink them all."

First he thought she was angry, because her eyes had grown deep and dark.

"The same is true with me, you know. I have never seen any one exactly like you, and you disturb me a little, because you represent something that I always thought was possible. You represent an unstable sort of independence. I don't believe you worry about consequences and I rather like that side of life—because I've never had it, I suppose. You see—" She moved her hand up and down on the arm of her chair again, and her speech grew more deliberate. "You see, I'm faced with a decision. The time is coming when I must make it definitely. I don't mind much. I'm rather happy, but any decision is like closing the door on something else. I don't mind telling you, because we're strangers enough so that it doesn't make much difference."

"No difference at all," Rodney agreed, and poured himself another drink. "Just two ships passing in the night. Is that what I ought to say?"

"If you want to put it that way," she assented. "You probably know what I mean."

"I could strain my mind by a little simple guessing," Rodney said.

"Don't strain your mind," she answered. "You saw us when you came in this afternoon. Paul—Mr. Steuben—"

"You really don't have to go on," said Rodney. "So he's the problem, is he?"

"I don't suppose so, actually," she said. "It's only that it all seems too completely simple—to nod one's head and then to get everything one wants ... ability, devotion, sureness, everything." She paused and moved her hand restlessly. "I don't know. I'm not very pleased with myself. I'm not worth all that."

Rodney leaned toward her and lowered his voice.

"Do you mind if I get personal?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "Don't you think I've indicated that I want you to?"

Rodney felt his pulses quicken. He poured himself another drink.

"If you meant to indicate that I disturbed you in any way, it would make me very happy."

She looked at him unsmilingly and frankly.

"As a matter of fact, you did a little. First when I sat here and saw your house, and then just now, when you came out the door. You looked difficult and things have always been so easy ... not that we would ever mean anything to each other. I was a little sorry for us both."

"Don't be sorry," he said, and he reached across the space that separated them and took her hand. "You're beautiful, you know."

Her fingers rested in his lightly but she did not draw her hand away. He was afraid to look at her, afraid to speak, for fear she would draw away her hand and kill that moment forever.

As they sat there in their silence, they were in a lonely place surrounded by a mutual unhappiness. Her fingers tightened over his.

"We ought to amount to more than we do. I don't like either of us much," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

She moved and a sharp fear seized him that the moment would be over. "I don't know why concretely." Her voice was low. "You're high-strung and you're sensitive, I think, but you're not afraid of life. It's too bad to throw it all away on nothing. I'm not much afraid of life, either. I suppose that's why I let you do this. It's all my fault, of course. It's only—I don't know what to do!" Then she drew her hand away and rose decisively. "I must be going now," she said.

He started dizzily to his feet. He knew that he was losing her. She was so near him, but still so far away. "Going?" he said, and his voice was strained. "Why, you're staying for dinner. The boys are laying the table."

"No," she answered, "of course, I'm not staying. I must be going, if you'll see me back."

He felt his body sway, but not from the drinks he had taken. "So it's good-by," he said. "I won't see you again. That's the way it was meant to be."

"Yes—of course," she answered, and her voice was level, but he did not dare meet her eyes.

"Of course," he replied, "but you might tell me the truth: do you want to go away?"

She looked at him steadily. "Not so very much," she said, "but I'm going just the same."

He never knew what moved him, unless it was sheer despair. Before he knew what he was doing, he had his arms around her and was drawing her close to him. "Then don't go," he was saying thickly, "please. You're here and I'm here, aren't we? Darling—we're so damned lonely, darling." Then he knew that he had been wrong; she had not wanted that at all. She was as quick and as agile as a cat. Before he could let her go—and he would have let her go—smack! her hand struck his face. As she struck him, a misty curtain went across his eyes and he could see her through a reddish haze, her lips half-parted, her eyes light green.

"I didn't ask for that," she said coolly, "Casanova."

The blood was rushing to the spot where her hand had met his cheek. He had never been so angry, but even in his anger he had a sense of fitness and tried to keep his voice level.

"Beautiful," he said, "you let me hold your hand." His eyes met hers and he saw greenish lights dart in them like little glints of sun.

"And because I let you," she was saying, "you thought you could add another scalp to your belt, didn't you? Another blossom to the daisy chain of memories. Answer me! Didn't you?"

Rodney Jones laughed, but his hands shook. "You're mixing metaphors," he said. "We'd better be going now, beautiful."

Then she was close to him, speaking almost in a whisper. "Call me that again," she whispered, "and I'll slap your other cheek."

"I wouldn't try," he said. "You're out in China, beautiful." She was trembling and so was he. It made an ugly picture which he would have given ten years of his life to have kept private. She had started and he heard what she had—voices in the outer court.

"You wait," Liang was saying. "I go tell Missy."

And then he heard another voice. "None of your lip. You take me to her now!"

"Hush," she whispered. "Hush! Sit down!" She was back in her chair, reaching for her glass. Women were amazing creatures. Except for the red blotch on Rodney's cheek, you might have thought that nothing had happened when Paul Steuben and Liang came into the inner court.

Rodney Jones pulled down the creases of his coat. "Hello," he said.

But Steuben had his own powers of observation and deduction. He turned his heavy face from Rodney to Mel Newall, giving each a careful, studious stare. "Mel," he said, "I've been looking for you everywhere. I got worried. The boss is still locked in, talking to that educated Chinese boy." And he looked at Rodney Jones again carefully and back at Mel. "I didn't think I'd find you here."

"Alone in a strange man's house." She added the last conventional clause with a smile.

Steuben's heavy eyebrows drew together and his blue eyes were focused sharply on Rodney Jones' thin face. "Anything wrong, Mel?" Steuben asked.

Rodney walked up to him. The man outweighed him by forty pounds. Steuben could have knocked him into next week and Rodney hoped he would, hoped to heaven he would, hoped anything might happen except what was happening.

"Nothing that's any of your business," he said.

Mel Newall had risen, straight and cool and blue, except for her greenish eyes. "Drop it, Paul!" she said. "I told you I can take care of myself—and I'd rather, please—in China or anywhere. Good-by, and thank you so much, Mr. Jones." She smiled her most attractive, ingenuous smile. "Thank you so much for everything. You've helped me make up my mind."

Rodney Jones smiled back at them both and gestured toward the cocktail shaker on the table. "Have a drink," he said. "Have a drink, Steuben. It's nerves and the North China air, and thanks for not spoiling my manly beauty, if there's any there to spoil. Have a drink? No?—She's right. She can look out for herself, Steuben," and he bowed like one of the attachés at the French Legation. "Good-by, beautiful."

When they were gone, he raised his voice. "Cocktails, Liang!" he called. "What the hell's the matter with you? Walking in your sleep?" He drank another cocktail and another, but they did not change his mood. He felt tired and deathly sick of himself and of the knowledge that he and his ego would probably be together for another thirty years. "And that for you, Jones," he said out loud. "There isn't anything left for you to be proud of, not one damn thing." Then Liang was at his elbow, speaking softly.

"Dinner's ready," he said. "Such a nice dinner."

The china on the dinner table was a light-green ware which could be purchased for a few coppers on the street corners. He admired the peace of its unconscious simplicity and the innate sense of form and color, which persisted in this country even to the beggar's rice bowl.

"Form," he muttered, "that's the word." There was a gurgling of whisky in the glass beside him. As usual, Liang was anticipating his desires. The scene in the court was going back and forth like a pendulum through his thoughts ... suppose he had done this ... suppose he had said that ... Put it away as he would, as something definitely over, back the scene would swing again ... the tilting of Mel's head, the turning of her hand. Suppose she had been right—that he was seeking simply for another moment. It would have been better than nothing. It would have been life. Yet, was there any form?

"Take away that whisky," he said. "I've had enough to-night."

"The great one will feel better if he takes it," said Liang.

Rodney Jones turned and faced his servant, deliberately raised the glass and threw it on the floor, where it went crashing on the polished wood.

"We'll get this straight right now," he said in English. "I'm running my life, not you!"

There was no satisfaction, however, in the breaking of the glass. The gesture met Liang's impersonal calm and was dissipated into nothing. Liang merely spoke two words, and the coolie was on his knees, picking up the fragments and

drying the floor.

Form—that was the word. Form was in the bowls and cups, and in the dark beams above his head and in the curved scroll lattices of the paper-covered windows. China lived and died in form. It permeated every phase of personal conduct and governed every situation in each life.

There was no form in America, in him, or in his kind.

His own life had none of the symmetry of the bowls upon the table. It was rolling out before him bit by bit, like a sequence of pictures on a colored Chinese scroll—a series of unconnected incidents, ending there in the courtyard.

"Well," he said aloud, "that's that. What's next?"

He could imagine that the wind was answering him outside in the growing dusk. The air in the court was a haze of yellowish brown that was growing thick and choking, for the earth of China was in the air again.

"Close the door, Liang," he called, though he knew it would not do much good to close the door. That impalpable dust would permeate every crack, clutching gently at the living breath, until each object in the room would be coated with it. The whole city would wear a yellowish veil by morning, the solemn royal yellow color of the soil.

"Master," Liang was saying, "the fortune-teller has come."

"Who?" asked Rodney Jones.

"You have forgotten, perhaps. To-night you desired me to fetch the master who reads fortune from the face."

Rodney could believe that it had been a year since he had been imbued with that idea. There was never any reason not to be entertained in a city where life was knocking at the door, and where all sorts of visitors could be summoned from the street outside. A word to Liang was enough to fetch diversion almost in a minute—the man with the trained mice that pulled small carts and obeyed his voice, the sculptor of rice-paste figures, the exhibitors of puppets, the blind storyteller, the trained sheep and dog, the Punch-and-Judy show, jugglers, sword dancers, stilt dancers,—he had them occasionally in the evening. All of them were a vital part of China, though they reminded him of a page of medieval European history.

Chou Fu-shan was the fortune teller's name. It was part of his trade to amuse a foreign dinner party, but his occult art made him important in the Chinese City, for he was familiar with all the two-thousand-year intricacies and principles of magic and divination vaguely called *fêng shui*. If a household was unhappy, Chou Fu-shan could tell when the White Tiger was rising above the dragon, could see and make changes in the furnishings of the courtyard that would be more desirable to the benign spirits. And he knew when it was time to place a mirror to drive away the height of a neighbor's gate. Mainly, however, he was a leader in the art of reading past and future and character from the face. He came in noiselessly behind Liang, walking with slow dignity, a small, spare pock-marked man with sunken cheeks and a scanty black mustache. His gown was black brocaded silk and he wore a purple "manners" vest above it.

Rodney Jones came forward to meet him and asked him to sit down.

"I have seen your Excellence before," Chou said. "You speak our language well."

"You are kind not to laugh at me," said Rodney Jones, "but it will always be beyond this dull one. Will it trouble the Teacher to read my face?"

"If my great elder brother will move into the light and deign to sit," said Chou. There was silence, except for the wind and the hissing of dust upon the paper windows, while the fortune-teller watched his face.

He had asked the man here in order that he might be diverted. Instead, he felt ill at ease, for it seemed to Rodney Jones that the man was reading his face like a page and that his hidden thoughts and fears were speaking plainly to the music of the wind outside. The other's eyes had sharpened with an impersonal interest and they moved over Rodney



Jones like light fingers touching him. All the time there was no speech, only voices from the wind. The speechlessness and the other's obliviousness to the lack of speech was working on Rodney's patience. He told himself severely that there was nothing strange and enigmatic about the Oriental mind, that the inscrutability of China was purely a romantic conception. It was conceivable that character could be read from a face, but nothing beyond character. He kept his lips immobile and assumed a steady, half-contemptuous indifference, but the silence was working on his mind. It was the barrier of language that made all China strange, that curtain of short, inverted speech interspersed by exaggerated courtesies. Their unbroken continuity of tradition contained no sense of time. These characteristics were all that made the man before him strange, he told himself: otherwise, he was only another charlatan playing on credulity. There was no doubt that he was playing on Liang's credulity and that Liang also felt the suspense as he stood by the door, for his eyes never left the pock-marked man. It seemed to Rodney Jones that Liang looked troubled when the seconds heaped themselves into a minute and then another minute. He could almost hear those seconds falling like the grains of dust beating on the window.

Rodney Jones spoke suddenly to Liang in English, purely out of a desire to hear crude Anglo-Saxon words which would stand pat, would not shift and shimmer. "What's he waiting for?" he asked.

"No can tell," Liang answered. "I think see something very bad."

Then Chou was speaking softly, like a doctor in a sickroom. "Honorable cycle?" he asked. He was asking Rodney Jones his age, and Rodney Jones answered politely.

"Stupidly grown thirty-three."

Chou leaned back in his chair and placed his hands upon his parted knees so that he looked like an ancestral portrait.

"Teacher must have exalted views," said Rodney Jones.

And Chou answered slowly, "The Honorable face is hard for this poor one to read," he said.

A gust of wind made the paper windows crack and snap, and mites of yellow dust were dancing in the lamplight. For the first time Rodney Jones felt frightened. The man had seen something in his face which he was reluctant to speak of. With the gust of wind, his speech had changed from Mandarin to broken English.

"You no go on journey, Mister Gentleman," he said. "Great danger, if you go on journey. I speak your honorable language, so you be sure to know."

There was art in that switch to pidgin from the involutions of Mandarin. It made the advice ugly and concrete. Rodney Jones leaned forward, staring at Chou. Now that the sentence was finished, he could hardly believe that the man had used English, for the soothsayer was speaking again in the polished phrases of his native tongue:

"This Stupid One could tell the Honorable One much more at some other more propitious time. To life and death there is a fixed time. Wealth and honor are by appointment of heaven. I cannot read surely the molding at the bottom of your eyes, because I do not understand the foreign eye."

Rodney Jones cleared his throat and wished that the wind would stop. Dust was everywhere, choking his nostrils, clinging to the corners of his eyes. There were all sorts of uncomprehended voices in the wind, moving in a cloud of dust nearer to him, nearer. "Am I in danger now, Master?" he asked. He spoke slowly, because he wished his words to sound entirely natural, and the other's words came back to him in the dust storm, mingling with the noises of the wind.

"Not here. Danger on a journey—"

"A journey," said Rodney Jones. Then a sound made him look up. His house coolie was standing at the door from the passage to the outer court with a letter in his hand. "Writing for the master," the boy said.

Rodney's heart gave a sudden leap, because he saw it was written on the stationery of the Hôtel de France et Chine,

but then he saw that Mel had not written it.

The note was written in the careless scrawling characters of a man who depended on secretaries rather than upon his own pen. It read:—

Dear Jones, Come up to the hotel to-night, or the first thing to-morrow, will you? There is something I wish to speak to you about. Send word which time you will come.

Yours,  
E. NEWALL.

He was glad of the interruption which brought him back to solid ground. It was like Mr. Newall to order him up to his hotel and to take it for granted he would appear. It was a situation which Rodney Jones could handle, not an intangible thing like a premonition in the air. He took a pencil from his pocket and wrote on the opposite side of the page:

"I'm busy to-night and busy all day to-morrow. Jones."

"Send that back," he said, and felt better. He was burning his bridges and he would not see Mel Newall again. He was pleased that he had character enough not already to be starting for the hotel. He would never give her the slightest inkling that the thought of her went through his mind like a pendulum.

Chou Fu-shan was standing and Rodney Jones rose also. "I give thanks," he said, "for the Teacher's exceeding kindness."

Mr. Chou bowed and clasped his hands. "May you have level peace on any road," he said.

Rodney bowed again.

"I have troubled your chariot," he said, in a courtesy as old as Troy. He meant that he had put Mr. Chou to trouble.

"If I pour out my heart," answered Mr. Chou.

Rodney Jones walked with him toward the door.

"Use no more steps," said Mr. Chou. "Don't come any farther."

Once he was gone, Rodney Jones stood listening to the dust hissing against the paper, and although the lights were on, the room seemed dark. The rafters above him were like shadows suspended just above his head. His forehead was wet and his hands were unsteady.

"Danger," the dust was hissing, "danger."

The girl was back in his mind again. Suppose he had done this; suppose he had done that. "Liang," he called, "Liang," and he knew that he was calling him because he did not want to be alone. Suppose he had done this; suppose he had done that.

## CHAPTER IV

He was awakened by Liang moving about his room. "Master," Liang was saying, "master." The watch by his bed showed that it was ten o'clock in the morning. He could see the sunlight and the shadows of the trees dancing against the white-paper panes. They moved like a shadow play between the scrollwork of the window. Liang placed a cup of tea beside him and his tongue felt thick and his head was aching. His face and hands and the sheets of his bed were powdery with yellow dust.

"Why didn't you wake me up at eight?" demanded Rodney Jones.

"It was better that you slept," Liang replied. "You were very tired; you are still tired even now."

"You're not my nurse," snarled Rodney Jones.

"And now," said Liang, "there's a stranger outside to see you, a large, thin, venerable foreigner. He has sent in his card."

It was Mr. Newall's card.

"What did you tell him?" asked Rodney Jones.

"I told him you drank too much last night and that you do not wish to be disturbed."

"Well, then, why doesn't he go away?" asked Rodney Jones.

"He will not go."

The house was small and voices carried easily. There was a sharp knock on the bedroom door. "Jones, are you awake?" It was Mr. Newall's voice, and before Rodney could answer, Mr. Newall came in and stood in the doorway, tall, angular and saturnine.

"Still busy, are you, Jones?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "I'm pretty busy."

Mr. Newall walked a step nearer to the bed, still looking at Rodney Jones.

"You certainly must want something of me badly," said Rodney, "or you wouldn't be here now."

"You're quite right. I do," said Mr. Newall. "I've been inquiring about you. You seem to have been around here and know the ropes. I want you to go with me on a two weeks' journey."

"On a what?" Rodney Jones stared at him stupidly and echoes of words came back to him from the night before.

"On a journey," said Mr. Newall, "to a place called Ho Hsien. How about it, Jones?"

A shiver went down Rodney's spine. He saw the fortune-teller's face and then the intelligent, pliable countenance of Philip Liu. "Mr. Newall," he said, and his speech was unsteady and thick, "you're joking, aren't you?"

"No," said Mr. Newall. "What's the matter with you, Jones?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Rodney Jones, but he knew it was not the truth. Something was the matter.

He sat on the edge of his bed and Liang handed him a wrapper. Now that the first shock of the idea had left him, his mind was running smoothly, telling him that the mention of a journey was nothing but coincidence. There was nothing occult or extraordinary about his aching head. Yet as he looked at Mr. Newall standing waiting for him to answer, he knew there was something unusual.

The old man had completely changed. His restless energy, latent the day before, was burning briskly now behind his

eyes, until his whole body seemed filled with it. It was desire that burned in his face, the same sort of desire which must always have moved him—the desire to put his hands on something new.

"Come out into the other room," said Mr. Newall. "Let me see, you left me last night, didn't you, when that young—"

"Chinese," Rodney warned him again. "It hurts their feelings when you call them Chinamen."

Mr. Newall shook his head. "Don't start splitting hairs. Listen to me, Jones; did you ever hear of this place called Ho Hsien?"

Rodney Jones picked up a cup of coffee. His head was aching badly, but that old man's energy gave him no peace. "You're not thinking of going there, are you?" Rodney asked. Mr. Newall moved his shoulders impatiently.

"Not thinking, going," he said.

"Why?" asked Rodney Jones.

Mr. Newall's voice was sharp and incisive. "Listen, Jones," he said, "I believe in luck. I've told you that before. I ought to, because I've played on hunches all my life. There's a feeling in my bones to-day. My luck is coming back. I believe every word about Ho Hsien."

Rodney Jones was thinking of the North China air. Was it true that it got into strangers' blood and set their nerves to jangling?

"What about Ho Hsien?" Rodney asked politely.

"Didn't you hear that educated Chinaman? Excuse my crudeness, Mr. Jones,—that cultivated Chinese last night? He says that this Yellow is in Ho Hsien. It came there when the Ming dynasty was broken up. It's been in the hands of a family of bankers until a few weeks ago. Those pieces have been in a box wrapped up in silk. That boy Liu has seen them." Some of the enthusiasm left Mr. Newall. His expression was appealing, as if he begged to be relieved of any doubts. "It's possible, isn't it, Jones?"

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "nearly anything out here is possible. It's possible the Japanese may come walking in to-morrow."

"I know when people are telling the truth," said Mr. Newall. He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "That Chinese, Liu, was telling the truth last night."

The door was open on the court and Rodney Jones looked out. The sun was shining through the leaves of the old tree so that the shadows and the sunlight made a pattern on the flagstones; and the flagstones were powdered with that yellow-reddish dust. The sun brought out the yellow, like the yellow glaze on tile, causing the color to dominate the red of the open door. He knew that the same color was moving in Mr. Newall's mind—Yellow—Ming Yellow. He could hear that soft rippling voice of Philip Liu speaking of those ten pieces of Ming Yellow. In a land where dynasties fell and rose like pulsations through the centuries, there were enough tales of hidden treasure. There was imperial Manchu treasure somewhere in the Forbidden City, almost beyond a doubt. There was the mystery of the Old Marshal's treasure which had been taken from Jehol.

It was possible—quite possible—that even such a fragile thing as Ming Yellow porcelain should be left from a wave of old disaster to molder in a Chinese town. But why had Philip Liu spoken of it? That was another question.

"He may be telling the truth, Mr. Newall," he said, "but truth in China is different from Anglo-Saxon truth. It has involutions and convolutions. There's always something else behind the truth, and something else again."

"You believe it too?" said Mr. Newall. "Good. And I don't mind the convolutions either. You don't know me, Jones, when I go out after something. If that Ming Yellow is there, I'm going to see it before the dealers get wind of it. Liu says he can lead me to it. I'm going to Ho Hsien."

"Are you?" said Rodney Jones, and smiled. "Liang, bring me the map," and he spread the commercial map of China before them on the breakfast table. "Before you go any farther, look here," he said. "You can't get to Ho Hsien in an automobile, Mr. Newall. There's the railroad there, and there's the nearest town on the railroad you can leave from—Ting Fou. Ho Hsien is over there and distances are only approximate, because half of this has not been properly surveyed. A hundred and fifty English miles from the railroad—four hundred and fifty Chinese *li*."

Mr. Newall bent over the map, frowning at the strange names, until he clamped his forefinger on the dark printing of Ho Hsien.

"Well, there's a road there, isn't there?" he asked. "What's that line?"

"Don't forget you're speaking of Chinese roads," Rodney Jones remarked. "You've never seen a real Chinese road. The line you speak about is a foot track full of rocks, along the edge of streams. It may have been a paved track once until the farmers rooted up the paving for walls."

"Well, it's a road, isn't it?" Mr. Newall said. "There's travel on it, isn't there?"

"Yes, on muleback," said Rodney Jones, "or in litters. You can hire them at Ting Fou. Five days on mule-back."

"I recall you mentioned that last night," said Mr. Newall. "That's why I said two weeks. The expense doesn't worry me. Mel isn't afraid of mules."

Rodney Jones pushed back his chair. "You're not—thinking of taking—her?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Newall; "and now let's get down to facts. You've traveled in the interior. That's why I want you, Jones. I want you to arrange for everything. It'll take a few days, I suppose."

"Why doesn't Liu do it?" asked Rodney Jones. "He started this, didn't he?"

Mr. Newall moved uneasily. "He offered to, of course. I'd rather have a white man."

"Did it ever occur to you," Rodney Jones inquired, "that I might have another occupation? I'm a newspaper correspondent, Mr. Newall. If I leave my post here, I'll lose my job."

Mr. Newall moved his shoulders impatiently, as though the idea had not occurred to him but could be dismissed as not important.

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Newall easily. "I'll attend to that. Ask any price you want. I'll get you another job, but now I want things to get started right away."

The insolence and the easy egotism of it was close to being superb. Mr. Newall sat there treating him solely as an element of immediate use without a thought to his future. He was not a man to Mr. Newall. He had become an employee because he had agreed to accompany Mr. Newall to a curio shop the day before. Rodney Jones considered the situation and enjoyed it, even to the point of asking another question.

"Does Mr. Liu know you're asking me?" he inquired.

"No," said Mr. Newall, "I didn't tell him that."

"If you had," he answered, "I have an idea he'd have been disturbed."

"That's my business," said Mr. Newall calmly.

Rodney Jones began to enjoy himself still more. "You mean you want me to get started conducting you and your daughter and the muscular Mr. Steuben, I suppose, out into the middle of nowhere, because you've been listening to a fairy tale told by a bright boy who wants your money? There's something wrong about it, Mr. Newall. Think it over."

"Wrong?" said Mr. Newall. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know exactly." Rodney shook his head and discovered that it was still aching. "But I'll tell you something I do know. In my opinion, the country around Ho Hsien is not safe. It's no place for you to go and I'm not exaggerating. There's a bandit named Liu Hei Ch'i—I got news of him yesterday—who is in that general vicinity. He'd like to meet you very much, Mr. Newall, but the feeling would not be mutual after you'd had five minutes of his company. You must not—absolutely you must not go."

"I've an answer for that," said Mr. Newall. "This young Liu knows the country and he says it's perfectly safe."

"And which would you rather believe?" asked Rodney. "Me or Mr. Liu? Think it over, Mr. Newall."

"I've thought it over," Mr. Newall said. "I'm not going to be stopped by theories. I haven't time. Finish your coffee and we'll get going, Jones."

Rodney poured himself a second cup of coffee.

"All right," he said, "I've thought it over. If you take your daughter out on a trip like that, you ought to be locked up. If you think I'm going to be mixed up in it, you're very much mistaken. I told you in my note that I was busy this morning. I'm busy, Mr. Newall."

Mr. Newall looked puzzled. "Why, what's the matter, Jones?" he asked.

"The matter is you and your ideas," said Rodney Jones. "I don't like anything about this trip or the way you've proposed it."

Mr. Newall did not move. "What are you mad about, Jones?" he asked.

"You, if you want to know," Rodney answered smoothly, "because you think my only function here is to take you out on a wild-goose chase after Ming-dynasty ceramics. If you're fool enough, and the legation lets you go, you'll have to get some one else to take you."

Still Mr. Newall did not move.

"How much do you want?" he asked. "Name your figure. I'd rather have you, Jones."

"Thanks," said Rodney. "I'm comfortable the way I am without any figure. And I'm busy, Mr. Newall."

Mr. Newall pushed his chair back. "You mean you're turning this down?" he demanded. "I don't believe it. You can have till this afternoon to think it over."

"Thanks," said Rodney Jones. "Get some one else. I'm sorry, I'm busy now." He listened as Mr. Newall's footsteps died away across the outer court.

"Well," he said to himself, "that's that. There's no calamity this time, Jones. You're not going on a journey."

## CHAPTER V

As he sat there with the yellow-red of the dust on the courtyard pavement just in front of him, the idea of that pilgrimage seemed increasingly fantastic. Probably nothing would happen to those three foreigners if they attempted it, for he believed that the risks of travel in China were greatly overrated. There would even be no great hardship if they were properly equipped, provided Liang, for instance, selected the traveling servants and took control. His sense of

uneasiness lay in the manner in which the idea of that exposition had started. Its motivation lay concealed beneath the slightly shady occurrences of the day before.

He had never seen Ho Hsien, but all provincial northern towns were as typical as the scenes on a willow-ware plate and he knew the general character of the country where the city lay. There would be hills rising into mountains, nakedly denuded of their trees, whose peaks, unsheltered from the erosion of wind and rain, were serrated and sharp. Their bases would be half buried deep in dust drifts which geologists called loess. The lower contours of the hills were blotted out by that dust, which had grown hard and solid through the millions of years during which the winds had laid it there. There would be terraces cut in this soil that would rise in a panorama of steps, up and up to the top of the hills; and the terraces would be green already with meticulously hand-tended crops of millet and winter wheat. But the color of that land, except for the green of cultivation and for the willows and poplars beside the roads, the villages and streams, would be a strange reddish brown which would grow purple as the sun grew low, and then the sunset would turn it into yellow. Brown dust turning into yellow, yellow-brown mud walls and roofs; the road cutting through that dust so that the loess would rise in a wall sometimes fifty feet in perpendicular height, where a thousand years of travel had worn a deep groove through it. Then there would be the town, and the wonder of the town standing in the cultivated plain, for such a place was always too startling to be true. A gray wall would surround it, with parapets and eerie towers rising into tiers of curved, tiled roofs. The city gates would make a dark arch from the road; the gate tower—perhaps with an infuriated god of war inside it—would frown down above the black shadow of the gate. The town would seem finer than Carcassonne, as motionless as a rock in the stream of time.

Why did a Europeanized Chinese wish to introduce three strangers to such a scene as that? Philip Liu, himself, would not be at home there. Who was Philip Liu? What was it that he wanted? The answer, of course, was money. Rodney Jones could close his eyes and see Mel Newall moving against that scene, and somehow the vision was disturbing.

"Liang!" he called.

Liang appeared quickly enough to show that he must have been waiting at the door. "You do not go away, Master?" he said. "You do not travel? It is very bad to travel."

The questions were disturbing. Even though Liang's face and voice betrayed no emotion, the mere fact that Liang had asked them was evidence of his deep concern, particularly when Rodney recalled that he was Liang's personal property through some inverted sense of possession or fidelity, for no one to rob or manage but Liang. Some unseen undercurrent somewhere in the pattern had made Liang fear for the safety of his property and for his personal perquisites. Some knowledge had come to Liang through the uncanny and unerring grapevine intelligence system of Chinese servants, but Rodney understood that he would never know exactly what it might be. Nevertheless he tried.

"You know many people, Liang," he said, never taking his eyes from that older, white-robed man. "Have you ever heard of a man named Liu—Philip Liu? I do not know his Chinese name."

Rodney Jones could swear that something moved behind Liang's dark impassive eyes, and that was not all. They had been speaking in Mandarin, but Liang answered him in English. It was a habit of Liang's, when an interview was difficult, to remove himself adroitly behind a curtain of linguistic ignorance and nerve-racking stupidity.

"I savvy. All time number one nice man," he said, "but Master no travel with him. No."

"Why not? Is he bad?"

"No, no." Again Rodney Jones could swear that something moved behind those Chinese eyes. "No. Nice. Nice. But no travel with him, please."

"But why?"

"Very sorry. No savvy why." But as sure as he was standing there, there was something that he savvied. "Fêng Shui—all time bad luck."

Doubtless, just as Liang had planned, Rodney Jones betrayed his growing exasperation.

"Damn it," he exploded, in his helplessness. "Can't you say anything? What bad luck?"

"I say plenty, please," Liang replied, perfect in his poise, again the master of the situation. "Bad luck, but all time number one nice man."

"You mean he has bad luck?"

"No." Liang's hands, folded beneath his sleeves, moved slightly. "Liu, all time he has good luck, very good; all time too good for you."

There was an implication somewhere of something, hidden behind a devious labyrinth of thought.

"Well, I'm not going anywhere," said Rodney. "You heard me tell the old stranger. You say it's dangerous. Suppose I did go, would you go too?"

Liang paused, but not for long.

"Yes. No like, but I go too. I'm your Number One."

Rodney understood that much of him. The servant meant what he was saying. He did not like, but he would go. He would go, not out of loyalty to a master but through loyalty to himself, because his code would oblige him. It had something to do with that inexplicable term called by the foreigners "face"; that mysterious pliable word that transcended pride and governed the conduct of the meanest picker in the ash heaps. Form was a better name for it, and China lived and died by forms, which sometimes took strange shapes, like the dragons and the clouds in the carvings of her temples. Liang had been hired as a traveling Number One, who assumed the responsibilities of his position seriously. He would go because of face.

"All right," said Rodney Jones. "Bring the typewriter and the table here, and then get out."

The blank white of the page in the carriage of the typewriter reminded him that he was in no mood for work. He could not drive the idea from his mind that something was not right. That talk with Liang and the bright sun outside filled his thoughts with an unpleasant sense of something impending—something that was just behind him in the sunlight. His head was aching and he could not get the thought of Mel Newall from his mind. She was nothing to him or he to her, but her voice was back in his ears again and somewhere she was as alone as he was. His fingers reached for the typewriter keys with a journalist's untutored skill. The staccato sound of the keys sent his thoughts in another current, and he began to write:

To understand the power of China, one must first understand the instinct of dominating by service which is inherent in the race. Dynasties have fallen by this one trait alone, not once but many times. In a hundred subtle ways a Chinese servant will work to become essential to the master, singling out his weaknesses and allowing them to grow, until he undermines character and becomes indispensable. A glance at the life in the Forbidden City in the last empire shows how completely the Manchu Masters were drowned in this wave of service. The Mings were drowned before them by exactly the same process. I propose, however, to be specific. When the barbarian—

He stopped at the word "barbarian" because some one was just behind him.

"What is it, Liang?" he asked, but when he turned, he saw it was not Liang. As though he had come there like a thought grown solid, Philip Liu in his white suit and Panama was standing in back of his chair.

"I'm so very sorry," he was saying, "I did not mean to startle you. I told your boy that I knew my way. I hope you do



not mind."

Rodney Jones stood up.

"I'm not startled, but you seem to walk on air," he said.

He was not telling the truth. He was more startled than the actual fact warranted, but he endeavored not to show it. Instead, he tried to keep his mind in focus, for he knew that Philip Liu must want something or he would not be waiting there.

"Sit down," said Rodney Jones. "Will you have a drink?"

Philip Liu shook his head and laughed in the facile manner of his people. "I never drink," he answered. "Am I interrupting you? I'm so sorry. I suppose you wonder why I'm here." It was not a difficult guess, but it annoyed Rodney Jones, for it seemed to him that Philip Liu's slightly protruding eyes were probing restlessly into his thoughts.

"Not at all," he said. "Your coming is an unexpected diversion. Any excuse to stop work is always welcome."

"Ha-ha!" said Philip Liu. "Yes, of course,"—and Rodney waited for him to continue. Philip Liu glanced at the furnishings of the room. His eyes stopped at a wood carving on a corner table and then moved on back to Rodney. He seemed to be uncertain and hesitant about beginning, and Rodney in a moment of perspicacity believed he could read something behind the long ivory-colored face. In spite of the gap of race between them, Philip Liu seemed in need of companionship. Although he made no motion, Rodney Jones could believe that Philip Liu was holding out a hand to him and his eyes were saying appealingly, "Please, please understand me." Then he tried to step across the barrier with colloquial speech. "Listen," he said aloud, "I've come to give you the lowdown on something." It was a genuine but almost pathetic effort. The words rippled incongruously when Philip said "lowdown."

"The what?" said Rodney Jones. He realized that he had come close to laughing, but he had stopped in time.

"The 'lowdown'," said Philip Liu. "Isn't that the word you newspaper men use? I heard something last night which I thought you might like to know and I'm just passing the 'lowdown' along. That's the word, isn't it? There is a big thing happening in Nanking. There is a general movement of troops south. You probably know what that means as well as I do. If I were you, I should go down and talk to General Ma."

Rodney Jones leaned forward in his chair. It had been in back of his mind for some time that there might be a troop movement south, and, if that were the case, there were a number of potentialities which might start civil war moving like a landslide. He forgot the Newalls and everything else in his interest at the news. "Where did you get that dope?" he asked.

Philip Liu leaned forward confidentially. "From a friend of mine in Nanking. It's not known outside yet. Nanking is the place to be now. If you saw General Ma—"

Rodney Jones interrupted him. "No one's able to see Ma. We've all of us tried a dozen times. If I could see Ma, do you think I'd be sitting here? Don't you think I know well enough—we all of us know that something's behind the scenes. There's another general in the provinces somewhere getting ready to go on the loose. No, I wouldn't be here if there were a chance of seeing Ma."

Philip Liu lowered his voice, but that confidential change of inflection did not entirely hide a sort of eagerness that made Rodney Jones suddenly uncomfortable. "Do you really want to see General Ma?" asked Philip Liu.

"You bet I do," said Rodney Jones. There was news somewhere. He could feel it in the air and he was there for news, and news often appeared in China in such subtle unexpected ways as this. "I want to see any one down there who'll talk."

Philip Liu leaned back in his chair. "If you take the train to Nanking this afternoon," he said, "I have friends who will see that you reach the general. He will give you an exclusive interview. I promise it if you leave for Nanking this

afternoon."

It always seemed to Rodney Jones that his mind worked faster that morning than usual. A thought prompted him in spite of his enthusiasm, a thought, and then another, which made him clasp his hands across his knee. It was the abrupt realization that no one did anything for nothing, and that he was on the verge of doing exactly what Philip Liu wanted him to do. The boy's dark eyes stared at him from the calm of his smoky face. Philip Liu was impelling him to go to Nanking so definitely that he was conscious of the force of Philip's desire. Philip had not been able entirely to erase that eagerness from his features. In that moment of illumination, Rodney Jones knew that Philip Liu wanted him out of Peking.

"Thanks," said Rodney. "That's kind of you, Liu." Then he weighed his next words carefully as he reached for a cigarette. There was one card he could play to see if he was right.

"Curious, the way things come in pairs, isn't it? I heard about you earlier this morning. Mr. Newall was just here." He spoke casually enough and blew a little cloud of cigarette smoke between them, but he had seen what he wanted. There was no change in the expression of that young Chinese, but his hands had made an imperceptible movement. His long fingers had twitched, but they stopped almost as soon as they started.

"Oh," he was saying, "I did not know. Was Mr. Newall here?"

"And he was talking about you," Rodney Jones continued evenly. "He said nice things. He said you know where there is some porcelain in Ho Hsien. He's planning to go there with you and he wanted me to go."

"Oh," said Philip Liu, "oh, yes, of course."

"Perhaps he mentioned me?" said Rodney casually. "Perhaps he told you it would be nice for me to go."

Philip Liu smiled and shook his head. "On the contrary," he answered, "he didn't say a word, old man."

Both of them knew the answer was a lie and both of them understood it. It was beautiful, how easily the words were going.

"Not that I seriously considered going," said Rodney Jones. Philip Liu's fingers moved a second time. "It makes me appreciate your coming here just that much more, because I hadn't even contemplated going." The words moved back and forth effortlessly but each of them was grasping a meaning behind the speech.

"Of course," said Philip Liu, "it wouldn't be worth your while, you wouldn't have the time—"

"Of course not," Rodney answered. "I suppose you know exactly what you're doing. Is the road safe to Ho Hsien?"

Philip Liu laughed pleasantly. "Please let's be frank," he said. "You were worried, quite naturally, but please don't worry any further. It's an easy and pleasant journey there and you must not give it a thought. The general commanding at Ho Hsien is a strong man. He will see that everything is safe."

Rodney Jones lighted another cigarette. Scraps of information were coming together in his mind, making a definite shape. "General Wu?" he asked. "Is he the one who found that porcelain?"

"Yes," Philip Liu smiled disarmingly. "He came upon it rather unexpectedly."

"Is he a connoisseur of porcelain?"

Philip Liu smiled again. "Perhaps not," he answered, "but the man who owned it is ... I should say, was."

Rodney paused and watched the cigarette between his fingers, while the pieces in his mind were taking shape. "A dispatch came in last night," he said, "about a bandit, named Lui Hei Ch'i. He has a small army of his own. It said that General Wu had sent out cavalry to find him. Doesn't that mean trouble?"

Philip Liu shook his head. "Oh, no," he answered, "no, indeed, no trouble. The general and Lui Hei Ch'i understand

each other, if you know what I mean."

Rodney knew what Philip meant, for it sometimes seemed to him that nearly every general and nearly every bandit chief in China had reached some working understanding. "You mean," said Rodney Jones, "he is going to buy that bandit out?"

"It would be easier than fighting, perhaps," said Philip Liu. Then he rose and held out his hand. "I must be going now."

"Back to see Mr. Newall, eh?" said Rodney Jones.

"Yes," said Philip Liu. "I'm so glad you're going to Nanking."

Their hands met and their eyes met.

"Thanks," said Rodney Jones. "You're awfully kind. I won't forget it, Liu."

Rodney Jones stood absolutely motionless until he heard the front gate close; then he whistled softly. There was no doubt any longer that something strange was happening. There was no doubt that Philip Liu wanted him out of the way and he had an inkling of the reason. Philip Liu wished to take Edwin Newall to the county town where General Wu was in command of troops. There was something going on at Ho Hsien, with troops gathering about it. Why did Philip want Mr. Newall there? For money. Generals always wanted money and he had heard something of General Wu. It seemed to him that he had heard that General Wu was on the verge of making trouble, that the general had ambitions of his own.

"Liang," he called, and Liang appeared in a flutter of his white gown, so promptly that he must have expected the call. "Have you ever heard of a General Wu out at Ho Hsien?"

Liang nodded. "Of course," he answered. "All Chinese know of General Wu. He is a very greedy man who was a bandit once; not a good man."

Rodney fixed Liang with his hardest glance.

"Don't lie to me now," he said. "What connection has this Liu with this greedy General Wu?"

Liang spoke slowly, reluctantly.

"The great general is Liu's uncle," he replied.

Rodney started out of his chair, so quickly that Liang stepped back.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" he shouted at him.

"I thought, of course, the Master knew," Liang answered courteously. "All Chinese know that Philip Liu is the nephew of General Wu."

"Well," said Rodney. "That tears it. There's something wrong,"—and yet he could think of nothing wrong. Liang was still watching him and he turned on him sharply.

"Any more news?" Rodney asked him.

"No, Master," said Liang.

"Then get me my hat," said Rodney. "I'm going to the hotel."

"Yes," they told him at the hotel desk, the Newalls were upstairs. It was only when he was in the slowly moving lift, progressing upward to the seventh floor, that he realized that he was being ridiculous. He was even more sharply aware of it a minute later, when he entered the Newalls' suite. He heard Mr. Newall and Steuben talking through a half-open door to the right. Mel Newall was alone in the sitting room. Rodney Jones wrinkled his face into a smile, but she did not smile back. Instead she examined him with frank distaste.

"Hello," she said. "I thought we'd seen the last of you."

"I wish to heaven you had," said Rodney Jones. It was her complete indifference that made him seem ridiculous, and he tried to examine her in a similar spirit. She was thin,—too thin,—he told himself, and he had never liked green eyes. He did not like the tight way that her dark hair was fixed. She had looked entirely differently last evening when she had let him hold her hand.

It was unpleasant to discover that similar ideas were evidently running through her own mind.

"You haven't got much that's attractive about you this morning," she told him frankly.

Rodney Jones grinned at her sweetly. "Neither have you," he answered. "You look terrible this morning—perfectly terrible. Hasn't any one told you that green is not your color?"

"Hasn't any one ever told you," she answered, "that you shouldn't wear a double-breasted coat with pencils sticking out of the pockets, and yellow shoes?"

"Hasn't any one told you?" Rodney Jones inquired, "that you shouldn't wear too many bracelets?"

"Hasn't any one ever showed you how to tie a necktie?" she asked.

"No," said Rodney Jones. "But you can show me, if you like."

"If I did, I might strangle you," she said.

Rodney Jones smiled merrily. "We may all be strangled before we're through," he answered. "Do you mind if I ask you a civil question? Just to gratify my academic curiosity?"

"You're curious enough," she replied, "without having to ask questions."

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "but there's something about you that interests me, Miss Newall. I'm genuinely concerned about you this morning—not about your papa or Mr. Steuben, but just you."

"Really?" she inquired.

Rodney's heart was beating faster. Anything was better than not seeing her at all. "I hear you're going on a trip," he said. "Is that true? Are you going with them?"

"Yes," she said. "What of it?"

Rodney Jones sighed. "Really," he answered, "I wish some one would tell me that. You ought not to go, you know. It isn't healthy in the country."

"You're always so thoughtful," she remarked, "aren't you, Mr. Jones? It's such a pity you aren't going with us. We'd have such fun together!"

"Yes," said Rodney, "barrels of it."

"Anything else you want to know?" she asked.

"No, I guess not," he said. "That's about the whole story." He stopped because there was nothing more to say. He

realized well enough that he was throwing all he had away for nothing, if he left his work without a reason. There was small chance that any other editor would employ him after that display of eccentricity. There was only one thing he was sure of—that he never wanted her to know, either in this world or the next, the reason for the decision he was making.

She was smiling at him like a hostess in a book of etiquette. "It is such a pity you can't accompany us, Mr. Jones," she was saying. "I'll miss your personality so much. You have got personality."

"I do hope nothing will shatter your poise before you return, Miss Newall," he replied. "Do you think your papa is busy?"

"Father," she called, "the newspaper man is here."

"Oh," said Mr. Newall. He looked grimly satisfied as he walked across the room. "Hello, Jones."

Rodney Jones faced him and plunged his hands into the side pockets of his coat. "Philip Liu's been to see me," he said. "He tried to ship me off to Nanking. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Personal jealousy, that's all," Mr. Newall said.

"Philip Liu's uncle is the general at Ho Hsien. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Nothing but a lucky break," Mr. Newall said.

"And you really think there's Yellow porcelain out there?"

"Yes," Mr. Newall said. "Don't you?"

"But you don't think you're foolish to go?" Rodney continued, "You don't see any implication in getting a rich man into the Chinese countryside?"

"Are you coming with us, or aren't you?" Mr. Newall persisted.

Rodney Jones sighed and looked at Mel Newall.

"There's only one thing about this trip I like," he said, "and I don't know that I like that much. For the rest, the whole business is crazy, but I'm coming because I don't want three idiots to be out there alone; and I'm an idiot myself to do it, if you want to know."

Mr. Newall looked relieved. He put a bony hand on his shoulder. "That's great, Jones," he said. "I had a hunch I could count on you, and my hunches are working right. We've got to get started right away. We haven't got much time. Steuben will help you make arrangements.... Steuben, Mr. Jones is going!"

There was a knock on the door. The room boy entered, ushering a black-robed coolie in front of him.

"The boy bring a present from Mr. Wong," he said. "Mr. Wong all same one who keep the curio store. Mr. Wong, he hope you come back soon some day."

"I'm not always wrong, you see," said Rodney. "I said you'd hear from that merchant."

"All right," said Mr. Newall. "Never mind about that now.... Steuben, I want you to go with Jones and start arrangements right away."

Steuben did not look pleased as he walked down the hall with Rodney Jones.

"The first thing we'll do," Rodney said, "is to go and have a drink. Then we'll go to my place and get things started. And there'll be just you and me out there. We'll have to stick together."

## CHAPTER VI

He was glad to forget the next ten days in Peking. As he stood in the courtyard of the gray-brick inn at Ting Fou, not a hundred yards away from a railroad station much like the railroad station of a French provincial town, he could believe that a definite curtain had fallen behind him and behind every one in the party. Once the steel ribbon of the railroad track was left behind, all the mechanical world which they had known would leave them. They had not started traveling yet, but familiar sights were leaving them already. The inn yard was filled with small, wiry, mouse-colored mules. They switched their tails, flattened their ears as the mule boys set wooden pack-saddles on their lacerated backs. There were also five litters in the yard, each a narrow bed-like platform between two long poles with a matting roof arched over it. The ends of these poles, front and rear, would be lifted into notches on the wooden saddles of two mules, and a passenger would sit in the small cabin shaded by the matting, which swayed and jolted as those animals moved steadily, almost without a halt, sliding, catching their balance, picking their footing accurately along the rocky way.

The muleteers were busy in the court, strapping on the baggage. They were copper-faced young countrymen who had the indelible stamp of the soil upon them which would have marked them in any land as peasants. Their blue pajama jackets were soiled and torn; their blue patched trousers were belted around the waist with heavy sashes from which hung tobacco pouches and flints and steel. Their trousers were bound tightly at the ankles, their heavy cloth slippers were ragged, their smooth dark heads were swathed in dirty towels or covered by immense broad-brimmed straw hats. They were talking to the mules in strange inimitable monosyllables. "*Kuh-kuh-kuh!*" they were saying. "Careful, careful, careful!"

Against the inn's gray wall, and against the latticed windows of the single-story square of buildings, the drivers and the mules looked like a page from Chaucer. They represented a method of conveyance which was probably old in the Sung dynasty, but they were genuine in that setting, more tangible than the railroad track outside the gate of the inn.

Rodney Jones examined the men and the animals carefully. Liang had hired the caravan, and he knew that Liang could be trusted. He turned to the servant, who stood beside him holding a small account book. Liang's small eyes moved carefully here and there, and he seemed cheerful now that they had started. The size of the caravan gave him reasons for good cheer, for he would be handling money in large sums, a portion of which would inevitably stay in his hands.

"They look all right," Rodney said.

"They will do well enough," Liang answered modestly, "but we should have started half an hour ago. It is ninety *li* to the night's resting place. The foreigners are not ready. The men will not work willingly, for what is the use if the foreigners are not ready?"

"Send the boys in to pack their things," said Rodney. "We'll start right away." Then he walked to the largest building on the north side of the court. He was aware that his personality had changed since he had put on his traveling clothes that morning. They took the slouch out of his stringy figure. The khaki of his shirt and riding breeches and puttees were definitely a part of him. He walked to the north building of the court and opened a door, and entered a single long room, more luxurious, perhaps, than an ordinary inn room, but characteristic of the world which they were entering. The room contained a teakwood table, two straight-backed armchairs, and several stools. At one end was the sleeping platform or *kang*, an essential part of any Chinese dwelling, raised perhaps three feet from the ground and covered with matting. The party was seated on the *kang*, drinking coffee and looking rather self-conscious and uncomfortable in their traveling clothes.

Philip Liu, in khaki riding breeches, with a pith helmet beside him, was discoursing on Chinese poetry.

"Chinese poetry is very hard to explain," he was saying. "The meaning, you must understand, is open to many interpretations. Many lines may be condensed into a single character. Every brush stroke has its meaning. Indeed, the greatest poem may be only a single couplet. One must sing it to understand."

Rodney paused for a moment at the door, listening to the brooklike flow of Philip's words. Philip, following a habit which he had developed in Peking, was delivering a lecture as facilely as though he read it from the pages of a travel book.

"Philip," Rodney said, "I'm so sorry to interrupt you, but we were to have started half an hour ago."

Philip looked up quickly. "All right, old man," he said, "but nobody seemed ready."

Rodney Jones looked around the room. The travelers' bags were unpacked and the bedding strewn about. It occurred to him that perhaps none of them had packed a bag before. "The boys are coming right in to pack you up," he said. "After this, they will come an hour before we start. It's essential we get started promptly, from now on. Your personal baggage will be put inside the litters. I'll be out in front.... Steuben, I'll want you in the first litter. Then Miss Newall, then Mr. Newall, then you, Philip. We're leaving in ten minutes."

They all appeared surprised at his outbreak. Mr. Newall looked more sallow than ever in his riding clothes; Mel Newall, in her pullover and riding breeches, was like a pretty girl on a country-club veranda. Paul Steuben carried in his appearance the touch of western melodrama. With the exception of Philip Liu, Rodney thought, none of them had ever looked so unable to cope with reality.

"We won't be ready in ten minutes, Jones," said Mr. Newall.

Rodney turned to him patiently. "You agreed to give me full charge of this party, didn't you?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Mr. Newall, "but you needn't be a martinet."

"We'll have to get this straight right now," said Rodney. "I'm trying to get you to a certain place safely and comfortably. If you don't like the way I do it, the railroad's just outside and I'll be glad to go back on it and let you carry on for yourselves. Otherwise you do what I say from now on, whether you like it or not. That goes for everybody."

There was a moment's silence. Then Mel Newall spoke. "Wonder man," she said.

"How about it, Mr. Newall?" Rodney asked.

Edwin Newall's lean jaws opened and closed upon a silent expletive. "Was there any need for this, Jones?" he inquired. "We're not going to a war, are we? Everything's all right, Philip says."

"Philip can do the talking later," said Rodney Jones. "Am I running this show or not? That's all I want to know."

"Of course, you're running it," said Mr. Newall, "but I resent your tone. I'm paying."

"I've heard that before," said Rodney. "Let's hope you don't pay any more than you expect. Now, let's get started.... But first, Paul, you and I have got to settle something. Liang tells me you're carrying a gun. Is that true?"

Steuben's face flushed and he stood up. "Yes, that's true," he said. "So you're setting spies on me, are you?"

"Didn't I tell you back in Peking," Rodney Jones inquired, "that there is nothing more dangerous or useless than carrying a gun? If you come to a point where you have to use it, you'll be killed. If you don't have to use it, there are plenty of people on the road might do murder to get possession of a gun. There's a well out in the courtyard. If you'll kindly hand me that gun, I'll drop it down the well."

Paul Steuben's face turned brick red. "I've got my own ideas," he said.

"I know you have," said Rodney. "The trouble is they just don't work out here. If you want to, you can take your gun and your ideas and go back to the railroad station. Otherwise you can hand me that gun and keep your ideas to yourself. How about it, Paul?"

Paul pulled a .38 automatic from his pocket and dropped it on the gray brick floor. "You go to hell," he said to

Rodney, thickly.

Rodney was about to call a boy to pick up the gun when Mel Newall's voice made him turn in surprise.

"Paul," she said, "behave yourself. Pick it up and give it to him."

And Paul Steuben bent and picked it up. "I'm sorry, Rodney," he said. "I won't do that again."

"Don't worry," Rodney answered. "It's just the North China air. When we start, you'd better walk with me awhile. You'll need the exercise."

The servants were packing up the baggage noiselessly, efficiently, and the atmosphere of the room seemed more relaxed.

"I'd like to walk a bit too, old man," said Philip Liu. And he followed Rodney outside. "I'm very glad you did that," he said softly. "Really, I'm very glad you've come."

"Thanks, Philip," said Rodney. "I hope you'll keep on being glad."

The baggage mules were already moving through the courtyard gate. The muleteers were lifting up the litters. Rodney Jones breathed deeply and set his hat more firmly on his head. The traveling servants had done a good job. The muleteers were good boys. The morning sun was bright and he was about to do something which he loved to do—to march beside a caravan with a slow steady stride, in tune with the animals' patient step.

"Come on," he said, "come on, Paul! We'll walk out ahead."

About a mile from the town of Ting Fou, Rodney Jones stopped beside the road to watch the caravan go by, with Steuben on one side of him and Philip Liu on the other. The country stretched before them in the peaceful conventional monotony of rural China. The road was a narrow track of reddish-brown dust between flat green fields of fresh millet and taller growths of winter wheat. On the horizon a mile away was a village with brown mud walls and green willows above the mud roofs of the houses. Farmers were out in the fields—men, women, and children—engaged in their ceaseless toil. A man stripped to the waist was hoeing. Another was on his hands and knees working among the weeds. Three tiny donkeys were coming toward them, their backs piled so high with wheat straw that they looked like moving ricks. A lean old bearded man paced slowly past on his way to town, carrying bits of scrap iron in two baskets balanced on a pole. Some children had gathered near them to watch the caravan go by. There was a tiny girl with two pigtails, dressed in red and blue, holding a naked baby by the hand. Two little boys with sticks, their eyes wide, stood watching Paul Steuben with a motionless stare, and Steuben stared back at the eccentric tufts of hair which had been left on their little shaven skulls. The mules were passing by them in good order. First came an old wizened man who wore a queue, leading the way. Then came the cooks and the cooks' boys, sitting on the bags and boxes that were strapped to the pack saddles, with the muleteers walking beside them. "Dr-r-r-r-r! Dr-r-r- Dr-r-r!" the muleteers were calling. "*Shu-shu! Shu!*" And a boy was singing in a high falsetto voice that rose like a bird's song over the flat fields. Then came more baggage and then the litters.

Then came more baggage mules and then Liang rode impassively by on muleback.

"We'll walk along behind them for a way," said Rodney Jones. "Everything looks all right. You're seeing China for the first time, Paul. It'll be like this day after day and yet every day it will be different."

"This is fine," Steuben answered, "I like to walk."

Then Philip Liu began to talk. "The people here are very backward," he explained. "They cannot read; they cannot write. Most of them have never been three miles from home. In any plan of government they have to be disregarded, of course."

"You may be right," said Rodney. "But sometimes it seems to me they know a lot."



"That's sheer sentiment," said Philip Liu. "All this will be changed when we get railroads in, and highways."

"Yes," Rodney answered, "but that's going to take a long, long time.... Hello! What's that?"

A sound of hoofbeats on the road behind them made them all turn and look.

"Hello," said Steuben. "Soldiers!" and he was right.

Soldiers, mounted on chunky little North China ponies in a column of twos, were coming up from the direction of Ting Fou. Their uniforms were the conventional gray cotton of Chinese troops; they carried carbines across their shoulders and cartridge bandoleers. Their faces beneath their visor caps were peculiarly characteristic of Chinese armies, young faces whose total puttylike lack of expression made them seem untrustworthy and vicious. They must have known who Rodney was, for when their leader saw him he shouted out an order and saluted, and the soldiers came to a straggly halt.

"What is it?" said Rodney sharply, and his mind groped among a dozen possibilities.

"Soldier protection," the leader said. "Soldier protection for the honorable foreigners." He spoke in a fast clipped dialect which Rodney could hardly understand and Rodney looked at Philip Liu. He was not pleased to see the soldiers, but Philip did not seem surprised.

"I can't understand him," Rodney said. "Who sent him?"

"He comes with the compliments of General Wu," said Philip Liu smoothly. "He has orders to accompany us all the way to Ho Hsien."

"Damnation," said Rodney. "We don't want any soldiers. If there's any trouble, they always run away, and they'll want five dollars a day and presents. Tell him we don't want them."

Then Philip's voice was answering. "He is so sorry. Orders. Perhaps it is just as well to have the soldiers."

It seemed to Rodney that Philip's voice was too smooth, that the soldiers and Philip Liu had an understanding of their own. Instead of protection, they made him feel, in spite of their respect, that they were there to guard a column of prisoners.

"Liu!" Rodney's voice was sharp. "Do you know anything about this?"

"Oh, no," said Philip Liu. "It is a courtesy, a custom." He was probably speaking the exact truth, but Rodney did not like it. Now that the soldiers had come, all he could do was to accept them. "All right," he said. "Tell them to go ahead."

Paul Steuben and the soldiers were exchanging curious glances, and Steuben also looked disturbed. Philip Liu and the sergeant were talking softly and smiling. "That's about as tough a bunch of babies as I've ever seen," said Steuben.

"Yes," said Rodney. "The Chinese army makes them tough. Some days they're bandits; some days they're soldiers."

Paul Steuben's heavy face grew grim. "If they start anything..." he began.

"We can't finish it the way you mean," said Rodney.

## CHAPTER VII

The road stretched forward, a single rut through a fertile plain, with the tilled fields pushing to the very edge of the

road, making it so narrow that now and then a row of millet would be half tramped down by some traveler's casual footsteps. The narrowness of the way and that encroaching of the fields told mutely of a crowded land, where the margin of existence might be altered by a row of trampled grain. The road led across the plain to a range of hills of brown earth denuded by trees, then it crossed a stony watercourse and continued beside it. The watercourse was nearly dry, because the treeless hills could store no moisture. Sometimes it would be a dry stream and then, in the periods of rains, it would become a roaring torrent that would tear against the fields along its banks. The hills were a long way off, but they would reach those hills by evening at their steady undeviating pace. Time and space were indeterminate in the plain. The Chinese measure of distance, the *li*, was as much a measure of time as distance, which varied in length according to the difficulties of travel. Thus, a *li* could be longer on the level and shorter in the mountains.

Now that they were on the road, China had closed around them gently, firmly, a self-sustaining world which was strangely beautiful and which had borrowed nothing from anything he knew. He recalled the words of the old emperor to that first British embassy, which had arrived in Peking nearly two hundred years before.

"Strange and costly objects do not interest me. As your ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange and ingenious and have no use for your country's manufactures." That was two hundred years ago and the country, now that they had left the railroad, still had no need of any contrivances but its own.

Paul Steuben walked in silence, incuriously, without a change of expression, a type which nothing would change. He was proof against environment. A useful, perfect type. His kind had plodded through the world since the beginning of man, enduring hardships and dangers, and coming home contentedly with nothing. But his weight was not made for walking. "Say," he said after a time, "it's hot!" His face was dripping wet.

"There's a litter for you," said Rodney. "No need to walk unless you like it."

Paul looked at him and grinned. "I guess I can stick it as long as you can," he said.

"This isn't a dance marathon," said Rodney.

After half an hour Philip Liu had walked enough.

"I think I'll ride," he said. "You'll excuse me, won't you?" He went skipping up the road, running lightly toward the mule litters.

Then Liang turned in his saddle, pulled up his mule, and spoke in English, with a smile he wore to conceal bad news. "Too much soldier," he said.

"Yes," said Rodney, "too much soldier,"—and they walked on in silence, while the country seemed to move past them languidly, like a landscape on a screen. They passed through the narrow cobbled street of a small market town where cloth and fans and shoes and ironware were on sale in front of rows of mud-walled houses. Awnings of white cloth were draped over the shopkeepers' white stalls. The populace of the town, in a double row of peering, smiling faces, came out to watch the foreigners go by. Rodney could hear them making remarks about Paul Steuben in pleasant, courteous voices.

"Look, he is enormous." ...

"His knees bend just like ours!" ...

"Is he white beneath his shirt or is it just his face and hands?" ...

"See, he is white too, where his garment is open."

"We're making quite a show," said Paul.

"Yes," said Rodney. "I know the way you feel, but you'll get used to that. You'll have the privacy of a goldfish all the way. Suppose a Chinese caravan came into an Iowa corn-belt town—"

But Paul's attention had moved in another direction. He was clearly not interested by what he saw.

"Listen," he said, "If you don't mind, I wish you'd tell me something. What about this porcelain the old man—Mr. Newall, I mean—is looking for?"

Rodney's face brightened, and for a while he forgot about the road. "You're asking me about what I think is the most beautiful thing in China," he replied. "There's nothing in the world that can touch the Chinese glazes. The actual ware called porcelain was probably discovered in China."

He stopped, embarrassed partly by his own enthusiasm and partly by the knowledge that Steuben would not share it. Only concrete facts would be left in Paul Steuben's mind, not beauty or mystery. Being sure of this, it seemed hardly worth continuing simply to make polite conversation. He would be revealing a part of himself for which Steuben could only feel a puzzled contempt, but then Paul Steuben blurted out the reason for his question. There was a pathos in the reason, and half against his will, he liked Paul Steuben for it.

"Maybe you don't know,"—Paul Steuben hesitated and cleared his throat—"Mel—Miss Newall—thinks I'm an awful fool about such things. She thinks I don't care shucks for anything except business and sport. You know what I mean. Now, if I could say something some evening that she thought was intelligent..."

His voice died out in an embarrassed cough, but he had no need to go further to clarify his meaning. He was saying without words that he did not consider Rodney Jones even vaguely as a rival, and the knowledge made Rodney wince. Long afterward he could recall every detail of that moment—the way the dust came cloudily across his eyes; though he knew that it was more than dust that made him catch his breath. The caravan was moving through the far gate of that mud-walled market town into a narrow gorge which the road had worn deep into the brown-red loess dust, and a cloud of soft dust rose in a film across his eyes, and his own futility seemed to rise up with it. There he was, as though nothing had occurred, talking of the ceramics of the Mings, talking to a memory of something and not to the man beside him. He was answering Paul Steuben's request, because, by doing so he seemed to be speaking to Mel Newall rather than to Paul:

"There is a great deal about porcelains that Europeans don't know—more than they think, perhaps. I don't know why, but there seems to be a tendency at home to underrate Ming porcelain. Our writers and connoisseurs keep harping on the later K'ang Hsi age as the climax of the potters' art. They are wrong about that, I think. Have you ever seen the Ming reds? Your eyes get lost in the depth and the mellowness of the color; your sight sinks into that red. Once you've seen it, I'll bet you'll agree no other red can touch it—particularly in the Süen-tê reign around 1530. I have an idea that the famous peach bloom of K'ang Hsi was only an abortive attempt of a later master to approximate the Ming red glaze. And have you ever seen the Ming blue underglaze, with a good mixture of Mohammedan blue, I mean, and the result of a perfect firing? Have you ever seen a good Ming blue?"

Rodney Jones waved his arm in a vague, hopeless gesture.

"I can't understand why any one likes a later blue if he's ever seen it. There's depth—depth. You seem to look down on that blue as through clear fine water. The Ming potters had time to work over their glazes. They had enough to do, but there was not the terrific pressure of work which was placed on later potters by the demands of K'ang Hsi and Ch'ien Lung. They had time to let the biscuit dry for a year before they fired it."

"What's biscuit? I can catch a little about kilns and firing, but what's biscuit?"

Paul Steuben's puzzled voice broke through his thoughts, and he saw Paul frowning in pained concentration.

"I'm sorry," Rodney Jones said, "I started talking and I forgot you might not know. Biscuit is the actual body of a vessel, the porcelain clay, if you don't mind an inaccurate term, as it comes off the potter's wheel. The glaze is what you might call a mineral paste, which is applied over this original vessel. Then the whole is placed in an oven called the kiln and subjected to intense heat. This heat fuses the chemicals in the outer paste, and makes them glassy, vitreous, and the biscuit, unlike the common clay of pottery, becomes white. It rings like a bell when you flick it with your finger."

"Thanks," Steuben's voice interrupted him again, "Thanks. I get it now—biscuit—kiln—firing."

But Rodney Jones hardly heard him. He was thinking of his own love, the porcelains of the Mings—that was something which Mel Newall could not take from him. He could have told her about that. She might have listened; she might have liked him, if he had told her. Suppose he had talked of the Mings that evening in the courtyard, instead of making a fool of himself? Suppose...

"Yes, they had time." He was speaking of his old love. "They could let the glaze dry for a year before they fired it. They say that time means nothing to the Chinese, but their artisans are like our own. They get pressed for time. Take the Yellows. It may be an eccentricity of mine, perhaps, but I'm in good company, since it was selected as the symbol of empire. I think there is nothing finer than the Chinese Yellows. They all have the sun in them and gold, but only the Mings have sun and gold and fire."

"The Ming Yellow is rare, isn't it?" Steuben asked. "Very rare?"

Rodney Jones laughed shortly.

"That's the question of our time, isn't it? But don't forget the rarity of an object doesn't make it beautiful. There are some porcelains which no one in his senses would care to look at, and yet they fetch a price only because they are very rare. As a matter of fact, Ming Yellow is very scarce indeed, particularly the Yellow of that short reign of the Emperor Süen Tê, when the best Ming examples were turned out. I have heard the scarcity explained—that it was because it was used only for Imperial religious rites. Whether that is true or not, there are very few perfect pieces, though there's plenty of later Yellow. But you can't go wrong, if you see it against true Ming. It's thick, it's cloudy. It hasn't got the fire. You can always tell it. Take a Ch'ing Yellow and look at the base where the glaze has run down a little thick, and the glaze will be fractured by minute cracks, but you won't find any cracks on Ming. It's clear—all limpid clear, like amber—but it's more than amber. It's—well, I don't know what it's like, but remember this when you think of porcelains: they have always been considered the most precious things in China. Jewels were all well enough for women, but the best pieces from the kilns were for the emperor. They have a price beyond jewels; they still have."

"Yes," said Paul Steuben with more enthusiasm, "That's true all right. I've seen what Mr. Newall's paid for some of the stuff he's bought. It makes this business of loping across country more sort of worth while, doesn't it? If that stuff is there, the old man's after big money again. He always has an eye for that."

Rodney Jones laughed again.

"Yes," he said, "that's probably the trouble."

"Huh?" Steuben's expression was blank incomprehension. "How do you mean, 'trouble'? I'd like to have that trouble."

"Perhaps you would. I wouldn't," Rodney answered shortly. "Is he coming out here only because he has heard of something beautiful which it would be easily worth going half around the world to see and touch? Not if I know Mr. Newall. He's out here because he knows a man named Rose is after Ming Yellow, and so he wants it too. He's out here to beat the market on Ming Yellow because he knows the price will go up, if collectors concentrate on it. Personally, that reason doesn't appeal to me much, but each one to his taste."

"But perhaps you're not right," said Steuben. Rodney expected the reply. Paul was the sort who would be loyal to his boss and loyal to his crowd. The man was as simple as a multiplication table, with a simplicity so without a doubt that Rodney envied it. "You don't know the boss as well as I do. He's in the high brackets in every way, and don't you forget it. You'll find out if there's any trouble."

"All right," said Rodney.

"You're out here for money and not art, aren't you? You're getting paid for this."

"Sure," said Rodney, "sure."

"Well, then, where's your kick coming? You're in your own glass house."

"No kick," said Rodney. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to throw a stone."

"I'm sorry," said Steuben. "I didn't mean to say that, but it always riles me when any one slams the boss. Thanks for talking to me. I'm just dumb."

"Forget it," said Rodney genially. "Why don't you go up and see how the employers are getting on? One of us ought to, and you're elected, Paul."

## CHAPTER VIII

There was a phrase for it in the Chinese speech, and the phrase was "Eating bitterness." That was what Rodney was eating then. The mere fact that Steuben did not suspect why he was there was enough to make him bitter. Loneliness was coming over him like a wave.

They came to another market town early in the afternoon and halted at the largest inn to bait the mules. The caravan clattered through the inn gate past the kitchens and into a wide yard. Clay stalls for the animals stood on the right and left of the yard, and the lattice windows of travelers' quarters inclosed the far side of the court.

"Liang," Rodney called, "show the strangers inside and bring them tea and warm washing water. See that the soldiers have cigarettes, and if they go near the baggage, let me know. I shall stay out here."

He did not wish to see any one just then; instead, he wished to be face to face with his own loneliness, standing in the courtyard as the only representative of another race. Out there solitude was bearable, because he was not with his own kind, and, though he was aloof, the surge of native life was friendly and diverting. He loved the excitement of those arrivals at an inn, where the hands of the clock turned back to the dawn of the Christian era, and where life assumed an old simplicity. The Chinese—the servants, the innkeeper, and the cooks—became as simple and engaging as the Spanish peasants in Cervantes, for life in the innyard was moving in a medieval sort of progress as soon as the mules were in. The muleteers were lifting down the litters. They were leading the animals, relieved of their heavy wooden saddles, toward the well in the corner of the court. Two inn boys, stripped to the waist, strained at a windlass, winding up water in woven willow buckets, bucket after bucket, and tossing it into a long stone trough. They were preparing chopped fodder in mud mangers by the stalls. He had heard a great deal said of the callous cruelty of the Chinese toward their animals, but it always seemed to him that they were no harder on the animals than on themselves. Man and beast were close partners there in that grinding, ceaseless struggle to gain the bare means of life, and now they would have a moment's respite at the inn.

There was a smell of fodder and dung and rice wine and bean oil. The soldiers were already squatting around two low tables, drinking *kao-liang* spirits from tiny cups, and digging their chopsticks into bowls of gray-brown wheat paste. There would be a twist of the wrist and swish, the paste would go into their heavy mouths. Two Mongolian thrushes, in their wicker cages outside the kitchen, broke into a chattering song, higher, but not unlike the voices in the court. A beggar, who had been swept in with the caravan from the street, was kneeling in front of him, mumbling a supplication and holding out his bowl, and returning thanks when Rodney tossed him two coppers.

The cooks were very busy inside the dingy, smoky kitchen house. Two boys stoked the mud stoves with handfuls of wheat straw, the fuel of that country, and an older man was making pancakes. He greased the interior of a shallow iron caldron, which was sunk deep into the mud stove so that it touched the flames; and leaned far over the huge receptacle, turning the cakes of dough. When he saw Rodney watching, he smiled across his greasy shoulder. Everything was pleasant, everything was right. Jones did not mind the dirt and smells of China, as he stood there watching. He did not mind the crowd of townspeople who stood about him in a respectful semicircle, staring, and conversing in low voices, for it all fitted into the picture.

Then he knew that something in the picture had changed before he knew the reason. He knew it before he saw Mel

Newall walking toward him from her room across the court. She was utterly incongruous in her riding breeches and soft sweater and small felt hat.

"Hello," she said, "director."

"Look out for those mules' heels," he warned. She walked past the line of mules contemptuously and stopped beside him. "You're not at the Ritz, you know," he added.

Her nose wrinkled.

"Thanks for reminding me," she said. "Why don't you come inside with us? They're asking for you, I don't know why."

"They must want something," Rodney Jones suggested. "Your tour conductor is staying out here, thanks. He's going to eat one of those pancakes in a minute, and then have some tea. We'll be leaving in about an hour. We're going another thirty *li*, and we'll stop for the night at a monastery in the hills. You better go back and rest. You'll need it."

"I don't blame you much for staying here," she said. "The room we're in is dreadful. It's hardly clean. I don't like to sit on that matting. It's filthy."

"Why don't you write a letter to the management?" Rodney Jones smiled sweetly and she smiled back.

"I suppose it amuses you to see us uncomfortable," she remarked.

"Listen," said Rodney Jones, "you're not so uncomfortable. This is a nice clean inn and that room was especially cleaned out for you. You'll remember this old hostelry affectionately after you've seen some others. Everything's being done for you that's possible, and now you're here, you'll have to take it and like it."

"Oh, Mr. Jones," she said, "please don't be cross with me. You know so much more than any Chinese. Philip was the one who complained first about its being dirty, and he intimates that you aren't doing this very well—and that isn't all he intimates. Not that he doesn't like you—he says he likes you very much. It's simply that he says you allow yourself to be deceived by your Number One servant."

"He does, does he?" said Rodney. "And I suppose you came out here to tell me that, just to add to the gaiety?"

Then he saw that she was looking at him soberly, intently.

"Never mind the reason. I came out here to tell you."

"Thanks," said Rodney Jones.

But she was still looking at him.

"You're not worried about anything, are you?" she asked suddenly.

"Oh, no," said Rodney Jones.

"When it comes to hardship," she continued more casually, "I can probably stand as much as you can. You needn't be so melodramatic about it. I can eat pancakes and be above dirt just as well as you."

"Certainly," said Rodney Jones. "Don't worry. The boys are making you a nice lunch."

Her eyes grew dark and she moved toward the kitchen door.

"Will you tell them to get me a pancake?"

"Naturally you will have your own way," said Rodney. "You can have your pancake and everything else because

you want it. Just come in the kitchen, and we'll sit there by that little table."

The scene had begun to divert him, especially as he could not tell whether she was angry or amused. But he was not alone in being diverted, for the door behind them was crowded with interested Chinese faces, and the kitchen staff was pleased. The innkeeper himself brought pots of tea and bowls and sauces, which he placed on the low little table on the *kang*. They sat down under the smoky beams, perfectly out of place, with the blazing wheat straw sending patches of yellow light toward them from the dark corners. The faces had crowded through the doorway and gathered around them in a double ring, until, at last, the landlord shooed them from the kitchen.

"Do you understand what they are saying?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rodney. "They are wondering whether you are my wife or my concubine. They do not believe you have borne me many children."

"You do think of the sweetest things to say," she said.

Rodney raised his chopsticks and plunged them into the bowl. Then he smeared sauces on his pancake and doubled it over quickly.

"You're pretty sweet yourself," he said, and they exchanged a level glance across the bowls and cups, "and we're giving the population lots of pleasure."

"I suppose—" her tone was speculative and aloof—"that you go through this country without its meaning a thing to you. I haven't heard you make one interesting or sympathetic remark."

Rodney waved a hand in the direction of the court.

"I don't have to," he said. "You have your own walking encyclopedia with you. Philip can tell you everything. I heard him lecturing on poetry this morning. Has he told how the Manchus designated rank by putting colored buttons on their hats?"

"Philip is interesting," she said, "and he knows how to behave."

"And he always will," said Rodney, "I've never seen a Chinese who didn't. Oh, yes, Philip is very interesting. Just you believe everything he says. Philip knows." Rodney paused and poured himself another cup of tea. "And you've got one thing more in common."

"That's more than we have," she said, "thank heaven."

Rodney wrinkled his face into one of his most genial smiles.

"You'd both of you like to see me a thousand miles from here. I hope for different reasons."

She set down her teacup and they exchanged another glance.

"You flatter yourself," she said.

"That's my weakness," Rodney answered. "I do as long as no one else does. I am perfectly aware what Philip's doing. He's fixed it so that your father won't listen to a word of advice from me. He has arranged it so that none of you trust me around the corner. I'll lay you a little bet, beautiful. Philip got Paul Steuben to carry that gun, and Philip arranged that I should know it. He wanted to get me in a quarrel and he hoped that I'd go home. All right. I'm satisfied."

"Is there any reason why I should trust you," she asked evenly, "or why my father should?"

"None whatsoever," Rodney said. "If that's the way you feel."

"You know you have the handling of all the money."

"Yes," said Rodney, "and the money's in the post office—all that we won't need for traveling—and the postal system is about the safest thing in China."

"I didn't mean it the way you think," she said. "I meant that every one's nerves seem to be on edge, yours included, and I meant more particularly that none of us have much reason to like you. You haven't gone out of your way to be agreeable to any one. Except Paul," she ended. "You were nice to Paul to-day."

Rodney choked and turned to his cup of tea. She had picked up the bowl of wheat paste.

"I know where I am with Paul," he said, and coughed and choked again.

"So do I," she said. "It's rather pleasant to know just how you will find some one, no matter what happens." She was struggling with the bowl. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Don't," Rodney begged her. "Please don't stop. Please eat some more of that, just the way you did then. The pancake was a good exhibition, but that look of pleasure you give with the noodle paste...! I used to think I loved you, but I know I love you now."

Mel Newall jumped down onto the pounded earth floor.

"I used to think you were about the most disagreeable person I had ever encountered," she said, "but I thought you had some rudimentary instincts of politeness—"

"Sit down," said Rodney. "There's lots more to eat," but she did not sit down.

"Listen," said Rodney, "I didn't mean to laugh. I take it all back. I don't love you."

"There's only one thing you love," Mel Newall said, "and that's yourself. I came out to this evil-smelling place because I didn't think they were being fair to you. I was sorry the way we all acted this morning... I thought we might have been wrong about you."

"Thanks," said Rodney shortly.

She looked at the table with distaste.

"And now you can eat the rest of that trash yourself. Good-by, director."

Rodney stood looking after her, oblivious to the sights and sounds around him. Outside the muleteers and the soldiers had finished too. The thrushes were chirping on a higher note that went jarring and rattling through his ears. Liang pushed his way through the crowd at the door.

"What is it, Liang?" he asked.

"In fifteen minutes," Liang said, "it is time to go."

"Is everything all right?"

Liang folded his hands in his sleeves.

"There is too much trouble," he said. "I do not like the trouble."

Rodney walked across the court to the travelers' room, opened the door, and stepped carefully over the high threshold. As he did so, the children and adults who had been making holes in the paper windows, so that they might see the foreigners, moved a little backward. When Rodney put himself in the position of these simple people, their interest seemed reasonable. If he had been one of them, he, too, would have moistened the tip of his finger to make a noiseless



hole in the ricepaper pane. The four strangers sat on the *kang*, leaning against the wall. They must have seemed ludicrously awkward to the eyes of the crowd outside and something to tell of during the summer evenings, for they did not sit comfortably cross-legged but sprawled untidily.

Mr. Newall must have seemed a remarkable figure. A rich man who was not fat, a man who should have been venerable by all the rights of his years, and yet who had the lines of a tired coolie on his face. As for Paul Steuben, what a sight he must have seemed, with his wrestler's body and shoebrush hair and ugly, cold eyes like ice. It probably took courage to stare at him, even through a window. To them Mel Newall was like a brazen hussy, but one might pass her by to observe the wonders of Philip Liu, for Rodney Jones could believe that Philip was the most amazing sight of all to that rustic group outside. He was one of their own countrymen who could not sit properly upon a *kang* and he was dressed like the foreign ghosts. What province did he come from, what sort of a man was he whose features said that he belonged within the Wall, but whose actions in a hundred little ways showed unfamiliarity with the ordinary customs? Did he belong to the foreigners or to the enlightened people? That was what they on the outside were no doubt wondering, and Rodney Jones could not help but wonder himself. Whether Philip was the dawn of a new China or a man without a country, Rodney could not tell. And Philip Liu was speaking while those others listened, delivering himself of another pleasant discourse. "The system of names in China is hard to understand," he was saying. "My surname is Liu, of course, and my Christian name is Philip, but that is only for convenience in Western speech, just as you have all been given Chinese names out here by the Chinese. There is another thing—the surnames in China are very limited in number. There were only one hundred in the old books and even now there are only a hundred and ten."

Paul Steuben rubbed his fingers through his shoe-brush hair. "If your name isn't Philip, what is it?" he asked.

"Don't interrupt him, Paul," Mr. Newall said. "This is all intensely interesting."

Philip Liu smiled and then he laughed. "What is my name?" he asked. "That all depends. There is my milk name, given me by my parents in my infancy, which they may still use. It is Small Dragon, a term of affection. My proper name, given only after consultation with a scholar and a poet, that is Te-Chi'ao, meaning High or Prominent. Isn't that a silly name? But then, of course, I have another name."

Mr. Newall looked puzzled at that juncture. He had the familiar mesmerized look of a stranger in China. "What kind of a name is your other name?" he asked.

"That," said Philip Liu, "is my courtesy name, my *Hao* name, which is given by one's dearest friends. Mine is *Yu-feng*. It means Jade Peak."

"What a nice name," Mel said. "I can see you sitting on a peak of jade."

Philip laughed disarmingly. "Oh, no, no, Miss Newall, those names are incongruous for any one like me. They only give me good examples and remind me of my unfitness."

"Excuse me," Rodney Jones said. "I don't want to interrupt this seminary, but we really must be going."

"Oh," said Philip, "excuse me."

"If you'll please get started right away—" said Rodney.

He walked beside the old pig-tailed leader at the head of the caravan, down the little street and then out toward the hills, but he had not forgotten that scene upon the *kang*. He could still feel Philip's eyes upon him, and there had been a change which Philip Liu had either not bothered or had not been sufficiently careful to conceal. Philip Liu's manner had been almost casual and careless, as though Rodney Jones no longer really mattered, as though they had met in a competition in which Rodney Jones had lost. Liu was competent; there was no doubt of that. There was competence behind every word of his artless conversation, and a skill in concealing an ability that was there. Jones dropped back until he found Liang perched upon his mule.

"Liang," he said in English, "you watch that young Chinese to-night. See if he talks with the soldiers. Watch him! Understand?"

Liang's careful middle-aged face revealed his perfect understanding. "No fear, master," he said. "I watch him all the time."

They had started out so late that morning that dusk was settling down when they came near their stopping place for the night. For the last two hours their road had left the plain and had changed into a stony track that wound over hilly ridges from which the top soil had been washed centuries ago. Then it would dip into a hollow, past a hamlet of mud houses where a small stream ran, and then up into the hills again. Toward dusk, just as the sun had set, he saw gray walls upon a hill that inclosed peaked roofs with tall poles above them.

"We rest there, master," Liang told him.

The shape of the walls and roofs was enough to show that the place was a religious institution, a temple in the hills. It was hard to explain why it stood in such a remote spot, for it was large and well kept up. It was probably a sacred place built on the foundations of other temples which had gone back to the dawn of time, into the Druid-like naturalistic religion of a primitive race. It was likely that at one time the hills around it had been covered by a heavy pine forest such as one saw in pictures at the time of the Sung dynasty, but nothing was left of the woodland except a grove of trees on the slope behind the wall.

"The old foreigner wants to see you," Liang said.

Rodney walked back to Mr. Newall's litter. Mr. Newall was leaning out, and he looked tired and white. "Are we going to go on all night, Jones?" he asked.

"No, sir." Rodney pointed to the walls. "We shall stop in the guest quarters there for the night. They'll be expecting us. We sent a boy ahead this morning."

"Tell them to stop those damn mules," Mr. Newall snapped. "I'll walk up to that temple."

He noticed that Mr. Newall's breath was short as they climbed the hill, and for a while he did not speak. "Well," said Rodney, "what's the matter, sir? Have you got something on your mind?"

"No," said Mr. Newall carefully, "nothing. So this is a temple, is it?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "a Buddhist temple. It's the customary place for travelers to stop along this road." They had reached the main gate by then and it was clear they were expected. The abbot himself, in a fine yellow robe, was standing there with a group of gray-clad, shaven-headed priests beside him, and little gray temple boys were opening a stable-yard gate. The abbot was bowing with his hands together as the priests gathered around them. Then, led by the abbot, they walked through the front gate into the inclosure guarded by its two warriors Heng and Hu, and into the paved enclosure where the drum and bell tower stood.

"Where are we going?" said Mr. Newall.

"He wishes to take you through the temple to his rooms," said Rodney.

Then they were walking up steps through the archway of another building, and there was a vision of red columns and carved eaves in twisting conventional shapes, painted red and green and blue. They passed through the building of the Four Guardian Kings, where the fat senile god of happiness sat. Then through another court into the building of the Three Masters, where the great gold figures smiled hazily in the half light. In still another courtyard giant peonies grew in beds, and the abbot led them into his own house. Lanterns hung from the ceilings and the yellow light glowed against glass pictures of flowers and landscapes. On one side of a little altar there were two fine lacquer tables with a lacquer sweetmeat box upon each, and the abbot was bowing them toward the chairs.

"Wait," said Rodney, "don't sit down for a minute. We must be polite." And he bowed and spoke the proper words

to the abbot and then they all three sat down. Temple boys poured them steaming cups of tea. Other boys were offering them hot towels. The abbot handed them sugared sweetmeats made in the shape of little gods.

Mr. Newall drank his tea and gazed around the room. "Did you do this to impress me, Jones?" he said.

"Nothing's meant to impress you," Rodney answered. "I suppose it is impressive when you see a temple for the first time. But we are being treated as distinguished strangers. Liang will give the abbot a present of tea in a moment and we'll make the temple a money present when we leave.... Oh, here are the others."

Liang had come in with Mel Newall and Paul Steuben. "There you are," said Rodney Jones. "And where is Mr. Liu?"

"He waited in back," Steuben answered, "to see about the baggage."

Rodney Jones frowned. "The baggage is all right," he said. "Liang will have everything brought in to you." Then he felt Mr. Newall's eyes on him.

"I told him to look after the baggage," Mr. Newall said.

Rodney Jones ate a sugar god before he answered and he knew it was no time for a quarrel then. "All right," he said. "We've been given the three buildings across the court. There's room for you and Miss Newall in one; Steuben, Liang, and I will share the other. There's a room in the third for Liu. He'll tell you all about this better than I can, if you'll excuse me, please." When he walked into the temple courtyard he knew that he had walked too far that day. His limbs ached with unexpected weariness. He was tired because none of them liked him, except possibly Steuben. He was tired because he was shut out by their dislike.

The courtyard was beautiful. There remained a touch of daylight in the sky above the curved temple roofs, although the evening star was out. That memory of daylight in the sky still made it a soft blue but it was growing darker every minute. A penetrating exotic scent came from the great white blossoms on the giant peony bushes which stood in raised stone-bordered beds near the center of the court. Those bushes must have been growing for well over two centuries. There was a smell of incense from the temple. A sound of chanting voices came from behind closed doors, and then a breath of wind caught the wings of the clappers in the wind bells on the eaves, making a faint stirring sound of bells. The monastery with its courts and shrines was moving down the ages into another night and the monastic life was beautiful. He could not observe any of the rites of a pagan religion in it. Instead, it had an ascetic, kindly simplicity. He might have been in France in the thirteenth century, stopping at an abbey in Provence. There was something in back of his mind—a wish—and he knew what it was. He wished that Mel Newall might have been there with him. They could have walked under the carved portico; they could have peered into the darkness where the eighteen golden wise men stood on their shelf along the wall. He could have shown her the hanging silks and the white parrot of Kuanyin.

"So they send that Chinese to watch the baggage," he said, beneath his breath. And then he saw Philip Liu. It occurred to him that Philip always appeared like an answer to a thought. He was stepping carefully through a round moon gate.

"The peonies," he said, "are beautiful. Have you listened to the bells?"

"Yes, I hear them," said Rodney. "If you're looking for Mr. Newall, he is taking tea in there. Is everything all right?"

"Oh, yes," said Philip. "Everything's all right. I'll see you later."

He was glad that Philip Liu could not see his face. "Maybe you're right," he said, beneath his breath, "maybe I will see you later." And he walked over to his own quarters beside the court. There was another little shrine and a room on either side, each shut off by curtains in a doorway of carved lacquer. In one of them a servant was fitting together his and Steuben's cot beds. Liang would be across the way. Rodney reached into his bag for his flashlight and then he walked out of the court toward the stables. He knew where the stables were, because all temples were built on a conventional plan. Philip Liu was right—everything was going well at the stables. There was a smooth sense of satisfied well-being as men and animals prepared for rest. The soldiers were grooming their horses. The muleteers were giving the animals their

first meal, and he knew that those boys would be up half the night giving their mules successive feedings of carefully-chopped fodder. The cooks had found a place to work; the temple boys were carrying out bowls of rice and great mounds of boiled dough and cakes. In other rooms blankets were already spread on the *kangs*. Philip Liu was right. Everything was going smoothly. The world was sinking into silence.

## CHAPTER IX

"Master," Liang was whispering in his ear. Liang's long fingers were holding his shoulder tight. "Wake up, master."

Rodney Jones raised himself on his elbow and his cot bed creaked precariously. For a second, as he pulled his mind out of the shadow of sleep, he did not know where he was, and then his memory prompted him like an awakened, faithful servant. He was in the guest room of that Buddhist temple, a stranger in mystic darkness. He heard a sigh of breeze and the gentle singing chatter of small bells. The wind bells on the eaves outside were moving and calling through the night; the last sound he had heard before sleeping, the first he had heard on waking. Then the illuminated dial of his wrist watch flashed at him; the hour was half-past two. His hand groped out for his electric torch.

"No," Liang whispered, "not the light."

"What?" Rodney whispered. "What...?"

"Liu is talking with the soldier officer," Liang whispered. "You better come and hear."

The whisper had an ugly sound, which hinted of nearly any implication, but there was no time to ask a question. For all he knew, anything might be happening in the dark outside. Then he heard Steuben's peaceful breathing, and he reached through the darkness and grasped Paul Steuben's wrist.

"Paul..." he whispered. "Steuben.... Leave your shoes.... Don't make a sound.... There's something..."

"Huh?" Paul Steuben began.

"Don't ask," Rodney's lips were close to his ear. "Something's going on.... Show us where, Liang."

Steuben was a comforting companion. He grunted again, but he asked no questions, and followed them noiselessly into the court. The night was still except for an occasional breath of wind, which set the bells to tinkling, and the air was cool enough to make one shiver. Liang moved cautiously ahead of them and their bare feet made no sound on the court paving. There was starlight enough to show the beds of the peonies and the outlines of the buildings with their tentlike roofs. The whole thing seemed fantastic, once they were outside. Liang moved along the wall toward the round moon door. He stopped when he reached it, and waved his hand, inviting them to move beside him, and they all three stood peering through the door.

It opened into another smaller court, where repairs on a building were in progress. He could see the outline of Chinese rope-tied scaffolding, sending up straight black poles into the lighter sky, and piles of roof tiling and cubes of stone in heaps upon the ground. Over toward the left, so near the door in the wall that one had to bend one's head around to see, two men were sitting on a pile of the roof tiles. One was in the gray blur of a soldier's uniform, and the other was dressed in olive-drab traveling clothes. Liang was right. Philip Liu and a soldier were in the courtyard talking comfortably, and now and then he could catch a snatch of their conversation. The man's dialect was hard to follow, but Philip Liu's was plainer, and the first word that came to him sent a quiver down Rodney's spine. He had always hated melodrama. The whole scene and his actions in it had no definite bearing on ordinary life until he heard that single word.

"Liu Hei Ch'i," Philip Liu was saying. "Black seven Liu." There was no doubt. The syllables were clear enough. The name moved back accurately through Rodney's memory, where he had filed it. He could even recall the last time he

had written that name on his typewriter in Peking—the evening Mel Newall had sat there beneath the tree. Liu Hei Ch'i and his rabble army had been moving from the south. General Wu had been sending cavalry. It had been only another bandit leader and another Chinese general for some copy desk to struggle with. And now Liu Hei Ch'i had become a person, a definite entity, because his name had been mentioned in a temple before dawn.

Out in that courtyard Philip Liu was speaking of a bandit chief, notorious enough to have his name on the cables.

"Liu Hei Ch'i," Philip's voice was cautious, but it was clear enough. "Is he there, then?"

Rodney's memory, attentive for such details, conveyed to him little details of Hei Ch'i's career, as he stood there listening. It was like so many other careers in the last three decades of Chinese anarchy—a peasant boy carried off by some raiding band, a natural leader, reared in an excellent soldier's school, an officer in a local general's army, a colonel who marched off with his regiment and looted two market towns when there was no pay, a vicious man of forty who had not made the right connections, but a consummate enough leader to march safely through China with a few thousand renegades, although two armies were on his heels. His name had been a piece of type and an abstraction in a welter of charred towns and violence, but now he was real enough as the Europeanized Philip Liu, graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, pronounced his name.

"I have heard Hei Ch'i is reasonable," Philip Liu was saying.

Rodney Jones drew in his breath. It was time for him to do something, if only to break the inertia that was on him, but he still hesitated. He was more sure than he had ever been that Philip Liu was a remarkable person; his respect for Philip Liu was growing. He reached for Paul Steuben's arm.

"Come on," he whispered, "Don't let that soldier get away. If he tries to, hit him. I'll look out for Liu."

"Huh?" said Paul Steuben. "What?" Rodney had not realized that Chinese would mean nothing to Paul Steuben, but there was no time to waste.

"Come on," he said, and stepped through the gate.

The soldier was the one who saw them first. He started up with a catlike speed, and then Rodney spoke. He tried to make his voice sound natural.

"Hello, Philip," he said. "Maybe you've got time to come over to my place and have a little talk, and tell your boy friend to come too. I always did like soldiers."

There was no longer any doubt that Philip Liu was excellent. Form was the name for what he showed—perfect adequate form. He had command of a tranquillity which betrayed nothing, absolutely nothing. He spoke two quick words to the soldier.

"Why, of course," he said, "and thank you so much. I'm sorry you cannot sleep. Don't worry, Mr. Steuben. This is Sergeant Chin Mao Shu, who will be delighted to come without your helping him. I should have had the sergeant in my own place, of course, but I was afraid that we might wake you."

"Thanks," said Rodney Jones.

Philip's face was a yellowish blur in the half light. He moved his hand in a gesture which seemed to cut an elliptical circle from the dark, as he spoke.

"*Li tang*," he said. "Only my true, just obligation. *Li tang*."

Steuben exhaled a deep bewildered breath.

"I don't see what the hell—" he began.

"Don't worry," said Rodney confidently, "you're going to see, all right"—but as he spoke, some of his own confidence was ebbing into the darkness and the gently twinkling bells. The serenity of Philip Liu was what disturbed him, for he could not believe that it was entirely assumed, and that serenity was as cold as steel, as cool and yet as distorting to straight logic as a piece of carved crystal was clear and yet distorting to a light ray.

Rodney Jones could almost believe that the situation, though he controlled it, was assuming an inexplicable Oriental aspect. A handful of his own traveling servants had appeared mysteriously, as though they had been awakened by nothing but a racial prescience, which made them aware of trouble. They were lighting the candle lanterns in his room and were fetching a pot of tea. They moved mechanically, undisturbed by the lateness of the hour. Their faces were like masks but their eyes were mutely curious, seemingly aware of something which he did not know. He thought they looked afraid.

"Take those boys out of here, Liang," he said, "and stay out," and he invited Philip Liu and the soldier to sit down on two stiff chairs by a table against the wall, opposite the *kang*. There was a mirror just behind the table of wavy glass, with the Chinese cards of former temple visitors stuck in rows between the glass and its teakwood frame. He could see his own face in the mirror, distorted and curious like every object in that room.

"Watch that soldier, Paul," he said, "and slug him if he makes a move. I don't like his looks."

Paul Steuben must have understood the justice of that remark, now that the features of the soldier were clear in the yellow light of the narrow room. The soldier's face was as heavy and inhuman as a badly modeled piece of clay. It was a round face with fat cheeks, long ears, heavy chin, pendulous lips, and clean-shaven skull, but all of them were claylike and inartistic. You could believe that the maker who had dabbled in that clay had lacked human understanding, for the features had not a single spark of humanity. You could believe that not a thing would move them. They had become completely hardened by sights of obscenity and cruelty, which were vaguely reflected in a pair of steady almond eyes that stared back at Rodney insolently and pryingly.

"No, Philip," said Rodney Jones, "I don't like your pudgy friend. I'm afraid he hasn't been leading what we might call a clean life."

Seemingly interested by the idea, Philip Liu studied the soldier carefully, turning half aside to see the other better, and those two Chinese faces made an interesting contrast—one devoid of all sensation, the other aquiline and gently clever. Philip rested one of his slight long-fingered hands on the table and then touched the edges of his teacup.

"I understand what you mean," he said. "I'm very sorry. Some of our best soldiers are like that. That is why the professional soldier is placed lowest, of course, in the ancient social scale."

Rodney Jones moved impatiently.

"Never mind the lecture right now," he said. "It's intensely interesting. And so are you, but that isn't what I want to know."

Philip moved his shoulders and smiled. His smile took away his placidity and for a moment, it plausibly bridged the gap of race.

"I don't know what you mean now," he said. "What have I done? I know you do not like me and I am very sorry. Perhaps we can each be frank. What is it you want to know?"

Rodney kept his eyes on Philip Liu.

"I may not like you," he answered, "but I admire you intensely. You're Europe's gift to China, Philip. I want to know exactly what is your little game?"

"Game?" said Philip Liu and he smiled again. "I wish I understood," and Rodney Jones smiled back.

"Listen, boy," he said. "There isn't much that you don't understand. When I first saw you, I thought you were just another of these college Chinese and I was wrong—how wrong." He paused and his admiration was honest. "You're a

first-rater, Philip. You're a number one. I admit it, even if I don't trust you around the corner. You've got the gift of intrigue and you're not out here for fun."

Philip Liu laughed like a good companion.

"And neither are you out here—for fun." His prominent eyes twinkled, closed and opened, as he looked at Rodney Jones. The tribute to his ability must have pleased him.

"Don't we both know it?" said Rodney frankly. "I'm out here to keep an eye on you. You've been busy getting me in wrong, but here I am, Phil. Here I am, looking at China's gift from the West, and asking what's your little game. You've got an old man and his daughter out here, and poor Mr. Steuben, who never did you any harm. And next I find a soldier guard, and now to-night—" Rodney paused, and then raised his voice—"I find you and this physically repulsive son of Mars talking about one of your countrymen, Hei Ch'i, who doesn't make his living in a nice way. It couldn't be that Hei Ch'i is near here, could it? It couldn't be that you're taking a parcel of rich foreigners to hand over to Hei Ch'i?"

A silence met him when he stopped that was as mysterious and heavy as fog. Paul Steuben was the one who broke it.

"Hell's bells!" he breathed. "You're crazy, Jones."

"Maybe," said Rodney. He was watching Philip Liu with every sense alert. Philip had not moved, and yet that very immobility made him the center of the room. Instead of moving, he was listening intently, with the rapt concentration of a student absorbing a lecture in a foreign tongue.

"Maybe," Rodney said a second time, "there's form, but there's no justice in China. How about it, Phil?"

Philip turned his head quickly and nodded.

"China is a nation in turmoil," Philip answered patiently, "the natural outcome of the ending of a dynasty." He moved his hand slowly across the table until his fingers reached the edge. "You suggest I am thinking of ransom, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Rodney briskly. "Ransom, gold. Heavy money. Are you going to hand them to Hei Ch'i? How about it, Phil?"

Philip's composure was not shaken. He sat there placidly for a space, as though time and anxiety meant nothing. He seemed to be in two places at once—in his own world and in the foreign world—deciding which to follow.

"You are wrong," he answered simply. "You are not correct. I should be pleased to explain."

"Now we're talking." The sight of Philip Liu's motionless figure made Rodney uneasy, but he spoke cordially. "All the cards on the table, if you please. I'm broad-minded, Philip. Maybe I can help you. Your uncle, General Wu, could not be in this, could he—because I hear he is your uncle?"

Philip smiled and nodded encouragingly.

"You are coming nearer now," he said, "but you're too suspicious, Mr. Jones. You have the idea that I am sinister, because my skin is yellow. I am not sinister. I am very much like you. You are here because you are an opportunist, if that is the right word. I am here because I am an opportunist too. I should have been frank with you in the first place. I should have, except that I was overafraid that your suspicions would upset the others. All foreigners are so suspicious of us. Yes, General Wu is my uncle and a very nice man, as you will see, and he needs money. That is all.... May I have a cigarette? You don't trust me, do you, because my skin is yellow?"

"Do you want me to tell the truth?" asked Rodney. "No matter what sort of a skin you might have, I wouldn't trust you around the corner. It isn't skin. It's you. I've seen your sort at home, as Nordic as Lief Ericson. You're too much on your own mind, Phil.... There's your cigarette and there's your match."

Philip lighted his cigarette carefully, lost in introspection, seemingly oblivious to the interest which surrounded him.

"That may be true. Yes, that may be true," he said. "You know, some day I should like to talk to you about myself. I was born in a family before the revolution—a family which had been in official life for generations. My teacher drilled me in rudimentary Chinese education for the imperial examinations, and then the world broke open. My father was killed and I was sent to mission school.... It is hard to digest two cultures. They puzzle me sometimes, but they have taught me to be an opportunist. That is something."

"Yes," said Rodney. "Some other time I'd love to have you talk about yourself. You must have a very interesting cultural and intellectual background. As I've told you, I've set you down as number one, or I wouldn't pay so much attention to you now. Suppose you switch the subject for a minute. What about you and this uncle of yours? I'm going to have it, if I have to shake it out of you. And what do you know about this robber Hei Ch'i? Let's get it straight. I want to go to sleep."

Philip Liu laughed pleasantly.

"You come to the point so easily," he said. "I sometimes forget how simple it is to be direct. My own people talk for such a long time. Yes, I shall be glad to be realistic, if you will not be shocked. My uncle is making what we may call an arrangement with Hei Ch'i, and he needs some ready money. In your own phrase, you would say he is buying out Hei Ch'i. My uncle wants Hei Ch'i's coöperation for certain business he is planning."

Rodney Jones whistled softly and nodded at Philip Liu.

"You mean there's going to be a little war?"

Philip nodded back.

"My uncle has ideas," he answered. "He is an ambitious man."

Rodney Jones lighted a cigarette. His intuition told him that Philip Liu was speaking at last of something which bordered on cold truth. Rumors of General Wu were coming back to him. In that land where anything might happen, it was not strange that another war lord should be rising. He looked at Philip Liu sitting motionless, slender, aquiline, intelligent. The first time he had seen that boy, he had been in uniform, in Nanking.

"And that's where you come in," he said gently. "Is that what you mean, Phil?"

"Yes," said Philip Liu, "I'm glad you understand."

There was no doubt any longer. Philip Liu was speaking the truth, and he fitted the part in spite of his physical slenderness.

The odd traits of his character fitted together perfectly. He had the skill and the judgment and the poise of an adventurer. He would be a rich man with his town house in Shanghai, if he should live.

"All right," said Rodney. "You might have told me earlier. It doesn't worry me at all. Now where does Mr. Newall fit in? You'd better tell me, Phil."

Philip Liu smiled back at him.

"Curiously enough, I told the truth, old man. There is Ming Yellow there. When I saw Mr. Newall, I told him the whole truth. He is the sort to whom one can tell such truths. You know the proverb—do not present your verses to any but a clever man?" He smiled and moved his hands. "There are my verses. You are a clever man—clever enough to see."

Rodney Jones was genuinely pleased with the compliment because the audacity and the skill of Philip Liu gave Philip's judgment of cleverness a definite weight.



"Thanks," he said. "I'm grateful to you for saying that. Your belief in me makes me very, very humble and just a little proud. So I understand that Mr. Newall is going to buy this collection of Ming Yellow and the money for the Ming Yellow goes to pay Hei Ch'i? Does Mr. Newall know that? Excuse me, if I'm slow."

"Not slow, not slow," Philip said, "or you would not have had my poor verses. Yes, Mr. Newall knows and he is much amused by the whole idea. He is even anxious to see my uncle and Hei Ch'i. I suppose it's a change from his environment. Everything is satisfactory because everything is simple. His Excellency, my uncle, is anxious to see Mr. Newall safely in Ho Hsien and so is Hei Ch'i. A good deal depends on that Ming Yellow. That is why my uncle has sent a special escort of soldiers. And this man here, whom you do not like," he nodded to his blank-faced companion, "this is one of Hei Ch'i's own lieutenants sent especially to see that you are all safe and to represent Hei Ch'i's interests. His name is Chin Mao Shu, the Golden-haired Rat, in English translation."

Rodney examined Chin a second time and Chin's appearance was sufficient to confirm that explanation of Philip Liu's. "He looks like a rat," said Rodney Jones, "but he hasn't got golden hair. Never mind, he gives every promise of being a golden-haired boy of depravity."

Paul Steuben moved and sighed. He had evidently understood accurately the revelations of the last few minutes. "Yellow-haired Rat!" he groaned. "Say, has the boss gone crazy?"

But Rodney Jones knew that Mr. Newall had not gone crazy. It was characteristic that he should have been intrigued by such an affair. Rodney could even sympathize, because he was intrigued himself.

Philip Liu was laughing again, his facile infectious laugh; and, seeing that every one's eyes were on him, Chin, the golden-haired rat, contorted his features into a horrible swift smile.

"For heaven's sake," said Rodney, "tell him to stop smiling, Phil!"

"Don't mind him," said Philip. "It is true, as the proverb says, that courtesy is wasted on a soldier. But Chin is really a good fellow. How do you say it—a good sport. You need not worry about him because he is a friend of mine."

Rodney Jones whistled softly. "You're wonderful, Philip," he said frankly. "You have so many interesting connections."

Philip Liu nodded in bland acknowledgment. "One needs them," he said, "if one has to make one's way these days. You are right—there is no justice in China without friends."

Rodney Jones did not answer for a moment, but sat there admiring the picture—admiring its simplicity, its audacity and balance, for it was perfect of its kind. If he had not known a little of strange Chinese adventures, he should have said it was grotesque and impossible. So it would have been anywhere else, but not there, with the wind bells ringing. There the plan of Philip's scheming was peculiarly a product of China, as definitely stamped with China's genius as one of her ivory puzzles.

"Philip," he said gently, "your uncle Wu must be a delightful man. With minds like his and yours, you two wouldn't think of pulling anything else on Mr. Newall, would you?"

Philip Liu shook his head. "I had forgotten," he remarked. "You don't trust me, do you?"

"You heard me the first time," Rodney answered. "I think you've honored me with the truth, and I'm very, very pleased at the compliment, and just a little proud, but I wouldn't trust you around the corner, Philip. How about it? Is there anything more up your sleeve?"

Philip Liu shook his head and smiled a most plausible smile. "Be rational," he replied. "If you think of every factor of the situation, you can see that my uncle could not afford to have any unpleasantness with foreigners at present. His plans will surely not admit of any difficulties with foreign legations. Mr. Newall will receive every courtesy—distinguished courtesy—and just as soon as the business is over, you will all be sent away as quickly as is reasonably possible."

The answer was plausible and logical enough nearly to set Rodney's mind at rest, until he stole another glance at the composed old-ivory mask of Philip Liu.

"And you wouldn't double-cross Uncle Wu, would you—now?" he asked softly. "That wouldn't enter a nice, clean mind like yours?"

Philip Liu's lips tightened, and he frowned as if the insinuation had actually hurt him.

"You don't understand the Chinese family," he said gently. "The Chinese family is a sacred matter. I owe my uncle very much."

"That relieves me, of course," said Rodney. He turned to Paul Steuben. "Well, what do you think about it, Paul?" he asked. "We've got the story now."

Paul Steuben removed his glance from the Golden-haired Rat's claylike face, and looked as though he were awaking from a dream. "I think it's the damndest thing I ever heard," he said soberly. "It's fantastic, and I think the boss is losing his head to get mixed up in such a racket. I'm going to tell him so."

Philip Liu's rippling voice interrupted him and Rodney was aware of a slight change in that voice.

"I'm afraid it would do no good," he said. "I'm afraid he does not value the opinion either of you or Mr. Jones."

Paul Steuben half rose from his seat. "So you've been slanging me to the boss, too, have you?" he demanded. "Why, you yellow—"

Rodney stopped him hastily. He had suddenly become aware of a fact that made his blood run slightly cool.

There was nothing much that he and Paul Steuben could do, although Philip had not mentioned it. There was an escort of General Wu's soldiers just outside. He was not sure, but he could almost be certain that there would be trouble if he should try to turn the party back, and he was not entirely sure that Philip Liu had not read his thoughts.

"Sit down, Paul," he said. "That won't do any good. Phil may have a yellow face but when it comes to nerve, he's not as yellow as I am, Paul." He always recalled that there was a certain pathos in the way Philip Liu took that compliment. His face lighted up ingenuously like a little boy's and calculation left his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, "thank you very much. That's kind of you, old man. I've always liked you. If we could only understand each other, we might be what you call pals. Really, I mean it, Mr. Jones."

And he did mean it in some inverted way.

Rodney Jones smiled at him kindly. "You've been a pal to me already, Phil," he answered. "But somehow I'll feel just a little safer when we get with your Uncle Wu. It's been very big of you and fine of you to tell us all this and I'm relieved. And now we've got about two hours to sleep before it's time to move."

Philip rose at once. "You really won't have to be worried about anything," he said. "I'll give you my word for that. Good night, Rodney. Do you mind if I call you Rodney?"

"Not a bit," said Rodney Jones. "But wait a minute—wait a minute. Tell your Blond Rat friend to go away and get some beauty rest. We've had such an interesting evening that you're going to stay right here."

Philip Liu's head moved slightly but he gave no other sign. "Here?" he said.

"Yes," said Rodney. "I'll have your bed brought in here with me and Mr. Steuben, and you're going to stay right with Mr. Steuben and me every single minute until we reach Ho Hsien. Have you ever looked at Mr. Steuben, Phil? He's a big strong man and if anything happens to us before we get to Ho Hsien, he's going to wring your neck. How about it, Paul?"

Paul Steuben grinned. It was the first time that Rodney had seen him look completely happy since they had first met

in Peking. "That's okay with me," Paul Steuben said.

Philip Liu's fingers moved. He seemed to bear no resentment, but Rodney knew that the idea of physical violence was acutely distasteful to him.

"And now," said Rodney, "tell your boy friend bye-bye and good night."

And Philip Liu sighed. "Oh, yes, of course," he said. "I suppose I'd do the same thing if I were you, Rodney. You're worried about Miss Newall. I know that." He must have done it deliberately, and it was clever of him to have done it.

As Mel Newall's name was mentioned, Rodney Jones saw Paul Steuben look at him with his blue eyes in sudden sharp focus, a curious, startled look. "Here, you," Paul Steuben said, "you leave her name out of this."

"Of course," said Philip Liu readily, "excuse me. I was only saying that neither of you have to worry, really. Everything's really perfectly all right."

"That's swell," said Rodney smoothly. "If that's so, we three will just be boys together and have lots and lots of fun. We'll have a chance to get acquainted, Phil."

"That's right," said Philip Liu. "Thank you very much, old man."

There were two hours left to sleep but Rodney Jones was wide awake through those two hours. Philip Liu lay motionless on his cot between Paul Steuben's and his own, and Rodney could hear both of them breathing. He wondered if they were awake too, but he could not tell, for neither of them spoke. He could only lie on his back, staring into the darkness, with Philip Liu's revelation revolving through his mind. Faces and names, and possibilities moved grotesquely through his thoughts. There was nothing to do except what he had done—absolutely nothing. Mel Newall and her lantern-jawed father, and the shoebrush-haired Paul Steuben and he were out there on a tide of circumstance, along with Philip Liu and General Wu and Mao Shu and Hei Ch'i. They made a pretty list of names and a pretty combination. Two weeks ago he could not have believed that such a combination was possible, but there it was. Liu, Wu, Mao Shu, and Hei Ch'i, —their names went together like a blind story-teller's chanted poem. He seemed to be moving among fantastic shapes, as foreign to his thoughts as the carvings on the temple eaves, of clouds and dragons and the phoenix in reds and blues and greens. Yet always the design of everything was perfect, though grotesque to the Western sense. He thought of jars twined with dragons, of flower-embroidered robes, of scroll landscape paintings, of mountains and rivers and pointed boats floating on streams like autumn leaves, of temples and figures working in the fields. They were in China now, in a new China, and yet in one which was infinitely old. A proverb was running through his mind, ringing like the wind bells in the Chinese temple.

*Feng ta sui feng,  
Yu ta sui yu.*

His ears were ringing with the subtleties of alliteration and the subtleties of tone.

"When the wind is strong," the words meant, "yield to the wind. If the rain be heavy, yield to the rain."

It was clear outside and the dawn was moving toward them, and the sun, but he knew they were very close to wind and rain.

## CHAPTER X

Rodney Jones might have taken Philip's word, in spite of all his subtleties, as things turned out; for Philip must have meant exactly what he said. Those next four days were pleasant days along that road winding through the mountains. Looking back on it, Rodney Jones could recall that Philip did his best to make them pleasant after that one conversation. A sense of friction had been subtly lifted and human relationships were easier. The servants moved harmoniously. There was no trouble with the soldiers and no trouble at the inns. Instead of resenting their watching him, Philip seemed to be pleased to be with them. At any rate, he possessed that social facility of his race which glides around a difficulty. Rodney Jones did not tell Mr. Newall what he had learned. Even if Mr. Newall had listened, which he doubted, he believed that Mr. Newall's stubbornness would have made the telling useless. As time went on, he was glad he had not bothered, for everything moved so easily. Strangely, without his being aware of it, the conduct of the journey seemed to slip out of his hands. They progressed as though guided by forces beyond control, and nothing happened—nothing. Like a slow train that moved on schedule, the caravan of mules moved forward up into a fertile table-land. Like a train that moved on schedule, it came in sight of Ho Hsien at six o'clock one evening, and that company of two races which had been drawn together through five days of travel was gay and pleased at the sight, and pleased with each other because they had reached their journey's end.

Mr. Newall had been unusually agreeable at lunch.

"Well, Jones," he had said, "you've done this very well. We ought to see that Yellow by night."

From the way he smiled, Mr. Newall indicated that he had heard the whole story and that he was looking forward to all the circumstances connected with the Yellow.

"Yes," Philip Liu said. "To-night, I am quite sure. The general will be so pleased"—and Mr. Newall had looked pleased himself.

"There isn't any real hurry," he said. "I like it here. I've got time enough, I think."

He was always thinking of time, as though time were a very important factor. Rodney wondered if Mr. Newall had always spent his life harassed by that thought of time.

The bells of the lead mules were ringing in a plaintive jingling as the caravan moved down a good broad road whose condition showed that they were approaching a place of importance. The muleteers had begun to sing in their falsetto voices, with the happiness of sailors coming into port. In an hour the mules would be in the stables and Liang would have given them their pay; and a night of revelry and relaxation from their toil rose before them as the gray walls of Ho Hsien rose from the horizon. There would be a fine night—women and gambling games, perhaps a pipe of opium and cups of distilled *kao-liang* that would burn their throats.

The town was just what he had thought it would be. Its walls rose from the grain fields and mud villages and over the poplar and willows along the streams, like the walls in the town in the song of Roland. If he had lived in China for a hundred years, Rodney Jones could believe that the perfection of her walled towns would still surprise him. Graves stood in the fields to the right and left of the road, simple earth mounds like beehives; some with a bit of paper money still held by a stone on top. They stood in little groups in the middle of plowed fields, as they did all over China, but no plow disturbed the spot where the ancestors were resting. Here and there marble tablets borne on the back of the grinning marble tortoise, that symbol of eternity and new life, marked the deeds of famous men who lay beneath the mounds. Some of those stones were cracked and sagging, but none of them outdated the walls of Ho Hsien. The walls stood in massive curtains of thick brown earth, carefully faced with gray brick. Successive generations had put new brick in place until the wall was like a page of history which probably went back five hundred years, a long time for China's impermanent architecture. The battlements and the curving roofs and the corner towers and triple tiered roofs of the gate towers made a tranquil picture in the sunset. They spoke of the old China, self-contained, aloof, frowning on everything that was new.

When Rodney saw the walls of Ho Hsien he felt a relief that surprised him. He had not realized the strain he'd been under until he saw Ho Hsien. The mules were moving in single file. Philip Liu was riding just ahead of him, and Paul Steuben was ahead of Philip. They had taken to mule-back instead of litters since their stay at the temple, in order that they might watch Philip better. Rodney slipped off the sacks that made his wooden saddle bearable and walked up to

Philip Liu's mule.

"Phil," he said, "you came across. I'm sorry that we troubled you. You can sleep by yourself to-night."

Philip Liu looked down from his perch and laughed. "It's been no trouble," he said. "I've enjoyed it very much. I hope so much I have behaved myself." He smiled appealingly. "I want to be a good fellow, you know, and I want you to think me one."

"Maybe I will," said Rodney. "You've been a good sport, Philip."

Philip Liu smiled like a small boy. "Thank you very much," he said. "That is the greatest Western compliment I know."

Rodney looked down the road toward the town walls of Ho Hsien. There were rows of low brick buildings between them and the town, and a great square field of trampled earth.

"Barracks, eh?" he said.

"Yes," said Philip, "the eastern barracks of my uncle's army."

Rodney looked at the barracks with the eye of an observer who had been through one small war and who understood something of Chinese troops. He noticed that there was mountain artillery and machine-gun equipment.

"It looks like war, all right," he said.

"The troops aren't bad, really," said Philip, "and there are some excellent officers with European education."

Rodney was still staring at the barracks. "How did you get all the machine guns here?" he asked.

"From the South," said Philip. "My uncle borrowed them. You will like my uncle. He is a very pleasant man."

"So some one else is in this too?" said Rodney. The relationship between Chinese generals always amazed him.

"That would be telling too much," said Philip frankly. "That is my uncle's secret, of course. You will like my uncle. He is a very nice man. Look"—he was pointing down the road—"there is some cavalry. I think it is one of the general's officers coming out to meet us."

"You'd better take one of the soldiers' horses and ride out to them," said Rodney. "You're all right with me, Philip, as long as we're safe here."

He stood by the side of the road, waiting for the mule litters to pass. Now that they had reached Ho Hsien without trouble, the whole situation began to amuse him. He did not blame Mr. Newall for being diverted. They were going to see an odd cross section of life, a war lord in his camp, and not every one had such an opportunity.

As Mel Newall's litter went by, he waved his hand to her and she leaned out.

"Would you like to get out and walk?" asked Rodney. "We're almost in by now."

"Thank you," said Mel Newall. "That is very thoughtful of you. If you'll just tell the mules to stop a moment." Then she held out her hands to him and jumped down beside him. "This is such an unusual attention," she said. "You might have suggested it before."

"I'm sorry," said Rodney. "I've been busy."

"I know," she said. "You're always busy. Nobody seems to have had any time for me."

"Well," said Rodney, "you've never had any time for me, anyway."

"I might have," she answered, "I might have spared a little. Do you think I can get a bath inside that wall?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "you can have tubs of hot water. You need it. You've got grime all over your face."

"It's nothing to the way you look," she said.

Rodney smiled, happy to be walking there with her on the edge of the road.

She looked at him thoughtfully. "And you look tired," she said. "Something's been worrying you all the time."

"Me?" said Rodney. "What makes you think so?"

She looked at him soberly and shrugged her shoulders. "Your features," she said, "they're easy to read. You wouldn't wrinkle up your face like that if you weren't worried. It's been wrinkled all the time."

"Thanks," said Rodney, "premature old age."

She gave her head a quick exasperated shake. "You won't ever be serious, will you?" she said.

"No," said Rodney, "not with you, again. I was once, and once is enough for me."

"When?" she asked.

"You know when," said Rodney. "At my house in Peking. Once is enough."

"Is it?" she asked. She did not smile and neither did he.

"Yes," he answered, "for me it is."

"You didn't behave very nicely," she reminded him. "It wasn't because you tried to kiss me. You understand that, don't you?"

"Absolutely," Rodney answered. "I've turned the whole matter over in my mind; I've given it a good deal of earnest thought, if I may say so. I'm afraid I was rather overimpressed by your saying that I disturbed you, and I misinterpreted your meaning. Besides, I never thought I'd see you again, and it rather— But never mind."

She looked straight ahead of her and did not answer for a while.

"There isn't anything to mind about, I suppose," she said.

"No," said Rodney. "I should forget it, if I were you. I have, practically."

She looked at him. She seemed to be asking him an unspoken question, but he could not tell what it was.

"I haven't, altogether," she said abruptly. "I've thought of it a good deal, and I've had plenty of time to think lately. There haven't been many things in my life to upset me—quite naturally, I suppose. I used to think that I'd welcome some sort of—adventure—along the lines of the one that nearly happened that night. And when it came, I didn't like it."

"No," Rodney agreed emphatically. "You certainly gave none of the appearances of liking it."

"It did me good, though," she continued, looking at him steadily. "It made me see what I really wanted, I suppose—peace, steadiness—"

She stopped with her glance still on him, and then she looked away.

"And Steuben," Rodney added, looking down the road.

She looked at him soberly.

"I think you're right," she said, "and I'm very glad to know."

He was there, walking steadily beside her, but he did not seem to be walking. Nothing seemed to matter but the dull weight of that last remark. He sought for an adequate and graceful reply, and instead he was ridiculous. He knew he was ridiculous.

"Then what are you talking to me for now?" he found himself asking.

"I wish I knew," she said to him simply. "I'd like very much to know."

"Possibly," said Rodney, and he found himself assuming a sarcastic calm, but it did not conceal his feelings, "I can help you find out. You've always had everything, and you want everything. For once in your life you're not going to get everything, and you'd better get used to the idea."

He hoped she would be angry and he was pleased to find she was. She turned her head toward him and her lips curled up and her eyes were dark.

"You know everything, don't you?" she demanded. "You always do, don't you."

"Yes," said Rodney, and his anger met hers on an equal plane, "and I can give you some more advice, if you'd like to hear it. Suppose you just get your mind off yourself for a little while, if you can find it possible. There are some other rather cogent things to think about. Here we are in the middle of nowhere, for instance, and your father's a very rich man, and all the boys here know it. He's a walking gold mine, and there isn't much justice here in China—not for gold mines. I tried to stop him coming, and now there's nothing to do but hope that everybody will be very nice. Have you ever thought of that?"

"I know," she said, and her annoyance had left her. "I tried to stop him, too, but you can't stop him when he gets started. He keeps saying he hasn't got much time, and I don't know what he means by that. Do you think he's looking well?"

"He looks well enough to me," said Rodney, "but then, I don't know. I'm just another paid employe. He's never been human with me once, except that first day when I talked to him about porcelain."

"Well," she said, "you haven't been so nice to him, have you?"

"No," said Rodney, "he annoyed me. I'm not nice when I'm annoyed."

"Do I annoy you too?" she asked.

"Yes," said Rodney, "every minute, beautiful, and particularly a minute or two ago."

"Will you promise me something?" she asked.

Rodney sighed. "I'm just that sort of a fool," he said, "that I'd say yes to anything at all, in spite of anything you do."

"Then promise me—" and she was speaking as though they were friends,— "promise me if anything happens—anything you think is really bad—that you'll tell me. Will you please? I won't faint or scream or anything."

"I know you won't," Rodney said. "But I thought you craved tranquillity. Is there anything on your mind?"

"No," she said, "nothing, except that I have a feeling there's something all around us. It's been with me every day. It's uneasy, like indigestion. It isn't a thought but a feeling that something's going to happen. Something that isn't right."

Rodney looked at her, and his sense of hurt had gone out of him and he nodded soberly. "You have intuition, beautiful," he said.

Then she reached and touched his arm. Her fingers closed tight on his cotton shirt. "Promise me," she said quickly, "Here comes Philip Liu."

"Yes; you know it," Rodney sighed. "Anything you say."

Philip Liu was riding toward them on a shaggy soldier's pony and he sat the saddle very well. A young officer with a sword and a visor cap was riding beside him, who smiled and saluted. "This is Lieutenant Shu," said Philip, "from His Excellency's staff."

Lieutenant Shu slid out of his saddle and saluted a second time. He was a handsome sight in a gray field uniform with a Sam Brown belt and a jingling saber. He had the studied, slightly self-conscious appearance characteristic of certain Chinese officers, as though he looked at himself for a long time in the mirror and had finally convinced himself by mesmerism that he had been to war.

"The general's compliments," he said in good English, "and he hopes so much that you have had a comfortable and pleasant journey. He asks if you and Mr. Newall will honor him by dining with him to-night. Everything has been fixed for you comfortably at the best hotel. The general is sorry that he cannot entertain you in his own quarters. May I tell him that you will honor him to-night?"

"Thanks," said Rodney, and he looked at Mel Newall. "His Excellency is too kind. I am embarrassed to trouble His Excellency, but there are two more in the party."

Philip Liu spoke quickly, with embarrassment.

"The general—" he began and stopped. "I do not believe that Miss Newall would enjoy exactly the sort of dinner which General Wu is giving. I thought perhaps Mr. Steuben might stay and keep her company. I'm sure he will not mind."

"Thank you, Philip," said Rodney. "I'm sure he won't." And he smiled at the general's aide. "Please thank the general very much," he said. "There is a proverb in your language, 'In times of trouble attach yourself to a good general'." Rodney laughed. "I'm attached to him already."

"Ha-ha!" said the aide. "Thank you very much. That is very good."

And Philip Liu laughed also. "Mr. Jones is capital," he said. "We shall have a capital time to-night."

The words had a strange ring to them which made Rodney Jones glance up, to find that the great wall of Ho Hsien was frowning just above him. The gate and the inner defense were opening before them like dark jaws, and the hum and noise of the town was coming through them. That officer and the foreign speech, and all the imported frills of European armies—his saber, his German Luger pistol in its leather case, and the machine guns beyond the wall—all seemed superfluous and out of place. China was coming again to meet them like a wave. It was covering them all with ageless, patient sound.

The caravan went through the second gate without a question from the sentries into the broad central street which stretched straight through the town to the farther wall. Lanes might move off on either side in twisting irregularity, but the central street was broad enough. Rodney Jones looked to the right and left with that interest which he always took in a new place, already classifying the sights he saw. Ho Hsien was evidently a prosperous county seat which was closer to a city than a town, one that must have housed its own magistrate under the old empire. It must have been a converging center for trade moving north and south along China's old routes of travel, before the railroad lines had shifted the current of trade. But Chinese custom was hard to change. There was still an air of prosperity about the shops on the main street, even if their signs and carvings were growing dingy. The shop banners were out, so that they were walking under an arch of flags, and all the life of the street was moving as it was at this day and minute in thousands of similar Chinese towns. The shopkeepers' birds were hanging outside, chirping and trilling through the bars of their cages; and the merchants were standing in their stalls by the streets, while country people stared at their wares. There were brass and rough china for sale. A coppersmith and his helpers were beating out bowls and pots. There was a stall occupied by a maker of flints and steel. There was a crowd around a clothes vender, who was lifting up his pile of garments one by one, displaying them for an instant, and laying them aside, while he chanted out their prices and their merits in the



conventional clothiers' song. The sweetmeat vender was beating his small brass gong. A charcoal retailer was waving his large rattle. The fan-repair man, for the weather was growing warm, was shaking his strings of bells. All the sounds were so conventional that a blind man on that street could have told exactly what was happening. The repairer of glazed paper umbrellas was shouting out his call "*Shih to yu san oh.*" Nevertheless, in spite of the familiarity, Rodney could detect a strained note, and the faces on the street were sullen and afraid. It was not difficult to tell that the mailed hand of war was squeezing all those people and draining the life from the country outside, for the phenomenon was common enough in almost any place where troops were quartered. Ho Hsien was facing what good people prayed their gods to avert—a calamity of soldiers.

General Wu had undoubtedly extracted a heavy cash levy for the privilege of his appearance, particularly if he were preparing for greater things. He had probably called together the heads of the commercial guilds and had squeezed them to the limit, with a veiled threat of looting; and, with that peculiar Chinese sense of the exact limit of human endurance, he would squeeze Ho Hsien again, just before he left it for greener pastures. "Squeeze" was the proper word for that quiet rapaciousness of China, and Ho Hsien was being squeezed until it was as sad as an orange with its juice half gone. One look at the town was enough to show Rodney that General Wu was both a serious and an able man.

The inn must have been a fine place once, but now it had a sense of watchfulness that verged on terror. The innkeeper and his boys had none of the cheerful anticipation of gain which one might have expected in normal times. Instead, the man and his helpers led them with a weary resignation into a small private courtyard backed by a veranda and a row of good large rooms.

"Everything has been done to make them clean," the man said. "There will be hot water—anything you ask for. Anything."

"Thank you," said Rodney. "Your business, I hope, is good."

"There is no business with soldiers," the man said. "Soldiers are a calamity."

As he spoke, the general's aide came up and the man grew pale.

"Everything I hope is all right," Lieutenant Shu said. "The general has given special orders. If you will be ready at six o'clock, there will be chairs to convey you to the general's house, and the general said," his voice dropped a note, "you may see the porcelain if you are not too tired, this evening."

The boys were bringing in the bags and placing them in the rows of rooms which opened on the court. Liang came and stood beside him.

"Too many soldiers," said Liang. "The general is a hard man. He has taxed the farmers ten years' ground rent in ten months."

This did not seem overexcessive, when one considered that there were districts where the land taxes had been collected sixty years ahead.

"Mr. Newall will go there," said Rodney, "and Miss Newall in the room beside him. Mr. Steuben will be on one side of them and I will be on the other. Then I want Mr. Liu next to me and you next to him. I shall want you here, Liang, and have dinner for Mr. Steuben and Miss Newall."

"Yes," said Liang, "I know. You and the old stranger and Mr. Liu will have dinner with the general." Liang folded his arms in his black sleeves. "Be careful, master," Liang said softly.

"Have you heard anything?" Rodney asked him.

"I have heard talk," Liang said softly, "and nothing that is very good. Liu Hei Ch'i is here. Be careful, Master."

"Very well," said Rodney; "there is nothing we can do about it."

"Your clothes have been laid out," said Liang. "There is a tub of water for you."

"Jones," Mr. Newall was calling, "come in here for a minute!" Mr. Newall was in his quarters, a box of a room with white paper windows. His clothes were unpacked and laid neatly on the *kang*, and his camp bed was already set up. He looked drawn and tired, but he was very cheerful.

"Well, this is like the Middle Ages, Jones," he said, "and this ought to be a very interesting evening. I never thought I'd have an opportunity to see a thing like this. I never thought I'd have the time."

"I hope you'll please stay near me," Rodney said. "Don't be shocked by anything you see to-night."

Mr. Newall laughed his silent laugh. "Still being my nurse, aren't you, Jones?" he said. "Don't worry. I won't be shocked. I haven't got the time. Look!" He pointed to a low table on the *kang* where a small blue-and-white jar was standing. "The general sent me that with his compliments. A pretty piece, isn't it?"

Rodney picked up the jar and turned it carefully in his hands and examined the mark on the bottom—and then he whistled.

"The general must expect a lot of you," he remarked. "That's a very good piece of Ming. Have you noticed that the fire was too hot? It's good blue, but the color's just begun to run and fade."

"That's your theory, is it?" said Mr. Newall.

"If you want to call it a theory," said Rodney. "Not enough heat, and the blue is muddy. Too much it fades and runs into the white. But this is very good. It's a deep fine blue. Do you know how they got that depth in Ming?"

"How do you think?" Mr. Newall asked.

"There is a theory that they put on white glaze first and then fired it," Rodney Jones replied, "and then the blue and white and fired it, instead of firing all the glazes at once. This is only a theory. None of the European experts advance it, but I've heard it in Peking."

Mr. Newall looked at him, interested. "How do you make that out?" he asked.

"By examining fragments," Rodney Jones replied. "It is said that one can see the strata, and the blue has never sunk into the biscuit."

"I've never heard exactly that." Mr. Newall seemed impressed. "Well, I'll be ready in twenty minutes. And Jones—" Mr. Newall passed a lean hand over his bony jaw—"I'm sorry I've been brusque with you. It's just my way. Maybe I was a fool to come on this trip. It was a matter of time. And if anything goes wrong it's my fault, not yours. Don't worry, Jones."

It was a strange ending to that conversation, from its beginnings in the intricacies of Ming porcelain. Something must have happened to make Mr. Newall speak so, and Rodney wondered what it was. "Has there been anything to make you uneasy, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Newall passed his hand over his bony chin again, and Rodney remembered that the greater part of Mr. Newall's life had been passed struggling with the tides of chance.

"No, nothing," he answered, "but that doesn't make any difference. I don't like it when there's nothing. I've lived by following hunches, Jones, and luck isn't running right. I cut myself shaving this morning. Look!" He pointed to a scratch on his wrinkled sallow cheek. "And that's not all. That fool servant of mine left my hat on my bed. Yes, right there on my bed! Never leave a hat on your bed, Jones. But if anything happens, it's not your fault. All right, I'll see you in twenty minutes."

And Rodney Jones left him with his hands in his pockets, looking at the blue-and-white Ming jar.

It was an amazing revelation, when he came to think of it, that Mr. Newall should be disturbed because a hat should have been tossed inadvertently on his bed, but there was more to the premonition than that. It indicated in a way the sensitive perception of a man who had lived accurately by chance. Even in that strange country, in the midst of unfamiliar sights, Edwin Newall had known vaguely, just as his daughter had known, that something was not right.

It was dark when they reached the general's house, three men in white European clothes. The house was half a mile away behind dingy gray walls which concealed its size and richness from any casual taxgatherer or thief. It was a large place such as might have belonged once to some rich merchant or official. Even from the dark street Rodney Jones could see that the main building was two stories high—an unusual, spectacular thing for that part of China. Two sentries with fixed bayonets were standing by the open red gate in that dirty wall, but once they were inside, the atmosphere changed into gaiety. No one in the world could be as adroit and as efficient as a Chinese host who wished to do one honor. A double row of great round lanterns bearing the name of General Wu in Chinese characters made a path across the court in soft yellow dots of light like glow-worms in huge cages. More lanterns hung from trees, and there were lanterns at the door of the two-story building.

They were not halfway across the court before a house door was opened and a huge man in gray field uniform stepped quickly out to meet them. A gold *fourragère* across his chest and a twinkling row of medals showed beyond a doubt that he was General Wu. Before he had reached them, Philip moved forward hastily with his hands stretched out in a Chinese gesture of respect, and Rodney thought for a moment that Philip was going to kneel upon the pavement. But the general clapped his nephew on the shoulder and broke into a booming laugh.

"Hello," he called, "I am so velly glad to see you. I do not speak English so damn good, but never mind. Never mind the ceremony to-night. I am Mr. Wu to-night.... Mr. Newall, good night.... Good night, Mr. Jones." He broke into a booming laugh again. "Ha-ha!" he shouted, "You see I do not speak English so damn good!" And he held out a large fleshy hand which was minus its middle finger. There was no doubt in Rodney's mind that General Wu was a very able man. He must have been completely sure of his position to have dispensed with all ceremony, but he may have been aware that his size was ceremony enough. He stood well over six feet and had the muscular build of a North China farmer and the bony North China face. The flesh of prosperity which had been creeping gradually over his muscles increased his portentousness with each new fatty wrinkle. His dark eyes glowed genially in the candlelight as his lips curled into something between a grin and a smile. He had the face of a man of action, but his eyes were shrewd. When he saw it, Rodney recalled the face. He had seen it once staring out at him from the pages of the China Who's Who, published in Shanghai, a determined expressive face among those other masks of faces. His nephew, Philip, looked like a schoolboy beside him, a rapier beside a bludgeon.

After shaking hands, General Wu laughed again and patted Mr. Newall affectionately. Then he shouted in Chinese:

"Music, you sons of turtles! Do you hear me? Music!"

The general had already been drinking heavily, but he held the liquor well and he knew how to command obedience. Before he had finished shouting, a military band from a dark corner of the courtyard burst into a panic of sound which drowned out words. It was playing The Star Spangled Banner. The American national anthem rose through wind instruments in a tortured roar into the dark sky above the tiled roofs, uncomfortably and unconvincingly. Three officers who had appeared behind the general came to a startled halt, and General Wu bellowed at them above the blare of music.

"Salute! Do you want these foreigners to put us to shame by laughing?" And then the music died into a brazen sigh.

"Thank you, general," said Mr. Newall, and he looked up curiously at the general's face. There was a long scar along the general's cheek which made his left eye pucker into an unintentionally humorous wink. "Thank you very much."

Swaying slightly on the heels of shining riding boots, General Wu looked dubiously at Rodney Jones. "Did they play that good?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rodney, "Excellently." He spoke in Mandarin. "We are deeply grateful for your thought of our poor country."

The general rubbed his hands together. "It is well for them they played it well," he said. "And now we will come inside. Your Excellent Great Man must be thirsty after his journey." And both his eyes puckered into tiny slits as he beamed on Mr. Newall kindly. With his left arm hooked in Rodney's arm and his right through Mr. Newall's, he led them into a formal reception room where stiff-backed teakwood chairs and lacquer tables stood facing each other in an uncompromising row. Glass candle lanterns were hanging from the ceiling and the whole room glowed with candles in a rich soft light. There were vases and jades on tables along the wall, and six large landscape paintings showing scenes of ancient court and temple life that went strangely with the general's laugh. One glance at the crystals and the jades and pictures was enough to show that the room held a small fortune. The display was pretentious, vulgar and probably intentional, but no yellow porcelain was on display.

## CHAPTER XI

There was a single guest waiting in the candle-light, who stood up as they came in. A thin man in a purple brocade robe was standing motionless nearly in the center of the room, examining them intently. His features were sharp and restless; his front teeth jutted unevenly over his lower lip and there were deep pock marks on his cheeks. He had placed his hands together and was bowing as General Wu waved a heavy hand toward him.

"This is Mr. Liu Hei Ch'i," he said in English. "He dines with us to-night."

But Rodney had guessed already that he was the bandit chief Hei Ch'i.

The man in the purple robe did not move, but his eyes turned slowly, first to Mr. Newall and then to Rodney Jones, and finally to Philip Liu. Rodney Jones was never sure, but he thought that those last two exchanged a meaning glance. He had an opportunity to observe it because the presence of that thin man with the rodent teeth did not make for conviviality. For a second or so he seemed to still even the convivial impulses of General Wu.

"This Humble One is deeply honored," said Rodney Jones, and the coolly insolent eyes of Hei Ch'i turned back to him without a European exterior to cloud his Chinese manners.

"I dare not," he said in Mandarin and his words slid whispering through his protruding teeth—"I dare not accept the compliment."

Rodney bowed and Hei Ch'i bowed, and then General Wu spoke in his native tongue. "My humble place is very poor looking," he said. "I hope so much you will not laugh at it. Please sit down."

Rodney Jones and Hei Ch'i sat down side by side. Two servants had appeared with glasses of cocktails, warm for lack of ice. Rodney took one and Hei Ch'i took one and they looked at each other over the glasses. "I feel very greatly honored," said Rodney.

"The feeling is mutual," said Hei Ch'i in his whistling voice.

"Are you busy these days?" Rodney asked.

Hei Ch'i took a sip from his glass and answered sibilantly, "Only on routine matters."

The general raised his glass to him. "*Gambei*," he shouted jovially.

"What does he say?" Mr. Newall asked.

"He says, 'Bottoms up,'" said Rodney. "The general is very hospitable." Rodney finished his glass and reached for another, although he was aware that the hospitality of General Wu would confine itself to an effort to drink him under the table. Philip Liu was talking to Mr. Newall solicitously, while the general listened. The three officers sat remotely in the

chairs opposite, and Hei Ch'i pushed a glass toward Rodney and grinned—a polite murderer, who had sacked a dozen towns.

"*Gambei!*" he said, and they both finished their glasses.

It would be hard to have placed a stranger collection of men together in one room. First there was Edwin Newall, who had been called a legal bandit and a lone wolf of Wall Street in the papers back at home, and then there was Philip Liu, pliable and adroit. Rodney Jones could almost believe that Philip was the adroitest of them all, watching every change of feature through his protruding eyes. Then there was General Wu, a rascal and a rake, whose type was universal, for any nation could have produced a General Wu, a man with the strength of a bull, and physical courage and shrewdness, and the ability to make other men behave. Hei Ch'i was more the product of his country. Rodney could feel his contemptuous alertness. Like Philip Liu, Hei Ch'i was watching everything, and Rodney could understand his anxiety.

"I have heard much about you," Rodney said.

"I fear that what you've heard has made you die of laughter," Hei Ch'i replied. "I have done so very little. I am a very humble man."

Rodney Jones nodded. "I have seen your officer, the Golden-haired Rat," he said. "Such a pleasant soldier." Hei Ch'i and he exchanged a glance.

"Yes," he answered, "tolerable."

Then Rodney made another remark deliberately. "I am surprised to see Your Excellency here," he said. "Your health must be very good."

Hei Ch'i understood him and he smiled again. "Yes, my health is good," he said. "General Wu and I have sworn brotherhood. Thus you comprehend that we can do each other no violence."

"You are very wise, master," said Rodney pleasantly.

Hei Ch'i's eyes moved deliberately about the room and finally rested on Mr. Newall. "Yes," he said. "Adversity makes one wise. So there is the very rich man from the Excellent Country?" His glance turned back to Rodney, cool and probing. "Is he so very rich?"

Rodney laughed. "You'd like to have him out in the hills, would you not?" he said.

Hei Ch'i nodded soberly. "Yes," he answered, "very much indeed. I am in great need of money."

"And that's why you're here, Excellency," suggested Rodney.

Hei Ch'i placed a pair of yellow clawlike hands upon his knees. "Yes," he answered, "exactly why I'm here. I am much in need of money. I think I may find it now."

Two servants had appeared, bowing, and the general rose. "Dinner!" he shouted. "A no-good dinner. Ha-ha! I am so sorry." They walked out a door to the right into another courtyard lighted by marble lanterns.

There was a rock garden at the end of it, one of those curious products of Chinese landscape art, of oddly shaped stones piled high in combinations that resembled the mountains and valleys of the world outside. Perhaps twelve feet up above the rock garden was a terrace reached by broad stone steps, where a table was laid beneath two ginkgo trees decorated with lanterns hanging from the branches.

Mr. Newall moved toward Rodney's side as they walked across the court. "Did you see that room?" he said. "It's a treasure house."

"Yes," said Rodney. "No doubt you'll bring some home."

"Where's the Ming Yellow?" Mr. Newall asked. "There wasn't any there."

Rodney edged closer and tried to speak casually, but at the moment it was hard to be casual, when his mind was still full of the objects he had seen in the first room they had entered.

"If you want my advice, don't be impatient," he said. "A bargain is the breath of life to a Chinese. He'll have your pieces on display after dinner, never fear. And one thing more—look them over when you see them, but don't talk price. It will be better to do your bargaining to-morrow. There's not much doubt that he has that Yellow, because you're right about that room. It's a treasure house. Our general has got his hands on some cache of Imperial treasure. The trouble is, he can't dispose of them so easily, and he wants some money quick."

"He'll get it," Mr. Newall was speaking almost reverently. "Why, this is a killing. It's the chance of a lifetime, Jones—and I said my luck was running out."

The loudness of Mr. Newall's reply made Rodney apprehensive.

"Not too loud—not too anxious," he said softly. "We'll have our chance to look."

Then he turned to see if they had been overheard, and saw Philip and the purple-robed bandit walking sedately side by side a yard or two behind them, talking in low voices like old friends. Any one should have known that all sorts of forces were moving, but Mr. Newall seemed oblivious, and more at home in that environment than Rodney Jones. As they sat down about the table, the band in the outer court burst forth again, playing the "Merry Widow Waltz", and fruit was set before them.

"Bring in the girls," the general shouted to the servants, and he beamed at Rodney. "You like a girl—what? And the Great One is not too old." The service was perfect in General Wu's ménage. Before his bellow had subsided, seven girls appeared from a building on the right—slim flowery creatures in tightly fitting gowns slit high up each side. Their cheeks were painted pink and white; their lips carmined beneath black crowns of beautifully plaited hair. They came forward in little mincing steps, with their musicians behind them carrying stringed instruments, and one of them began to sing in a high quavering voice which set Rodney's nerves on edge.

Time turned into courses of variegated foods; heaps of dishes were succeeding other heaps. After the fruit came preserves of walnuts, almonds, fruit jelly, cherries and crab apples with stems. The meal was moving forward in an orderly routine, with hot yellow rice wine in small cups that never could stay empty. The meat dishes came on, to the tune of high singing. Cold ham, cold sliced chicken with cucumbers, preserved eggs and smoked fish. By the time the principal dishes had appeared, voices were growing louder, and General Wu kept toasting Rodney and the table in the small cups of wine. Rodney noticed that Hei Ch'i drank his wine abstemiously and now and then exchanged a quick remark with Philip Liu. After the cold meats came sharks' fins with chicken slices underneath, bird's-nest soup and roast duck with pancakes, white mushroom soup, sweet and sour sauced fish, lotus-seed soup, fried duck livers, potato pie and bamboo soup, small meat dumplings and finally rice with cream-of-cabbage soup. The general raised his voice above the shrieking of the music. "There is very little food," he said.

"There's enough for me," Mr. Newall shouted.

"The food is very bad," the general said. "The cook will hear of this to-morrow. Where is the champagne?"

Rodney wondered what the history had been of the champagne bottles which appeared bearing a good French label, for they had traveled a long distance over devious paths to grace that peculiar feast, and it seemed to him that the champagne was the final touch of wildness and vulgarity. The girl behind him was shrieking a song in his ear and the general was raising his glass. General Wu was drunk at last—too drunk, Rodney believed, to hold his tongue.

"Here is to our Excellent Guest," he said in Chinese. "The Excellent Man who has come to buy the porcelain which I was so fortunate to come on by accident; the Excellent Man who is going to make all things possible. I am so glad he has come."

"He's drinking to you," Rodney called across the table to Mr. Newall. "Hold out your glass."

"*Gambe!*" the general shouted.

"Ask him where that Yellow is?" said Mr. Newall. "I'd like to see it to-night."

"No, no," said Rodney. "Don't worry. It will come."

The general had sat down again and he turned to Rodney Jones, sedate, but bleary eyed. "You're comfortable?" he said. "You've had enough of this wretched food?"

"This Humble One is very grateful for the princely hospitality," Rodney said. "I have seen your soldiers. They are very good."

The general laughed and sipped champagne. "Yes, very good," he answered. "Sometime soon you may hear something. I shall be out of this wretched town before the rains. I shall be marching on the railroad." He stopped himself abruptly. "But I talk too much. I am not a cautious man. I may talk too much, but I am sorry for any one who makes use of my talk. Very, very sorry!"

"I should be too," said Rodney.

"And I am a simple man," the general said, "vulgar and without education. You have heard me speak English. I learnt it as a cook's boy in Tientsin. There I was a coolie on the docks before the soldiers took me." The girl behind him was singing more closely in his ear, and Rodney raised his voice.

"You have succeeded very well," he shouted.

General Wu's scar was a pinkish red on the yellow bronze of his face. His eye had puckered almost to a slit and his forehead was growing moist. "Yes," he shouted back, "I have succeeded very well. How I ask you? How?"

"I could not say," Rodney answered. "Perhaps you would care to enlighten me."

The general smashed his fist down upon the table and the glasses rattled. "By this hand," he said—"that is how. Because I have not been afraid. You understand me, I hope."

"Yes," said Rodney, "I understand you very well. You are a very great man."

"I did not say I was a great man," said General Wu. "But I will have a large name. I am strong as a tiger. They will hear more of me before I am finished."

"I'm sure they will," said Rodney.

"What did you say?" the general shouted.

The whole affair was growing mad. The singsong girl was shrieking close to Rodney's ear again and the wine was buzzing in his head.

"I said you were a great man, General Wu," he answered. "You did not hear me because that girl makes so much noise."

General Wu turned his head heavily. "What girl?" he asked.

"The pretty little flower who stands behind my chair," said Rodney.

"She bothers you?" the general asked. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"It is no trouble," Rodney answered, "but it is hard to hear you on account of her singing."

The general rose and his chair crashed on the pavement and he turned toward the girl, who was still singing. She

was light and pretty, with dark, dancing eyes. Her voice broke into a scream, for General Wu had bent and seized her by the waist and knee and had raised her high above his head. He was speaking the truth when he said that he was strong. He raised her above his head and threw her clear across the table into the pointed rock garden in the lower court. "I'm very sorry," he said to Rodney Jones. "There, she will not trouble you any more I think." There was a silence, but only for a moment. The servants were picking up the general's chair and sweeping up the fragments of his broken glass while words stopped at the table for a moment.

Hei Ch'i grinned slightly and glanced toward the rock garden with the cool professional interest which a doctor might take in an emergency operation. For the first time Rodney had known him, Mr. Newall looked shocked. The sight had brought him bolt upright and his face was as white as paper. "Jones," he stammered, "Jones—"

Philip Liu rose hastily and moved toward his uncle placatingly, stretching out a delicate hand. He seemed embarrassed rather than shocked.

"Revered old one," he said in that rippling voice, "Revered old father—you forget. Foreigners are here."

Swaying slightly, General Wu turned to consider his nephew, and exhaled a great breath like a porpoise coming up for air.

"You sleazy, squeamish good-for-nothing!" he roared. "You're half a foreigner yourself, you educated monkey, with your audacity to rebuke me in the face of guests! I can teach manners to my sister's worthless son. Take that, you insult to the tablets of your ancestors."

The general was certainly very drunk to have done what he did then. He raised his four-fingered hand palm open and brought it like a flail against the side of Philip's face. Philip Liu staggered, tripped over a chair and fell, and General Wu sat down composedly, drawing deep strong breaths.

Too fascinated to look away, Rodney sat staring at the white, prostrate form of Philip Liu, knowing that the second act of General Wu's was more serious than the first, though the blow had not been hard. Philip Liu was on his knees in a few seconds, and pulling himself to his feet, while the servants looked on, motionless. Even in that instant—probably the worst that he would ever know—that Chinese had form. He was pulling out a spotless handkerchief and passing it softly across his face, but his expression was unforgettable. It revealed humiliation and the very dregs of shame. It had not been the actual blow, Rodney knew well enough. If the blow had been delivered in private, it would have been a small matter in a society which was governed by the rigid etiquette of family. Instead, it had been administered before servants and strangers, and, worst of all, before foreigners. It was not the physical blow, but the blow to pride. It was the loss of face. Compared to that loss, the death or the maiming of a girl was only careless play. Philip Liu had lost face, as he understood well enough. He must have been thinking then that the tale would be whispered in every barracks and every street in Ho Hsien. He would have been glad to have died, but even then he was struggling desperately to regain that loss of face. He held his hands before him and bowed to General Wu.

"This worthless one thanks his excellent relative," he said. "This worthless one was very wrong."

"That is well," said General Wu. "Tell the musicians to play more music and carry that girl away."

The servants were setting the table to rights. Two of them were carrying the girl to a building across the court.

"At any rate," the general said, "she was no good, that one." He spoke to Hei Ch'i across the table. "You did not like her, did you?"

Hei Ch'i, who had been staring thoughtfully at Philip Liu, moved his eyes.

"No, she was no good," he said, and smiled; "at any rate, I should not buy her now."

Rodney Jones picked up his champagne glass, but his hand was shaking.

"Sit down, Mr. Newall," he said sharply. "We haven't finished yet,"—and he raised his glass to General Wu.



Perhaps the general realized already that his actions had been unfortunate. "Thank you, General," Rodney ended. "I'm sure the girl won't disturb me any more."

General Wu laughed heartily and slapped him on the back. "You see," he said, "I am very strong. But now, if you are ready to see my porcelains—I hope you will not laugh too much when you see them."

"The general is too kind," Rodney answered. "May I ask where the great one got them?"

General Wu leaned his hands on the table and pushed himself slowly out of his chair. His eyes were puckered shrewdly.

"I came upon them by chance," he explained. "Their owner did not care for them."

It would have been difficult not to have noticed the implication, now that one had dined with General Wu. Rodney rose, also, and took Mr. Newall's arm.

"We're seeing the porcelains now," he said, and added beneath his breath. "Take it easily. Remember what I said. Don't notice anything."

Then he stopped, because he saw that Hei Ch'i had favored them with a thoughtful, hungry look, though he had been dining very well. The general was leading the way down the steps and back to the reception room. Two servants were standing by the doors.

"There they are," the general said, and added a second time, "I hope you will not laugh,"—but no one would have laughed.

A table in the center of the room was covered with yellow ware which glowed beneath the flames of the candles like the sun and gold and earth mixed together in a single color. Rodney Jones heard Mr. Newall draw his breath and exhale it in a sigh, as he stood looking at the table. An individual piece might be acquired, but not such an unbelievable collection as he saw. There were nine pieces of yellow glazed porcelain, four of them in pairs with a yellow urn in the center, arranged as they might have stood once on an altar of the imperial dead—jars, bowls and plates, to hold an emperor's offerings to his ancestors. Their yellow was the Ming monochrome, distinctive of its period, giving its own vitality to the pieces which stood there chastely, speaking mutely of the greatness of another age.

They made a strange ending to that evening, for there was a scornful, serene rebuke in the beauty of that yellow. It was like a spirit which had risen from its tomb to speak of order and of peace and to chide the parvenus who stood around the table. The poetry of China was in that yellow, and the wisdom of Confucius and the five relations. It reflected a spirit which was indestructible. A dynasty had crashed around it while it had lain hidden and now it had appeared again in the convulsions of another age. Those men standing about the table had nothing to do with the true China. That was something which they could not check or even touch. The yellow lay deep in the country. There would be other artists, other poets, other scholars, working while the generals drank their wine....

Thoughts were running dreamlike through Rodney's mind as he stood there looking. He had forgotten where he was until he heard Mr. Newall speak. General Wu was watching, not the porcelain, but Mr. Newall. Hei Ch'i's eyes were fixed on Mr. Newall with the wistful ardor of a dog watching his plate of food. Mr. Newall had reached for a bowl on the table and he was holding it up, examining the mark.

"Jones," he said slowly, "it's Suen-tê. Gad! I wonder ... what will Rose say?"

In spite of all that had happened, Mr. Newall's acquisitive instinct was speaking. He was thinking that there was no other such set of pieces in the world and thinking of his triumph over a rival collector, but his instincts of a trader asserted themselves at once. He set down the bowl, addressing General Wu.

"I must see these by daylight," he said. "Tell him, will you, Jones?"

The general's voice rang out in a trustful, easy response:

"I am only pleased that they have found favor. I shall do myself the honor of bringing them myself to the honored one to-morrow morning. Then perhaps he will care to talk about the price. At ten o'clock in the morning, eh?"

"Very well," said Mr. Newall dryly. "I think we've seen enough to-night. I'm tired. We'd better be going now."

Rodney bowed, and the general bowed and every one was bowing.

"Please," said the general, following the courtesies, "wait a little longer."

Rodney bowed again. "We have taken too much of the great one's time."

The words of courtesy moved quickly, like little tinkling bells. At the gate, as they stepped into their chairs, the band struck up the American national anthem a second time, and the general stood there bowing his ugly shaven head. No one spoke for a while after the chairs were lifted, for each must have been lost in his own thoughts. Rodney Jones was thinking of a look which Philip had directed at his uncle in an instant when the great man's back was turned—he wondered if Philip had known he had seen. It had been a steady, venomous look. There was no sound for a while except the breathing of chair bearers and the padding of their cloth-soled slippers on the silent street.

"Jones," said Mr. Newall suddenly, "Jones—that girl—"

"Please, Mr. Newall," said Philip quickly. "One must forget such matters. It was nothing."

But Rodney knew there was another matter which Philip would not forget.

"You'd better cross it off, Mr. Newall," he agreed. "There's nothing we can do."

He was right enough in saying there was nothing they could do.

"You see," Philip's voice had regained its old flowing confidence, "my uncle is sometimes violent in wine, but his heart is very good. We must forget such things, of course. You will see the Ming Yellow in the morning. Ha, ha, I told you it was here, and Mr. Jones hardly believed me, did you, Rodney? And to-morrow afternoon, we will make an expedition perhaps—a picnic—what do you say? We will forget all this to-morrow."

Rodney Jones listened to Philip's suggestion carefully and weighed it in his mind, but he could see nothing wrong. Philip Liu was bearing himself like a gentleman and he was suffering more than any of them would suffer on that journey.

When they reached the inn and servants met them with lanterns, Mr. Newall looked drawn and pale.

"I wish Mel wasn't here, Jones," he said. "You were right. She shouldn't have come."

Then Rodney waited for Philip and walked with him to the private court. He wished to show some attention, though he could not decide what sort, because he was sorry—genuinely sorry—for Philip Liu. He wondered whether it would be wise to speak, and whether sympathy would not be an impertinence, and then his impulse got the better of him.

"Phil," he said. He never forgot the old ivory mask of those Chinese features. They were all Chinese just then, and those prominent dark eyes were the only thing that gave them life. There was agony in the eyes, and suspicion, which told Rodney he had been wrong to speak.

"Yes," the single word was patient, but the patience itself was ominous.

"Will you forgive me if I say something?" Rodney said, and he found himself seeking diffidently for a proper phrase. "That was very bitter for you to-night. I know you're eating bitterness."

Philip's eyes made two sharp points of light.

"So you understand?" he said, and he repeated: "Yes, you understand."

"And I want to tell you something you don't understand, perhaps," Rodney answered. "It's my racial point of view. You didn't lose face with me to-night. You've got more than you ever had. I thought you might feel better, if you knew."

There was a sigh that was not speech, but the sigh broke that passivity for an instant. In that broken beat of time agony moved beneath a code of manners, and somehow the revelation was shocking.

"Thank you." A tremor in that rippling English, a half-perceptible hint of discord was like the tearing of a curtain, and Philip Liu stood at the entrance of their courtyard, a human being in the grip of deep emotion. "Thank you so very much. You—you have a deep perception." His words moved unevenly for once, and his lips twitched into a grimace of a polite Oriental smile. He stopped and stood dead still, and Rodney Jones was deeply moved, because that hint of a breakdown had been so sudden and completely unexpected.

"I'm sorry," said Rodney, and his own voice was broken, "very sorry, Liu." But, before he had finished, Philip was himself again.

"Excuse me," he said, "so much for bothering you. I shall sleep now. I shall be glad to be by myself, I think. Good night."

The slim, slightly overdressed white figure of Philip Liu moved across the little court. A door opened, closed and he was gone. The courtyard was like the painted backdrop of a stage against a warm glow of footlights. A row of lanterns were still glowing from the eaves of the porch, where they were hanging in front of the sleeping rooms, and two servants were squatting on their heels, waiting to put the lights out when he went to bed. The paper windows of the bedrooms glowed with soft light which made the patterned scrollwork of the windows black against soft yellow. Philip Liu, he noticed, had not entirely closed his door, or it had opened a crack without his noticing, so that the light from his room cut like a knife across the porch.

"That was terrible," Rodney whispered to himself. "Lord, that was terrible."

Then he noticed that Mel Newall's door had opened and that she was standing, a slim straight shadow against the light.

"Hello," she said; and walked toward him across the court with swift, direct short steps. "Aren't you going to bed?" She seemed to be asking him a question which was not the one she spoke. It seemed to him that she had changed since she had seen him last. She was asking him something with her eyes, but he could not tell what.

"Not for a while," said Rodney. "I don't feel very sleepy, thanks."

"Did you have a good time?" she asked.

"Fine," he said. "Did you?"

"Splendid. I like this little court. Paul wants to know if there isn't some place where we can swim."

"They were told to bring you bathing water."

"They did. Paul says it was like bathing on a postage stamp. He wants to swish. It's hot to-night. You look better in hot weather."

"How?"

"How should I know how?" she asked. "You just look better. Father says you saw the Ming Yellow. Did you like it?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "beautiful; worth coming this far just to look at. There's nothing like it in the world. You'll see it yourself to-morrow."

Her eyes seemed to be asking him to do something or to say something, but he could not tell what.

"You haven't called me that to-night," she said.

"What—called you what?"

"You know," she answered. "Beautiful."

"What?" said Rodney. "Oh—excuse me, beautiful."

"Thanks," she said, "that builds up my morale. We've seen a lot together, haven't we—in a curious sort of way?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "in a curious sort of way."

"You get to know other people on a trip like this, don't you—as though you'd known them for years and years."

"Yes," said Rodney. "Traveling like this, you get to know people like a book."

"Do you know me like a book?"

"There're books and books," said Rodney. "It all depends what book." The idea amused him. "They're Encyclopaedia Britannicas and Books of Common Prayer, and notebooks, and chapbooks, and daybooks. I dare say there are night books too, but I've never heard of any—and betting books—"

Then he felt her hand close lightly over his.

"Don't strain your mind," she said. "Good night."

"Are you comfortable?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "considering."

"If anything frightens you, sing out. I'm right in the room next door."

"That's consoling. Thanks," she said. "Good night."

He lighted a cigarette and stood alone in the court, not realizing until she had gone that he had been happy in her company. He had been aware of nothing but her. And yet they had said nothing. He reviewed that aimless conversation and he seemed to know it word for word. It had seemed subtle and absorbing when they had been speaking, and yet it had been nothing. He wondered why she had come to speak to him. It must have been because she was lonely and wished to hear another voice. Nevertheless, he had a feeling that there had been something on her mind. That she had wished to tell him something. What?

He was restless. He would have to try to sleep in a little while, but he knew he could not sleep with the memories of the evening behind him. There was one thing he was very glad of—that he had insisted that Mr. Newall leave his money with the postal authorities at the railroad. They were in a pretty situation, with a drunken, bullying general and a bandit chief, who was waiting for his pay. Then he thought of those yellow bowls and jars, aloof and golden on their table. Where had they come from, he wondered, into that mad unbelievable *galère*? It was China in a delirium—China where anything might happen. It was a page from San Kuo or a chapter from All Men are Brothers.

He had just ground out his cigarette when he saw that another of the doors was opening, and that Paul Steuben was walking toward him in a suit of blue pajamas.

"Hello," he said, and he rubbed his hand through his shoe-brush blond hair. "I can't sleep." He yawned and flexed his muscles. "So the boss saw his yellow pots and pans? I told you the boss always gets what he's after."

Rodney Jones lighted a second cigarette. "He may get more than he's after," he said. "Don't forget that while you're

here."

Paul Steuben's eyes came into quick focus. "Huh?" he said. "Did anything go wrong?"

"Nothing to worry us, perhaps," said Rodney. "The general murdered a singsong girl."

"Huh?" said Steuben. "He what—?"

"He lifted her over his head," said Rodney, "and tossed her into a bed of rocks. But it's none of our business, Paul."

Steuben rolled his shoulders like a boxer in the ring. "And what did you do?" he asked.

"Not a thing," said Rodney. "There wasn't a thing to do. Get this into your head, Paul. There are four hundred and fifty million people in China. Just keep remembering that number until we see the railroad track again. And that wasn't all." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Philip lost his face."

"He what—?" said Steuben.

"His uncle slapped him," said Rodney softly, "right there at the table."

Steuben breathed deeply. "It's a rough little town, isn't it?" he remarked. "You can count on me, Jones, to bust up any ten of these chocolate soldiers, guns and all!"

"That's why I'm talking to you to-night," said Rodney. "Keep your hands still, Paul. Don't you bust up anything!"

"Listen," said Steuben, "if anybody lays a hand on Mel—"

"Let 'em," said Rodney. "They won't hurt Mel. Chinese are not attracted by our women as a rule."

"Not attracted?" said Steuben. "Then they must be crazy!"

"It depends on how you think of it," said Rodney. "The Chinese consider that our women have ugly staring eyes and bony faces and big teeth."

Steuben began to laugh. "All right," he said, "all right. Jones, come into the corner where nobody can hear. I've got to tell somebody. I may as well tell you, because I know it doesn't mean anything to you. You know the way I feel about Mel Newall, I guess. Well, I asked her to marry me to-night."

The cigarette that Rodney was holding dropped to the ground in a little shower of sparks but he did not bother to stamp on it. He seemed to have swallowed something cold and indigestible and hard, like a stone.

"Good," he answered, "and what did she say, Paul?"

"That's it," said Steuben. "She as good as said yes. I've been crazy about Mel for two years, I guess. The boss has known about it. He's told me to go ahead, but I never seemed to get up my courage until to-night. Then I just up and asked her, that's all, and she said she'd probably say yes to-morrow."

Rodney struck a match to light another cigarette. The match went out and he struck another.

"I have an idea," he said, "she's just the girl for you."

"You think so?" said Steuben. "I'm glad you think so. I had to tell some one. You know the way it is when you're crazy about a girl. I didn't mean to bore you, Jones."

"You didn't," said Rodney. "I'm pleased you thought enough of me to tell me."

Paul Steuben rubbed his forehead as though his confession had been like a piece of heavy exercise. "I had to tell

somebody," he repeated. And he flexed his arm uncomfortably. "Gosh, it's hot!" he said. "This weather's terrible. I'd like to go for a swim. I'd like to splash and splash in cold water. I'd like to stay in cold water for an hour."

"You'd just get hot again when you got out," said Rodney. "I guess I'll go to sleep, Paul. I'm awfully pleased. I'm very glad."

"Of course," said Paul, "it doesn't mean a thing to you. I suppose you wonder what I'm happy about."

"Oh, no, I don't," said Rodney. "Good night, Paul," and he walked to his room along the cloisterlike veranda. Philip Liu's door was still open a crack and, as he passed, he had a glimpse of Philip sitting by the little table on the Chinese bed, staring into space. He hesitated a moment, for he felt more unhappy than he had ever thought he would, and he was tempted to open the door another crack to have a talk with Philip Liu, then he thought better of it because there was nothing he could say. Liang was waiting for him.

Liang smiled brightly. "The young virgin," he said, "I think will marry the heavy man from the Excellent Country." Then Rodney knew that his instinct had been right. Mel Newall had meant to tell him something in that talk of theirs. She had meant to tell him that everything was over. He was not surprised that he did not sleep well that night.

It was early morning—three o'clock—when he woke up, and he knew that no sound, but only his restlessness had aroused him. He had been dreaming about General Wu, and he had been eating pigeon eggs with chop-sticks as long as the table. It was his own restlessness which wakened him, because there was not a sound outside. Nevertheless, he got up quietly and pulled open his door. The sky above the courtyard was dark velvet dotted with stars, but all the constellations seemed in the wrong place. The door of the room at his left, Philip Liu's room, was open more than the crack he remembered. He turned on the electric torch he was holding in his hand and flashed it at the door; then he opened the crack of the door wider and looked inside. The room was empty. The bed had not been slept in, and Philip Liu was gone. He never knew why the sight of that empty room seemed ominous, any more than he ever understood what prompted him to do what he did next. He walked along the veranda to the room on the other side of his and rapped against the paper window.

"Mel?" he said. "Mel Newall, are you all right?"

And he heard her voice answer sleepily, "What is it?"

"Nothing," he said. "It's Jones. I was just wondering if you were all right, that's all. Good night." He heard her stirring in the room. "I'm sorry I waked you up," he said.

"Never mind," she said, "good night," and her voice reminded him that everything was over.

## CHAPTER XII

Liang woke him in the morning, bringing a cup of tea. As soon as Rodney opened his eyes, two thoughts which had hovered about him when he fell asleep returned to him unpleasantly. It was the morning when Mr. Newall was to buy the Ming Yellow, and there was something queer about that. There was something queer about everything. Mel Newall was to marry Steuben and Philip Liu had disappeared.

"It is half-past nine," Liang said. "I let you sleep. Long journey."

Rodney drank his tea while Liang laid out his clothes—his best white clothes, Rodney noticed. As usual, Liang was silently arranging each detail of his life.

The room was stifling hot. "Tear some of that paper off the window," Rodney said. "You had no business to let me sleep so long."

Liang bowed unctuously. "Master was very tired," he said. "The Great Master will buy the porcelain to-day."

"Have you heard anything about that porcelain?" Rodney Jones inquired.

"No," said Liang. "Nothing."

But Rodney knew that Liang had heard something. Nevertheless, Liang's reticence relieved him, because Liang seemed amused. "Where's Mr. Liu?" Rodney asked.

"Mr. Liu is up and dressed," Liang said, "and talking to the Great Master." And he added as an after-thought, "Mr. Liu is very well."

Rodney Jones pulled on his socks. "He wasn't in last night," he said.

Liang shook his head. "Oh, yes, he was in," he answered, "and sleeping all the while."

"I tell you I looked in his room," said Rodney. "He wasn't in."

"Very well," said Liang; "if the master says he was not in, he was not in." Liang was impervious, with the self-assurance of an adult speaking to a little child, and Rodney tried to think back through the night. Had he dreamed he had looked into Philip Liu's room and found it empty?

"Tell Mr. Liu to come in here," he said.

He was aware again that the day would be very hot. The sun, beating on the bricks and stones and gray tiles of Ho Hsien, was already sending waves of heat through the sightless paper windows of his boxlike little room, and the heat brought with it an intense and pitiless reality. Reality brought the bare walls, and that matting-covered platform called a *kang*, half a stove and half a bed, where he had been sleeping, into hard, unpicturesque relief, so that the room was like a cell. He did not belong on that *kang* with its teapot and its little bow-legged table. The ascetic bareness of the room and the heat and glare outside conveyed an indefinable impression of silent threat. Everything was telling him mockingly that he was a stranger, who had come unbidden and unwanted, and a nameless something was hanging over him like thunder in the heat. Though he could tell himself it was a mood, which would pass in a minute, he could not avoid the definite conviction of that mood.

There was nothing that was wrong in that morning light, and yet for the first time on that journey he felt a touch of stark unreasoning fear, and the sensation amazed him by its definiteness. His heart was beating, his forehead was moist with actual fear.

"Jones," he said to himself, "you must be going crazy. You had a reason for it last night, perhaps. But it's morning now." He argued that it must be nerves, frayed from suspense and from the clash of personality—there was too much personality—but reason did no good. There was violence in the sunlight, like a bursting of suppressed emotion, a hint of something sinister, of erotic cruelty and pain; and, before he knew it, Rodney Jones found himself doing something which he had never done before.

"Please God," he heard himself saying, "let me get them out of this!"

He never knew whether he had spoken the words aloud, but in any event, that expression of emotion had given him relief, if only because it conveyed to him so conclusively his own helplessness. At any rate, the world was sane again when he heard Philip Liu tapping at the door.

Philip Liu was in his white suit, and the calm of integration was back on him, and the inscrutable armor of his form. It did not seem conceivable, now that Philip was there, that the lineless ivory of him had ever shown anything but good nature and reserve. His eyes met Rodney's frankly, and his slightly heavy lips drew upward as he smiled. His eyes were

reading everything with that accurate human observation of his race.

"I'm afraid you did not sleep well last night," he said.

Rodney's wits moved wearily. He was struggling again with the Chinese veil of manners, and it was like fighting with a cloud, where one saw vague glimpses of objects which were never tangible.

"And you didn't do so well in the sleeping line either, did you, boy?" he asked. Philip shook his head soberly.

"No, I was restless and I walked about," he said. "Your man said you wanted to see me. There is nothing wrong, I hope?"

Rodney put on his white coat.

"I hope not," he said. "It gave me a little turn when I saw you weren't in your room. Just walking about to compose yourself, were you?"

"Yes"—Philip's dark eyes were patient with good nature—"just around the courts. I did compose myself."

"Yes," said Rodney. "Well, you did a good job."

"Thank you," Philip said. "Yes, I am feeling better now. My uncle will arrive in a few minutes. They are unpacking the Yellow porcelain already in a room off the farther court." Philip's glance shifted slightly. For a second there was the suspicion of a rift in that cloud of manners. "We can leave to-morrow morning. Everything is quite all right."

Something made Rodney's nerves go taut and he was conscious of using a definite effort to keep them in control.

"You're sure of that, are you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Philip, "everything is quite all right."

But he had seen that everything was not right with Philip Liu. A wrongness had revealed itself for just a fraction of a second in that sensitive tranquil mask.

"You haven't got any ideas of your own, have you, Philip?" With an effort Rodney made his voice casual. "I'd hate it, if you did. You have such bright ideas."

"No," said Philip. "No. What makes you think that?" Then he smiled disarmingly, as though a thought had struck him. "But Mr. Steuben has ideas. Mr. Steuben says he is hot. He wants to go for a swim all over in cold water."

Then something snapped in Rodney. "To hell with Mr. Steuben!" Rodney said. "What's your uncle's game?"

Philip looked amused. He betrayed that devastating amusement of his race when confronted with an individual lacking self-control.

"No game," said Philip. "It was as I told you—he wants to sell the porcelain, that is all."

"For how much?" Rodney asked.

Philip's amusement became more obvious. He looked at Rodney thoughtfully.

"For a good deal, I think," he said. "Mr. Newall wanted to come here. Perhaps he had better pay a good deal, don't you think?"

Rodney did not answer. The harshness of the room was before his eyes again and even Philip's face was harsh and unrelieved by the light. Rodney had no time to answer.



"Jones!" Mr. Newall was calling. "Where are you, Jones?"

Mr. Newall and Paul Steuben and Mel Newall were standing outside in the sun. Mr. Newall looked rested and he was rubbing his hand over his bony jaw. Mel Newall had a far-away look and Paul Steuben appeared fatuous because he was in love.

"Well, Jones," Mr. Newall said, "we're pretty well washed up, I think. Some coolies are fetching the Ming Yellow in."

Paul Steuben laughed with a joy that was somehow discordant. "I wish I was washed up," he said. "Lord, I wish there was any place where I could get a swim."

Mel Newall looked at him and sighed. Her eyes rested thoughtfully on Paul's heavy shoulder muscles and on his broad, furrowed forehead.

"I know. You'd like to swish around," she said. "Forget it, Paul. There isn't any place to swim."

Philip Liu was looking at the little courtyard gate. "I think," he said, "that here comes General Wu." He did not think. He knew. There was no doubt that General Wu was coming, because boot heels were ringing in the outer court.

First Lieutenant Shu with his shining saber came stepping immaculately into the sunlight. Lieutenant Shu clicked his heels together like a West Pointer.

"The general, please," he said. "The general and Colonel Liu Hei Ch'i."

General Wu entered the courtyard next and the sun shone warmly on his polished riding boots and twinkled on his gold and silver medals with each of his heavy strides. General Wu was hot and he was mopping his broad face with a large silk handkerchief. He drew it away from his face slowly, like a revealing curtain, which showed first his scar-squinted eye, then his flat nose and then his large heavy mouth.

"Good morning, Mr. Gentlemen," he said in English. "Good morning, Missy Lady. Ha-ha! I am sorry I don't speak English so good but we have all-come—what?" and he slapped a four-fingered hand on Hei Ch'i's shoulder. "Mr. Liu Hei Ch'i has come too. He is a colonel now."

Hei Ch'i did not answer, but contented himself with looking at Mr. Newall carefully and moving his lips a trifle above his protruding teeth. He had evidently been made a colonel overnight, for he was in a spotted gray uniform somewhat the worse for wear. A group of servants had appeared at the gate behind them who gazed at the scene with interest. It seemed to Rodney that they gazed with anticipation as if they knew that the scene held possibilities.

Mr. Newall cleared his throat and Paul Steuben spoke suddenly. "Tell that toothy man to take his dirty eyes away from Mel," he said.

"Quiet, Paul!" said Rodney Jones. "He won't do her any harm."

"Yes," said Mr. Newall. "Be quiet, Paul.... Ready for business, are you, general?"

General Wu beamed and his eyes drew into slits.

"Business," he said. "Yes! If you please to come this way."

He nodded toward the gate which led to the outer court. More servants were standing, staring into one of the open doors of a building, but as they heard the general's voice, they stepped back hastily. There were three small hampers near the door, which evidently had held the Ming Yellow. The general waved his arm to the doorway.

"Bring tea," he called. "We'll go inside and talk business—what?"

Rodney found himself walking on one side of Mel Newall and Paul Steuben on the other, and Mel Newall spoke to

Rodney softly.

"I understand why you've been worried, now," she said. "Who is the man in the dirty uniform?"

Rodney shrugged his shoulders. "Just a bandit," he explained. "He's going to get paid off and join General Wu's army if your father buys the Yellow. I promised to tell you if I was worried. Yes, that man worries me very much."

Mel Newall looked at Hei Ch'i steadily. "I think Father had better buy it then," she remarked.

"Yes," said Rodney, "so do I."

"Here they are," said the general, and they entered a long low room. The nine pieces of Ming Yellow had been placed on a *kang* at the end of it.

He heard Mel Newall catch her breath and he did not blame her much. "Look at it, Paul!" she said. And he heard Paul Steuben give an inarticulate but disillusioned grunt.

Rodney Jones, however, had only half an eye for the Yellow. He was staring at an old black-robed Chinese who stood beside it with his hands tucked into his loose sleeves. He was staring at a figure which he seemed to have recollected from another incarnation. The deeply lined dignity of the face was unmistakable. Rodney Jones was staring at Mr. Wong, the curio dealer from Peking, in whose shop he and Mr. Newall had examined a bowl of Yellow, it seemed a year ago. The sight of Mr. Wong was a startling surprise, although Rodney tried not to show it. The old man standing there brought lines of thought together into an unexpected unity. Mr. Newall himself must have had a vague memory of Mr. Wong, in spite of a foreigner's difficulty with Chinese features.

"Who's that?" said Mr. Newall suddenly.

"It's Mr. Wong," said Rodney. "Do you remember? The dealer in the Chinese City in Peking, who showed you the yellow bowl."

Mr. Newall rubbed his hand across his jaw for a moment.

"I don't like that," he said. "How the deuce did he get here?"

Mr. Wong was bowing to Rodney courteously and Rodney Jones bowed back.

"Are you well?" asked Mr. Wong in Mandarin.

"Well," said Rodney. "Are you well?" And then his curiosity got the better of him. "How did you happen to come here?" he asked.

Mr. Wong smiled comfortably. "Because I was told that there was some Suen-tê porcelain here," Mr. Wong replied silkily, and looked at Mr. Newall. There was no doubt he was amused. "I have come to buy it, if I can, for a client from your Excellent Country, who has given me an order through a New York dealer."

Rodney Jones looked about the room. General Wu was smiling; even Philip Liu was smiling. "Your client's name couldn't be Mr. Rose?" Rodney asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Wong; "that is my client's name."

Rodney Jones paused for a moment. He was becoming more and more convinced of the implications and the artistic irony conveyed by the presence of Mr. Wong.

That scene had been contrived by the hand of a master in a style that was typically Chinese in the unexpectedness of its involutions. He wondered that he had never thought of such a possibility before, and then he began to laugh. He laughed because the joke was on Mr. Newall and because the affair was so beautifully contrived. Mr. Newall had traveled to Ho Hsien to buy Ming Yellow cheap, and he would not get it cheap. General Wu and Philip Liu had seen to

that. They had called in Mr. Wong.

"What the devil are you laughing at?" Mr. Newall asked sharply.

And Rodney turned to him, still laughing.

"Mr. Wong has come to buy that porcelain for Mr. Rose," he explained. "It looks as though you and Mr. Rose will bid against each other, after all."

Mr. Newall did not answer and Rodney turned to General Wu.

"General," he said, "you and your nephew are very clever men. I congratulate you, general.... Why didn't you tell me sooner, Philip? I always said you were first-rate."

"Thank you," said Philip. "Thank you very much. You are not angry then?"

"No," said Rodney, "I'm not angry. I'm not buying that Ming Yellow. That's Mr. Newall's worry." Instead of being angry, he felt very much relieved. By that single revelation, all the mystery which had hung over things had been dispelled at last into something close to comedy. He did not care what Mr. Newall paid. No matter what the price was, Mr. Newall could afford to pay it. It had been trickery, perhaps, but an honest sort of trickery to which Mr. Newall himself might have resorted if he had goods to sell. Rodney laughed and then General Wu began laughing. His sides shook and his voice boomed through the room.

"He thought he could get it cheap," he said. "No one buys cheap from me."

Then Mel Newall saw the humor and she was laughing too.

"I think you're going to pay for the party, father," she said.

General Wu spoke sharply to Philip. "Where are your manners?" he said. "Get chairs. Do you want these Excellent Ones to stand?"

"Yes," said Philip softly. "Yes, I bring chairs, Great One."

"You see," said General Wu to Rodney Jones, "he has learned so much that he forgets his manners."

It was like an act in a play which every one enjoyed except possibly Mr. Newall and Paul Steuben, who was hot and bored. They sat down in a semicircle around the Ming Yellow on the *kang*, while Mr. Newall examined it piece by piece. Now that he knew why Mr. Wong was there, he had become saturnine and grim. General Wu watched him impassively between noisy sips of tea, while Hei Ch'i gripped the arms of his chair with his claws of hands and watched also, breathing very softly. Mr. Wong watched Mr. Newall's fingers appreciatively as they moved appraisingly over the yellow surfaces. There was no doubt that the foreigner knew what he was doing. If there was irony, it was tinged with a certain perfection of justice. For once in his life Mr. Newall was going to pay handsomely.

"Look at them, Jones," he said. "There's nothing wrong, I think." There was hardly any need to look. The mellow flawlessness, the translucent depth of that glaze would probably never be equaled in the world again. If it were, it would take time to give it that mellowness because it seemed to have absorbed the sun's rays for five hundred years.

Rodney Jones picked up the pieces, one by one, with a feeling close to awe. His mind was suddenly at peace now that he knew the worst. It would be a bona fide sale and money did not matter where that Yellow was concerned. He could forget that Mel Newall was watching him as he looked into the glaze. Its flow was as perfect as destiny. The blue signature on the bottom was beyond imitation.

"If you ask me," he said, "they come near to being perfect."

Mr. Wong spoke softly. "You and the old stranger know," he said. "I think nothing like them will ever be seen again."

Mr. Newall drank his cup of tea while every one watched him, because there was nothing more to say. That breath of life to Chinese nostrils, the bargain, was hanging in the air of the inn room above them. The desire for possession and the desire for money were hanging in the balance. The presence of those two desires had an æsthetic quality that sufficed to make them still and patient, and such moments were to be prolonged, for they made life worth living.

"Tell the general," Mr. Newall said, "that this is all good enough, but it has no great value in my country. Tell him I came here prepared to pay a generous price, and I'll pay it. All of those pieces, for forty thousand dollars." Mr. Newall clicked his lean jaws together. "Mex," he added slowly.

The general listened courteously and placed his great hands on his knees.

"The Great One offers too little," he answered, "far too little. It is fortunate for me that Mr. Wong is here. What has Mr. Wong to say?"

Mr. Wong opened his lips and closed them. "Fifty thousand dollars," he said.

And Mr. Newall looked at Mr. Wong's composed face. He was clearly gauging Mr. Wong's limit, and Rodney whispered to him. "Go up higher. You can't leave this place without buying." Mr. Newall nodded. He knew he was there to pay and he knew how to take his medicine.

"One hundred thousand dollars," he said. There was a sigh. It came from Hei Ch'i's protruding teeth.

Hei Ch'i was leaning forward in his chair, fascinated, as Rodney Jones translated the figure into Chinese. The sound of the sum rolled out solidly, and General Wu smiled faintly, as though the figure came nearer to his fancy.

"One hundred and ten thousand," said Mr. Wong.

The East and West were meeting, eyeing each other across a bridge of time. Mr. Newall's lips twitched.

"One hundred and fifty thousand," he said.

Mr. Wong spread his knees apart and set his hands upon them.

"Ten thousand more, please, Excellency," he said.

It was hard to know whether Mr. Wong was speaking the truth or whether he was simply a stalking hawk prepared by General Wu, but Mr. Wong's position made no difference.

Mr. Newall looked at General Wu, who smiled at him kindly. Without any intimation of duress, General Wu was squeezing Mr. Newall as confidently as he had squeezed the provincial merchants. Rodney saw Hei Ch'i glance at the General sharply.

"Two hundred thousand," Mr. Newall said.

Paul Steuben breathed deeply and Rodney watched Hei Ch'i. It seemed to him that Hei Ch'i was looking at the Yellow with reproachful amazement. Mr. Wong had hesitated. He looked at General Wu.

"Tell the General I've had enough of this nonsense," Mr. Newall said. "Two hundred and fifty thousand Mex, and not a copper more."

General Wu moved his hands from his knees and folded them across his stomach. It might have been a signal. Rodney was not sure.

"That is beyond my means," said Mr. Wong. "I am very sorry."

As Mr. Wong spoke, the whole room changed. The atmosphere of tension had gone and was replaced by cheerful pleantry. General Wu smiled cheerfully. "Yes," he said, "the price is low, but I am a reasonable man."

Mr. Newall smiled a trifle sourly. "As a matter of fact, I'm satisfied," he said.

"So am I," said General Wu. "If one pays enough, one will not be greatly cheated."

Hei Ch'i spoke suddenly. "You did not tell me he would pay as much as that," he said to General Wu. And the look of cheer left the general for an instant.

"We'll arrange that matter later," he answered shortly. "How should I know my whole fortune?"

And Mr. Newall spoke again. "Tell him that the money will be paid at the post office at the railroad, when these pieces are safely delivered at the railroad. That's understood, I hope."

General Wu nodded. "That is very satisfactory," he said. "I shall send a guard with you and the porcelain. The guard will take the money. And you—" he looked at Hei Ch'i, "you may send your own men if you want. You will not be cheated."

"Thank you," said Hei Ch'i. "His Excellency is very kind." But Hei Ch'i did not seem wholly pleased.

The general rose and laid a hand on Rodney's shoulder.

"His Excellency will stay with us longer, I hope," he said.

"The general is too kind," said Rodney. "We're leaving to-morrow morning."

"I am very, very sorry," the general answered. "I am afraid my hospitality has not been good."

The general looked at Mr. Newall, seemingly forgetting that the foreigner could not understand Chinese. Even if Mr. Newall had been a linguist, the remark would probably have passed unnoticed, for his mind was still on the Ming Yellow. He watched it with the satisfaction of possession.

"This has been a slick business," he said. "They put a fast one over on me, Jones, but that's all over. I don't know what part in this Mr. Wong has had, but I know he is a connoisseur. It would take a great weight off my mind if Mr. Wong would take care of these things. I should rather have him pack them than some soldier, and have him watch them on the way home. What's more, you might tell Mr. Wong that I'll do any further buying through him. Tell Mr. Wong he's too good a man for Rose, Jones."

"I hesitate," said Mr. Wong. "I hesitate to accept the Great One's compliment." But Mr. Wong was plainly pleased. Every one was pleased. They were walking into the courtyard and the General was taking his leave.

"Lord," Paul Steuben said, "it's hot!"

Mr. Newall touched Rodney's arm. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I got that pretty cheap. Three and a half dollars Mex is equal to one of ours at the last exchange I heard quoted."

"Be careful," said Rodney. "Don't say that out loud,"—and he looked suspiciously around him, because in a sense Mr. Newall had been right.

General Wu was bowing. Lieutenant Shu was shaking hands with Mel Newall, but Hei Ch'i and Philip Liu were not there. Rodney Jones looked again to be sure. He was right. Hei Ch'i and Philip Liu were not there. "Well," he said, "that's that."

"Yes," said Mr. Newall, "I've had enough of this. Can't we move out of here to-day?"

Rodney found that his patience was growing short. "I've had pretty nearly enough myself," he answered, "but we can't move out to-day. You've got the Yellow. Won't that be enough?"

"Isn't there any place—" Paul Steuben was speaking plaintively again.

Rodney whirled on him sharply. "Where you can have a swim—is that it?"

"Yes," said Paul Steuben, "where I can have a swim."

"As a matter of fact," Philip Liu was speaking just behind them, and he had not been in the courtyard half a minute before, "there is a place," he said. "We could go this afternoon."

Then Mel Newall was speaking in quick exasperation. "If there is any place he can go for a swim, let's see him swim," she said.

Mr. Newall turned toward her mildly. He was in a sympathetic mood now that his business was over. "Don't bear down on Paul, Mel," he said. "We've been pretty lucky to-day. I don't blame Paul if he wants a swim. I wouldn't mind one myself, if the water's clean."

Rodney Jones did not bother to listen. He was thinking of the ancient astuteness of Mr. Wong. He remembered that he and Mr. Wong had had a relationship at one time which was as close to friendship as Mr. Wong would probably ever have for a foreigner. He turned away from the talk of swimming and walked back to the room where the trading had been done. Mr. Wong was still there, running his fingers carefully over a Ming Yellow jar.

"What did you mean by 'hesitate'?" Rodney asked him. "You said you 'would hesitate to' accept the compliment. Do you mean you will not take care of these things?"

Mr. Wong set down the bowl very carefully. "No," he said, "I mean that I am very pleased to do anything that the Great One asks."

And Rodney struggled with the eccentricities of the Chinese tongue. "The bargain is over, the business is done. Will you tell me something?" Rodney asked.

The politeness and the ambiguity of Chinese thought whirled in his mind like the heat of the sun outside.

"These pieces," Rodney said. "They are very good. Did you bring them here yourself? Was all this arranged?" He knew that such a matter was possible, because he had heard of stranger deals.

"No," said Mr. Wong simply. "That would have been a great thought, but I did not have the Yellow."

"Where did it come from, then?" asked Rodney.

Mr. Wong moved his hands in his sleeves. "That I do not know," he said. "The general came upon it. China is a large place. When the Ming dynasty broke down, much treasure was hidden. When the Ch'ing dynasty fell, more treasure was hidden. Bandits do not care for such things as these, because they may not be carried and they break too easily. I was told they were here. I did not believe it, but I came."

"You came to buy them?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wong, "as surely as the old stranger came to buy them." He moved his hands in his sleeves again. "I was buying them for a client from the Excellent Country. I may have raised my price a trifle beyond what I came prepared to pay, to please the general. You and I are men. We understand."

"What do we understand?" Rodney answered.

Mr. Wong gave him a meaning glance. "You have more perceptions than most foreigners," he said. "You and I understand that the general is using the money from these pieces to buy a bandit. I was glad to please the general beyond a certain price, but you and I know price. After all, the great old stranger came on these very cheaply in his money. Four of our dollars nearly equals one of his." Mr. Wong nodded and moved his fingers in his sleeves. "The general, I think, will give me some small gratuity, but that is honest business."

"Would you be so kind," Rodney asked him, "as to tell me who told you to come here?"

Mr. Wong paused for a second. "Mr. Liu told me there was Ming Yellow here," he said.

"Yes," said Rodney, "Mr. Liu is a very clever man."

"Yes," said Mr. Wong, "a very clever man."

## CHAPTER XIII

When Rodney reached the courtyard again, Philip Liu was speaking with his perfect rippling mastery of English.

"Yes," he was saying, "the place is beautiful. A marble pool fed by mountain springs. The buildings are quite deserted. It is called the Pool of the Seventh Prince."

"What prince?" said Mel Newall.

"I cannot tell," said Philip Liu. "I am very sorry. It is always called the Pool of the Seventh Prince. The buildings around it are falling down. The water comes from dragons' mouths, but really it is very clear. You will like it very much and it is only nine *li* off. I can get horses."

"Jones," Paul Steuben was calling, "Jones! Did you hear what Liu was saying? He knows a place where we can take a swim. We're going there after lunch."

"Yes," said Philip Liu, "if you care to go, you will like it very much. Cool spring water in a marble pool. The Pool of the Seventh Prince."

"And don't say we can't go, Rodney," Mel Newall said, "because we're going. I'm not going to roast in here."

Rodney put his hands in the side pockets of his coat. He knew he had no reason to be suspicious, because, as far as he could see, everything was over and he knew that his case was weak.

"Wait till you get back to Peking," he said. "Then you can take a swim in the Dragon Pool."

Paul Steuben scowled and Rodney Jones had a sense of every one being against him.

"Now listen, Jones," Paul Steuben said, "I'm going for a swim!"

Rodney looked at the faces around him. They all were petulant and angry—all except Philip Liu's.

"You're sure it's all right, Philip?" Rodney asked.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Philip Liu.

Though Philip's reply had been prompt and had rung with glowing confidence, it betrayed an anxiety to see the Pool of the Seventh Prince which seemed to Rodney slightly out of character.

"Just the same," he said, "I think it's better to stay around here. One is apt to get into trouble."

Mr. Newall and Mel and Steuben turned toward him, all together, as though a string had pulled them, and they all wore the same expressions of hostility.

"And once again," said Mel Newall, "the old experienced traveler tells us what to do. We can't go wrong with you,

can we, Mr. Jones?"

"No," said Mr. Newall, "Jones is always right."

There was a sarcasm in those speeches which indicated a surprising resentment, and for a moment Rodney Jones could not understand.

"Here," he said, "what's the matter? I haven't done anything, except make a simple statement."

Paul Steuben took a rolling step toward him. "If you want to know," he said, "that statement business is one thing about you that's been getting on our nerves."

"Oh, drop it, Paul," Mel Newall said. "Never mind it now."

"No," said Paul Steuben. "This is the time to get this over with. You spend all your time, Jones, saying this and that can't be done. You sit and talk to us from a pinnacle of acquired knowledge. How long have you been in China, after all? Eighteen months, you've told us. Well, why should eighteen months make you infallible? It's a priggish attitude. And it's getting on our nerves."

It was the first time that Rodney saw himself as they must have seen him, and the picture was not pleasant. He had placed himself in a rôle which he had always disliked and resented in others. His mind went back over a dozen incidents in that trip where he had laid down the law autocratically without any explanation. He had made himself exasperating to any rational human being simply through his own worry and preoccupation, and his worry had come to nothing. Philip Liu had dealt honestly in his way and General Wu had been honest according to his lights. He took his hands out of his pockets. "I didn't see it that way," he admitted. "It was the responsibility, I suppose. Thanks for telling me, Paul."

"That's all right," Paul Steuben answered gracefully. "You've had a lot on your mind that you didn't need to have, that's all."

Rodney Jones looked at Mel Newall. He wanted her, at least, to think better of him than that. "Well, in view of this morning, I think you're right," he said. "I must have been an awful bore, and I hate bores."

"You have been," Mel Newall said. "A dreadful bore, sometimes."

"And I've been officious," Rodney agreed. "All right. I've been as stupid as anybody else. Let's go take a swim, if you want to, and if Philip knows the place." He was surprised when he had finished to find that a hundred hidden resentments had been dissipated by his assent, Mr. Newall himself was cordial, no longer an employer in his manner.

"You're all right, Jones," he said. "You're all right, Jones."

"Yes," echoed Paul Steuben. "Forget about it, son."

But Mel Newall said nothing. He believed later that he made his next suggestion entirely because Mel had said nothing.

"If it's only nine *li* out," he said, "we might take lunch and go there right away. I can tell Liang and he can find some horses."

"He need not bother, old man," Philip Liu said suddenly. "I know the town, and I can find them in half an hour, with a mule to carry the lunch boxes—what?"

"That's the stuff!" Paul Steuben's voice rung joyfully, like a deep strong bell. "Let's go in half an hour."

If Mel Newall had said a word to him, it might have changed his mood, but she had not spoken. Her silence was like a last complete denial, which told him that everything he had done had amounted to exactly nothing. His fears and his suspicions had been nothing. He was sure of that, when he walked back to his room alone. There was nothing about



him which she could have liked as he saw himself as she must have seen him.

"You've been a fool, Jones," he muttered. "A damned, sententious fool." And then he called Liang.

As soon as he called Liang, he had another thought—that his manner on that whole expedition had been of Liang's contriving. Equipped with his new perspective, he could look back very clearly through the mazes of Liang's mind. Liang had been jealous of Philip Liu, with his desperate introverted Chinese jealousy. And Rodney Jones could see how logically and completely Liang had worked upon his own suspicions and dislikes, until he had ended by being Liang's obedient tool. At least he could heap a portion of his resentment on Liang.

Liang entered the room almost noiselessly and stood at respectful attention in his black cotton traveling gown.

"Get a picnic lunch ready," Rodney ordered him shortly. "We're going out in half an hour."

Liang hesitated for a moment and folded his hands in his sleeves. "Where?" he asked impassively. "Where is the master going?"

Rodney felt a slight twinge of exasperation. Once again he was going to be fighting a cloud in an argument with Liang. He marshaled his thoughts quickly, placing them like soldiers in position.

"We are going nine *li* out of here," he said, "to picnic at a place called the Pool of the Seventh Prince. But there is no reason for you to know about it. You only have to prepare the picnic and come out with us to serve it." He paused and then added deliberately, "Mr. Liu is getting ponies for us to ride."

The last remark had a definite effect. Liang's shoulders stiffened a fraction of an inch. It was a slur on his face that any one should hire ponies but himself, and it hurt Liang, as Rodney meant it to hurt him.

"Master," Liang said earnestly, "the master should not do that. It is not wise."

"Do what?" asked Rodney Jones.

Liang looked genuinely disturbed. His voice assumed a higher key. Instead of patience, there was nearly agitation in his voice. "It is not safe to go outside the walls," Liang said.

"You think so, do you?" Rodney's reply was cool and he felt a rising indignation against the machinations of Liang. "Why do you think so?"

"Because it is not safe," Liang repeated. "I declare it is not safe."

It was clear enough to Rodney—if it had not been before—that to keep his own face, Liang was preying on his fears.

And Rodney knew it was time for a show-down with Liang.

"Liang," he said, "you have been using your own jealousy to make me fearful. You have made me lose face with these other foreigners. Do not dare to stand arguing with me. Go out and get that lunch."

"Master," Liang's voice rose an octave higher. "You must not go; it is not safe!"

And Rodney's patience snapped. "Be quiet," he said. "Do you think I am entirely a fool? Order that lunch and send another boy if you're afraid to go!"

Liang's shoulders stiffened and he stood there for a moment, a rigid black figure, motionless beneath the straight lines of his gown. Rodney's remark had hurt him, just as Rodney knew it would.

"Yes," said Liang in English; there was a twang in his voice that made it reverberate like the bass string on a guitar. "Master says I go, I go all right."

"Yes," Rodney shot back at him, "you'll go all right. You'll go to save your precious face. Now get out of here damn quick!"

Liang stood silent for a second without speaking, completely, passively motionless. His eyes met Rodney's in a single sharp glance, and then he turned, still without speaking, and padded quickly out the door. The scene was over, and for once in their association Rodney had put his servant in his place.

After those words, he knew Liang would go. Liang would go through fire, not out of loyalty to him, but entirely from face. If he did not go, his prestige in that involved world of Chinese service would leave him, and that was more than life.

"Well," said Rodney Jones, "that's that"—and he reached into his bag for a towel and a cake of soap. The room was hotter than it had been, and that clash of wills with Liang had left him tired and in bad humor. He felt his resentment against Liang rising instead of waning. It took away his customary caution. He pulled his cap down over his eye and walked into the court.

The ponies stood in the first courtyard of the inn, squat, shaggy little brutes whose ancestors had come from the Mongolian plain. A glance at them told Rodney that Philip Liu had done very well. They were exceptionally fine, well-fed ponies for a country where life was as hard for animals as it was for men. Their broad chests showed endurance and their eyes showed courage. Rodney had always admired the breed.

"That's a mighty fine string of horses, Philip," he said. He wanted to be agreeable because he was ashamed of his own past churlishness.

"Thank you," said Philip Liu. "I'm sorry the saddles are wood, for they will not be comfortable."

"Nonsense," said Rodney. "The saddles are all right."

Mel Newall smiled. "Can Paul ride one of those poor things?" she asked. "Paul will break its back."

"I think not," said Philip Liu. "The ponies are very strong."

Mel Newall wore a white shirt, jodhpurs, and a small tight-fitting hat. Paul Steuben was again equipped in riding breeches which gave him the appearance of a big-game hunter. Mr. Newall wore riding breeches too. The clothes gave them all a look of luxury which reminded Rodney that he had forgotten to change from his white suit.

"Can you ride in those?" asked Philip Liu solicitously, looking at his long linen trousers, and Rodney noticed that Philip also was equipped for the road in khaki breeches and puttees and a neat khaki coat with bulging pockets.

Rodney began to laugh. "You look as though you were going on a thousand-mile expedition, Phil," he said. "I can manage in these clothes, if it's only for nine *li*."

"Yes," said Philip, and Rodney remembered the speech later. "Only nine *li*. Yes, of course."

"It isn't any farther than that, is it?" asked Rodney.

"Oh, no," said Philip, "only nine *li*, of course."

Two servants had appeared with the lunch hamper, which they began strapping on the mule. Two others were packing the second hamper with towels and changes of linen. The expedition had already assumed elaborate proportions, because the Chinese servants would gain face for themselves from the pretensions of their masters.

Mr. Newall was growing impatient, as always when anything was delayed. "What are we standing around and doing nothing for?" he demanded. "Aren't we ready to go?"

Rodney had already perceived the reason for the delay—Liang was not there. And his absence was exasperating.

"Liang!" he shouted through the heat of the courtyard. "Liang!" When there was no answer, it occurred to Rodney that Liang was working out his temper on them by going slow. "Where's Liang?" he asked one of the boys.

"He's gone out, master," the boy answered cheerfully.

"Out?" shouted Rodney. "Where's he gone?"

"I cannot tell where he has gone," the boy said. "He is simply gone."

Rodney's indignation increased each second but he had no time to give way to it, for just then Liang appeared like magic. He was smiling and holding out five fans.

"I have purchased fans," he said. "It has been so very hot." And still smiling, he gave every one a fan.

"Confound you!" Rodney said. "Who told you to buy fans?"

"I was delayed," Liang answered. "They were hard to find. But are they not beautiful fans?"

"Never mind," said Mr. Newall. "Let's start. Don't scold him, Jones." And three minutes later they were out of the inn and riding down the street toward the town gate opposite the one which they had entered the day before.

Rodney was surprised that Mel Newall had maneuvered her pony beside his, until he guessed the reason. Paul Steuben must have been annoyed because she had made a remark about his size and weight. He was ahead of them, talking about his horsemanship to Philip Liu.

"I can ride anything—always could," he said.

The main street of Ho Hsien was baking in the sun. The merchants had put white rectangles of cloth supported by cross poles above their booths, and the cloth hung at different angles in brilliant white against the shops' façades. The coolies, carrying their burdens, were stripped down to the waist, and the children were running about with no clothes at all. A stout man had pulled a fan from the neck of his gown and waved it vigorously in front of him, while he watched them with frank curiosity.

"I know a Chinese joke about a fan," said Rodney Jones.

"Don't keep it to yourself," said Mel Newall. "I never heard a Chinese joke."

"There are not many," said Rodney, and he wished she was not with him. "There are not many Chinese jokes like ours, but I heard an old man talking to a younger one. He told the younger one he had used the same fan for forty years and that it had never worn out. It had never worn out because he never waved it in front of him. He waved his head in front of the fan instead."

"Is that all?" Mel Newall asked.

"Yes, that's all," said Rodney. "I don't suppose I told it very well."

"No," said Mel, "you didn't."

"It doesn't surprise me," Rodney said. "I don't do much well, do I?"

She did not answer him for a while.

"Sometimes you do," she said at length. "Now and then you're quite surprising."

"Thanks," said Rodney shortly.

"Sometimes you make me laugh. Sometimes you make me angry. I can never tell which you'll do."

"Oh?" said Rodney. "Which way do I make you now?"

She straightened her shoulders and bit her lower lip.

"I wish I knew," she answered. "I'd give a good deal to know."

"Not that it would make any difference to you," Rodney suggested.

"No," she agreed. "I don't suppose it would. I wonder what you think about me. Nothing, I suppose."

"I told you once," said Rodney. "I love and adore you, Beautiful."

"That's a habit of yours, isn't it?" she asked. "Saying that to every one?"

"Not any more," said Rodney. "You've broken me of that."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she asked.

"No," he said. "Why should I?"

"Because I don't," she said.

"But you'd like to, wouldn't you?" said Rodney. "Just because you'd like to have everything all at once."

"What difference does it make?" She repeated her question sharply. "You and I haven't anything in common. In a few days now you'll forget all this. You'll be a newspaper man again."

"No, I won't," he said. "I threw over that job when I came out here." He had answered without thinking, and, when he had said it, he could have bitten off his tongue.

Mel Newall looked coolly, impersonally surprised. "I don't see why," she said.

And somehow he was annoyed by her attitude and her lack of understanding, for it showed how far her world was removed from his.

"It just happens," said Rodney elaborately, "that people in my position can't take two weeks' vacation any time they want it. They get fired when they do. Frankly, I saved my employers the trouble. I resigned by cable the day before I left."

"But why?" she asked curiously. "I don't see why."

Rodney laughed and looked straight up the Chinese street as it shimmered in the sun. That same sense of unease, that feeling of stark reality which had been with him in the morning, came over him again, and again he knew that his nerves were not steady and he answered, "'Them that ask no questions needn't hear no lie.' Watch the wall, my darling, when the gentlemen go by."

"Don't be silly," she said.

A change in her voice made him look at her, astonished.

"Why?" she asked him again. "Why did you throw over your work?"

"Just a whim," said Rodney silkily, "a mere artistic whim. I couldn't bear to have you out here alone without me." He had not intended her to believe it and he saw that she had not. If she had, she would not have smiled back at him in the way she did.

"You do think up the most amazing things," she said.

"Yes," said Rodney. "And now my ego's hurt."

"You never did need to tell me you're an egotist," she answered.

"No," said Rodney, "I don't need to. My ego is suffering because you have got on perfectly well without me, haven't you? I didn't need to come at all."

"That must be very hard for you to bear," she said. "And now, what are you going to do when you get back?"

"I don't know," he said. "There's always something."

"Yes," she answered. "Father can get you something."

"Not me," said Rodney. "I may have my ups and downs, but I don't have to depend on any one for help. That isn't why I came. I can paddle my own canoe."

"Yes," she said, "I know you can." And then she was silent, and Rodney made no effort to continue the conversation, because there seemed to be nothing more to say.

It occurred to him that he had accomplished an artistic feat by telling the truth in such a way that she did not believe him. Nevertheless, through some childish sense of contradiction, it hurt him that she did not believe it. He kicked his heels into his horse's ribs. The little animal gave a startled bound and Rodney trotted up the street alone and through the arch of the city wall at the head of the procession.

He thought, as he had thought before, that China was made of walls which surrounded her cities and even her meanest dwellings. Each house was a series of walled courts, each shut off from the other in a constant effort at privacy. It was the same motif as the Chinese mind, where emotions and manners were neatly walled off from each other. He amused himself by thinking that his mind might also be arranged in neat walled courts. Then he could put the memory of Mel Newall and Paul Steuben and the whole trip in one of them and slam the red gate and put the bar across it forever.

The road was out in farm country again, and the country was like a Canton-china plate, a hot plate in an oven. The leaves of the poplars beside the road were drooping with the heat. The country ahead rose in undulating curves of terraced hills toward the bare brown mountains on the horizon, and heat waves were shimmering from the hills into a pitiless, cloudless blue sky. Rodney pulled up his sweating pony and waited for Philip Liu.

"Where's the pool, Philip?" he said.

Philip Liu pointed to a hill about two miles away. Its sides were rocky and uncultivated. The air around it was hazy with dust, as was so often the case with the North China air, but Rodney could see well enough where Philip was pointing. There was a space inclosed by a wall on that far-off hill, and the roofs of buildings in the enclosure were more pretentious than any of the farm hamlets in the foreground.

"Is that a temple?" Rodney asked.

"Yes," said Philip. "A deserted temple. The buildings are falling into ruin, I think, but it is very private. Very few people go there except occasional goatherds. The land begins to grow barren at that point, but there is a spring and a very fine pool. Look, you can see the trees above it."

Rodney's curiosity was aroused, now that he examined the place more closely. He could see that Philip was right in saying that the country in that direction was barren. The low hill where the temple stood was very lonely.

"You mean to say no one uses those buildings?" he asked. "Why not?"

Philip Liu gave him a sideward glance, as though he had been aroused from introspection. Ever since they'd started riding, Rodney remembered that he had not heard Philip's voice rippling in its customary informative key. "Cheer up, Philip," Rodney said.

"Thank you," Philip answered, "but I am very cheerful."

"No, you're not," said Rodney. "But then, I'm not either; so forget it."

"You are not cheerful," said Philip. "I am very sorry. What is the matter, then?"

"Nothing I won't get over," said Rodney. "There isn't much that doesn't pass."

"Perhaps," said Philip Liu. "But there are some things which cannot pass." And Rodney knew that Philip was thinking about his face. He had probably been brooding all that day on the disgrace which had been put upon him.

"You went to missionary school, didn't you?" said Rodney. "You've heard about hell, haven't you, Phil? You can make your own mind a little hell if you think too much. Forget about it!"

"I am very sorry," said Philip Liu. "There are things one can't forget."

"You can if you try," said Rodney Jones.

Philip moved his ivory face. His large eyes were expressive, but Rodney could not tell what they expressed.

"Perhaps," said Philip, "I do not want to forget."

"I'd make an honest effort if I were you," said Rodney. "Why isn't any one living in the temple?"

"Who knows?" said Philip sadly. "China is so superstitious. They say the abbot hanged himself there thirty years ago. And then there are the foxes. The luck is very bad."

"Everybody has bad luck," said Rodney. "Cheer up, Phil."

"You are very kind," said Philip Liu. "Thank you very much. Yes, everybody has bad luck."

"Yes," said Rodney, "and there's a time and a place for everything."

"Yes," said Philip Liu. "That is very comforting. There is a time and a place for everything." Then a thought must have struck him. "It is easier for you," he added. "You have a few simple standards. I know them, but I cannot use them always, if you see what I mean, because I have the other standards. It is very confusing sometimes. Do you see what I mean?"

Rodney saw what he had seen before—the pathos of Philip Liu.

"That's the trouble with a lot of you boys," he said. "You try to swallow everything that's foreign. And then you try to be yourselves and you can't be. It isn't your fault, Phil. It's life."

"Thank you," said Philip Liu. "You have phrased it very well, but—" He looked toward the hill and then toward the walls of Ho Hsien and the walls were growing dimmer in the dusty air. "It is very difficult sometimes. I am afraid luncheon will be quite late. It is already two o'clock."

Rodney looked at his wrist watch, surprised. The bargaining for the Ming Yellow had taken much longer than he had thought. Then he looked back over his shoulder and noticed that Liang was riding just ten yards behind him. Liang was looking at the hill also, with a patient, incurious glance. Neither Rodney or Philip spoke much after that. It was the way it had been with Mel Newall, Rodney thought. They had stopped their talking because there was nothing more to say, because words and personalities had somehow dried up hopelessly beneath the Chinese sun. Then they were at the bottom of the hill.

The walls of the temple rose on a slope a hundred yards or so above them. The stucco was falling from the walls, and there were gaping holes in the rotting roofs. The upper structure of the bell tower and the drum tower were already falling in. The stone-paved road curved itself up the hill toward the deserted gate. They were approaching a lonely ruin which had all the sadness of desertion. Rodney glanced at Philip Liu quickly. Philip's eyes were on the temple wall.

"How did you find out about this place, Philip?" Rodney asked.

Philip Liu's answer was careless and his mood seemed light again. "I've often ridden out this way," he said. "I enjoy examining the interesting landmarks. And the pool is very interesting."

A thought crossed Rodney's mind—a memory. "You suggested that we go on a picnic last night, didn't you, Philip?" he inquired.

Philip Liu smiled. "So I did," he answered. "I like picnics, don't you? And your man Liang does things so very well." The conversation tinkled like brittle glass, and it did not return to Rodney's memory until later. The stocky little ponies had finished their climb up the winding stone road and they were through the temple gate. Rodney Jones reined up his horse.

"Well," he said, "it must have been a grand place once."

Philip Liu did not answer. They were in the wide temple court where parched grass was growing between the square bricks of the pavement. The gaping windows of low temple buildings made a quadrangle about them like an arena of sightless eyes. A pair of worn marble lions crouched snarling at them as they guarded the steps of the building which would house the Buddha. Grotesque figures on the hips of the tiled roofs glared down at them dumbly, and the sound of their voices and the horses' hoofs only accentuated a sadder, deeper silence that was shut in by the moldering walls. The temple must have been a marvelous place once. It reminded him of the impermanence of China and of the lavishness of China which allowed such a place to fall to ruin. It reminded him that labor was very cheap and that time and effort meant nothing or almost nothing in the scroll of Chinese history, where succeeding dynasties had destroyed old monuments in a perpetual confidence that finer ones could be made. Given a few more years of winter and of rain, and the temple roofs would fall upon the mud-made gods, now that their worshipers had left them. The richness and the profusion of carving on the beams above the temple porches, the beautiful designs on the windows, were disintegrating into mockery. Everyone must have had some sense of this, for the voices of the party unintentionally grew low, and Rodney saw that Liang and the two servant boys who were with him, and the horse boys were not comfortable. Philip Liu was the only one who seemed to be at ease in the temple court. The boys were leading the horses under the shadow of a side porch and were tying them to the wooden pillars.

"The pool is in the other court," said Philip Liu, "if you will please come this way."

It was easy enough to forget the desolation of the temple, once one saw the other court. Another quadrangle of ruined buildings surrounded it, but the melancholy was dissipated by a sound of running water, which made the ruined courtyard half stately and half gay. In the center of the court a rectangular sheet of water shone coolly like a jewel, set in a rectangle of moss-covered marble blocks. The courtyard itself was very cool from the shade of four enormous ginkgo trees which rose green above the buildings from the spots where they had been planted by the pious monks of some other long-forgotten temple, to judge from their huge girth, a good six hundred years ago. The hot sun came through their leaves in greenish-tinted light that sparkled playfully on the still cool waters of the pool. The pool and the trees were beyond all time and ruin, and everything was right, once they heard the water pouring into the pool from a marble dragon's mouth. If Rodney Jones had any thought that their presence was a desecration to that stillness, Paul Steuben had no such idea. With an inane whoop of pleasure he darted through the sagging doors of one of the buildings.

"Say," he shouted, "you ought to see the god in there!"

But no one wished to see the god, Paul Steuben least of all. He was out in less than a minute in a pair of shorts and was plunging into the pool. Then every one was laughing and talking, and the boys were making a table of the broken door and laying a white cloth over it. Paul Steuben had his swim and Philip Liu his way.

## CHAPTER XIV

Rodney Jones looked at his watch again. Time was running fast in that place which was beyond all time. Time was running fast, so that he never accounted carefully for the next measured interval. After lunch he sat with his back against one of the trees, looking at the pool, and he must have been close to dozing when he heard Mel Newall speak to him.

"Paul is going into the pool again," she said. "Would you like to walk around?"

Mr. Newall was leaning against another tree, dozing. Two boys were packing up the napkins and the plates and Philip Liu had disappeared. As Rodney rose, he looked at his wrist watch to find that it was nearly five o'clock. He only remembered those details later.

"Thanks, I'd like to walk around," he said. "The sun will be lower in a little while, and then we can start home. Where's Liu?"

"He said he was looking at the view," Mel Newall answered. "I'd like to see that big building over there, but it's too quiet to see alone." She was pointing to one of the larger buildings which made a barrier between them and the other court.

As Rodney walked beside her toward it, he could understand what she meant, for the building had the passive silence of desertion, and its central door, which gaped open behind a row of weather-beaten columns, was an entrance to a forbidding place. They could hear Paul splashing behind them in the pool, but the noises he made grew fainter as they walked toward the door without speaking.

Then they were inside in the twilight and shadow of the enormous hall. The great Buddha still sat on his altar in the center, with his wise men still holding court around the walls. Their motionless figures were ghostly in the half light.

"You're in the hall of the Buddha," Rodney found himself saying, and the sight of the figures had drawn them close together, like children trespassing in a place where they did not belong. "The gods will stay here until everything falls down," Rodney explained. "Mud gods." He looked up curiously into the great face of the Buddha where he sat with his Mona Lisa smile. "Their paint has come off them badly," he said casually, "but the figures are good. I should say they are about two hundred years old."

She moved so close to him that her shoulder touched his, and he did not believe that she was aware of his nearness because she did not move away. "They're terrible in here alone," she said. "Rodney—" even in the half light he could see that her eyes had grown dark and deep. "Have you noticed anything queer?"

Rodney remembered that he felt very queerly then in a dozen different ways. "What do you mean—queer?" he asked.

"There's been something about to-day, all day— Rodney, do you ever feel afraid without knowing exactly why?"

"Yes," said Rodney. "You don't feel afraid now, do you?" She had brought his own uneasiness back to him again. "There's nothing to be afraid of here." He took her hand and she did not take hers away.

"It isn't here," she said, "it's everywhere."

But Rodney had forgotten his own uneasiness because he was holding Mel Newall's hand. Because he was holding her hand, everything that had happened seemed logical and perfect. "Forget it," he said softly, "forget it, Beautiful."

"We'd better be going back, I suppose," she said.



"All right," he answered, "Beautiful." And then another thought moved him. "That is, if you want to go," he added. "Why do you want to go?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Habit, I suppose."

Rodney spoke again and there was a catch in his voice.

"It isn't very kind of you to take me in here," he said. "You haven't been very kind lately—just talking to me, I mean. You needn't say you don't know the way I feel about you, because of course you do. And I don't blame you for the way you feel about me. There's nothing I can give you, and you're going to marry Steuben. It isn't kind of you, Mel."

Her voice came to him through the shadows.

"Perhaps I didn't mean to be kind," she said.

"No," said Rodney, "I don't suppose you did. What is it you want? Do you want the satisfaction of having me speak to you honestly, so you can throw me down? I'll do it, if you want to, and you can die of laughing. I love you. You've heard me say it before, and you thought I didn't mean it. I've always loved you. Now you've made me make a fool of myself. Does it do you any good?"

"I don't know what it does," she said, "I really wish I knew. I wish—Rodney, I'm afraid. Everything I've always thought ... Rodney—" She had clutched at his arm. There was no doubt that she was frightened then.

"Rodney, did you hear that? There are men in the yard outside. Men and horses coming into the yard."

There was no reason to ask Rodney if he had heard, for the sound had come to him suddenly like a clap of thunder, and the walls of the temple enclosure magnified the sound. Outside, just beyond the hall of the great Buddha, was a clatter of hoofs and loud Chinese voices that rose in a quick crescendo.

A voice was bawling out, "Where are they, then?" And another voice answered ripplingly and pleasantly. The voice was Philip Liu's.

"Everything is quite all right. They are by the pool."

Rodney Jones stood motionless and his hand gripped Mel Newall's tight.

"What is it, Rodney?" she was whispering. And Rodney Jones felt panic rising in him.

"Lord knows what it is," he answered, "but we'd better go and see."

The door which was facing the outer court was half open and he pushed his way through it, still holding Mel Newall's hand. The scene in the outer court flashed on him and struck him like a blow. It struck him so unexpectedly that it was hard to think. He only knew that things were very bad, that the worst which he had ever anticipated had befallen them. There were a dozen horsemen in the courtyard, dingy, ragged-looking men carrying rifles and cartridge bandoliers with knives and pistols stuck in their sashes. The sight of them was like a bolt of lightning and made him stand stock-still. The details of the scene etched themselves on his mind like acid—the white clearness of the sunlight, the grass in the pavement, the grass on the tiled roofs, the gaping doors and windows, and then the horsemen in the center of the court. The men were sliding off their horses, talking excitedly. Some one was shouting an order, and five men were hurrying around the building where he was standing toward the pool. Rodney Jones knew the clay-faced man who was leading them. It was his old friend, the Golden-haired Rat. He blinked and looked at the court again. A single Chinese was still sitting on a horse, with his hands tied behind him. It was Mr. Wong. A mule was standing beside Wong's horse, with three hampers strapped on the saddle—the Ming Yellow hampers—and in the foreground, just before the temple steps, was Hei Ch'i, still in his shabby Colonel's uniform, exchanging quick words through his protruding teeth with Philip Liu.

Rodney's mind was moving in the helpless panic of one's mind in a dream. Mel Newall was pulling at his arm.

"Who are they?" she was asking. "What are they doing?"

Rodney Jones began to laugh, but he did not know he was laughing until he started.

"Bandits, Beautiful," he said. "That's who they are—fun-loving bandits, come to make a call. I wasn't so wrong in being careful, after all. Philip Liu has sold us out." Then he knew he did not want her to be frightened. "Don't be frightened," he said, "Beautiful."

"I'm not," she said, "not yet. Is there anything to do?"

The comedy of the scene struck Rodney when Mel asked if there was anything to do. They could not have been standing there for more than ten seconds, but by that time Rodney could see everything clearly. It did no good to be bitter and he had enough pride not to show fear, if only because of the girl who was standing near him.

"Of course we might call the nearest policeman," he said, "but there isn't any policeman. There is no law in China, but natural forces, Beautiful. Just don't let them think you're afraid of them. You wait here." And he walked down the steps into the courtyard with his face wrinkled in a cordial smile. Still smiling, he walked slowly toward Hei Ch'i and Philip Liu, and no one stopped him.

Philip Liu and Hei Ch'i turned toward him solemnly, as though nothing unusual had occurred. "Hello, boy scout," said Rodney to Philip. "So you sold us out, did you?" And he bowed to Hei Ch'i. "You're very fortunate to-day, oh, big brother," he said. "I suppose you're leaving the general now."

Hei Ch'i raised his upper lip and laughed without replying and glanced at Philip Liu. Philip was the one who answered, with an excitement and a sort of embarrassment which he could not entirely suppress.

"I am very sorry," he said; "really, I am very sorry."

"I'll bet you are," said Rodney. "It must be hard on you."

"It is hard," said Philip Liu frankly, "but what else could I do? The general slapped my face."

Rodney Jones' smile grew broader at the irony of Philip Liu. Philip's logic was perfect. The general had slapped his face!

"Of course," said Rodney, "you took the only step possible. Don't worry. I understand."

"Thank you," said Philip Liu. "I'm so glad you understand."

"You couldn't—" Rodney hesitated politely, "you couldn't give me some vague idea of what Mr. Hei Ch'i proposes to do, now that we're all here together?"

Hei Ch'i eyed him coolly. "Tell him," he answered; "it will do no harm."

And Philip's rippling voice sounded above the noise of horses and the voices in the court. "Everything will be quite all right. Hei Ch'i will handle the strangers gently. He was dissatisfied with my uncle's terms, you see. It occurred to him that ransom would be more profitable. I was glad to help him because I was, of course, furious with my uncle. Hei Ch'i had these men near by. He seized Mr. Wong and the Ming Yellow. We will stay here until dusk, and then ride to Hei Ch'i's main body. You see, everything is all right. I do not think my uncle will slap my face again."

Rodney looked at his wrist watch and Philip read his thoughts.

"There is no need to worry about the general. He feels that everything has gone so well that he is quite deceived, I think. We have an hour here and then we'll be moving."

Hei Ch'i's eyes were on Rodney's watch. "That is a nice watch you have. Give it to me!" he said.

Rodney unstrapped it from his wrist. "Certainly," he answered, "big brother. Do not laugh at this small present."

"Thank you," Hei Ch'i answered. "Your thoughtfulness is moving."

Rodney could believe that his mind had been split into two equal parts. He could see himself with half his mind carrying on a grotesque dialogue, while the other half was struggling with anxiety and fear. He looked at the men around him. With the exception of Philip Liu and Hei Ch'i, there was not a face that was not abysmally stupid and degenerate. Those bandits were the worst dregs of a criminal class, but they were cheerful and strong and active. From the corner of his eye he could see them tying up Liang and the servants and the horse boys, while Hei Ch'i stood in the center of the court looking calmly on, so sure of himself that he did not resent Rodney's presence.

There was a chatter of high voices from the direction of the pool which told Rodney that a new phase in the comedy was starting. The Golden-haired Rat and his men were appearing with Mr. Newall and with Paul Steuben, who was barefoot, clad only in his shirt and riding breeches. The Golden-haired Rat was prodding Paul Steuben in the small of the back with a Luger automatic, and Paul Steuben's mind was working in a daze.

"What the hell is this all about?" he called across the court.

"Keep cheerful," Rodney called back. "Only bandits, Paul!"

"Bandits?" said Mr. Newall. The old man seemed to take the matter philosophically.

"Yes," said Rodney, "they've got you and the Ming Yellow, now. Paul, I hope you liked your swim!"

But Paul Steuben had not heard him. He was staring toward the steps of the building that housed the Buddha. "Damn you!" he roared out suddenly. "Let that girl alone!"

One of Hei Ch'i's men, a gawky boy with a lopsided face, had Mel Newall by the arm and was dragging her down the steps and Rodney started toward them.

"Don't mind him," he said; "it's all right, Mel." But it was not all right.

In spite of the automatic which was prodding him in the back, Paul Steuben had broken free and was running across the court.

"Stop, you damn fool!" shouted Rodney. "Do you want to kill us all?" But Paul Steuben did not stop. It seemed to Rodney that everything else had stopped, that every one stood irresolutely watching Paul Steuben dart across that space. The irresolution was comprehensible, because the man's action had been entirely out of order, without reason and without form. Rodney remembered that even violence had form in China. He had a glimpse of the Golden-haired Rat who still held his automatic without pulling the trigger because of the madness of Paul Steuben's act. The whole thing, however, could not have taken more than two seconds, before Paul Steuben had clamped a hand on the neck of the man who was holding Mel Newall, had snatched him to one side, and had smashed him in the face. Then the man was on his back, his face a bloody smear, and Paul Steuben was standing over him.

His time of grace was over then. There was a chatter of astonished indignant voices. The Golden-haired Rat was raising his pistol, and two of the men were unslinging their carbines. Paul Steuben was standing in the valley of the shadow. He would be dead in another moment and Rodney could think of only one way of saving him. He burst into a shout of laughter. He was shocked at the genuineness of his own mirth, because it must have been close to hysteria, and he was not the only one who was surprised. He saw bewilderment in the face turned toward him and uncertainty.

Hei Ch'i was looking at him uncertainly.

"That was funny, was it not?" Rodney said to him. "The big one is so very strong that he is very comical. Did you observe how humorous it was—the way he hit the man?"

Before Hei Ch'i could answer, Rodney skipped over to Paul Steuben and gave him a playful kick. "Laugh, you damn

fool," he whispered, "laugh, if you don't want to die."

The heat of Paul's anger must have cooled by then. He must have seen what Rodney had seen, because he turned around and grinned. The bandit had pulled himself onto his elbow and Rodney laughed more loudly.

"Look at him," he said to Hei Ch'i. "Is he not very amusing?"

As a matter of fact, Paul Steuben was amusing in an ugly, farcical way. His size and his combination of a scowl and a smile made him seem like a clown in a Chinese play, and something made the tension snap. Some one else began to laugh and Philip Liu began to laugh. Hei Ch'i himself smiled dubiously.

"Yes, he is a great clown," he said. "Do not touch him and we will see another very humorous thing." He watched his man rising from the pavement and wiping the blood from his face.

"Chin Mao Shu," Hei Ch'i called. The Golden-haired Rat moved forward. "Who is the man who spied on you, when you talked with Mr. Liu? Strip him and bring him here. Get Chou to bring his whip."

A wave of nausea swept over Rodney Jones, for he understood what was to happen. Two men were dragging Liang into the center of the court. They had stripped him to the waist, as a third man stood behind him with a thonged whip. Hei Ch'i smiled at Rodney Jones.

"I have heard," he said, "that this man was officious. I'm sorry we have not the time to think of some more interesting punishment, but I should like to have you and your friends understand that this is a serious business."

"I'll tell them," Rodney Jones tried to keep his voice level under Hei Ch'i's probing stare, because he knew that the man was trying to make him afraid. "There is no need for that."

"Lash him!" said Hei Ch'i.

The two men had jerked Liang's arms out straight and the third whirled up the whip. There was a muffled cry and Liang's body gave a galvanized jerk; then it was still beneath the blows. The snap of the blows seemed to echo like thunder in the courtyard and Rodney Jones turned to Paul Steuben in his helpless anger.

"You see," he said, "That's all the good you did!" And then he saw Mel Newall looking ashy white. She had turned toward him as he spoke.

"Mel," he said, "you don't have to look at that!" And the next thing he knew, his arms were around her. She was sobbing, her head upon his shoulder.

"Rodney," she sobbed.

"Don't look," he said. "It will be over in a minute. You'll be all right, Mel. I'll see you'll be all right."

"Rodney," she sobbed, "thank God you're here, and please don't let me go."

"If you feel that way," Rodney answered, his voice steady again, "I'd rather be here than anywhere else. Not that it makes much difference. There's nothing we can do."

Liang's body was limp and any one could see that he no longer felt the blows. "Stop!" said Hei Ch'i and his eyes were back on Rodney's.

"Why don't you laugh?" he inquired. "That was very funny, wasn't it? Perhaps that will teach you and your people to behave. And now—" he raised his arm.

Rodney felt a hand on his shoulder and a hot breath on his neck. Three bandits with their rifles ready were closing in on Paul Steuben.

"Put these people in a side room," Hei Ch'i directed, "and place a guard at the door, and—wait." His slowly moving, probing eyes turned on Philip Liu, who was still standing near him. "Take this worthless half devil in with them," he said.

Philip Liu stood with one of his hands in a bulging pocket and Rodney noticed that the Golden-haired Rat had moved from behind Philip. Philip seemed to be standing in the center of a stage, somewhat pale, but tranquil and not at all surprised. Rodney forgot himself in his interest at that new turn.

"I do not understand," said Philip Liu.

"I shall be glad to make you understand," Hei Ch'i replied. "You have done your work and I am through with you. You're of no further use to me."

"Or you to me," said Philip Liu.

The thing that followed next was so unexpected that Rodney's eye could not follow it. There were two pistol shots in quick succession, so close to him that he jumped. He heard the Golden-haired Rat shouting out, "Stay still, stay still! He was a hard man. We will divide the money!"

Philip Liu was standing with an automatic pistol smoking in his hand, watching Hei Ch'i who lay on the stones, sprawled dead upon his face. The men had gathered about in a circle, with a stupid sort of fascination.

"Stand back!" the Golden-haired Rat was calling. "Every one of you will have a hundred dollars extra, as Mr. Liu has promised you. I am your leader now. Does any one not believe it?"

There was no longer any uncertainty in Rodney's mind that the matter had been prearranged and that Philip Liu's hand had been in it. He spoke to Philip almost cordially. It seemed the natural thing to do, since Philip was standing close beside him.

"That was very neat, Philip," he said. "I said you were first-rate." He had noticed that Philip was always pleased by flattery, and Philip was true to form.

"Thank you," said Philip. "I was a little afraid of this. Hei Ch'i was not a nice man."

"No," said Rodney, "he wasn't very nice."

"And now," said Philip patiently, "if you will please all step into the side room and wait, I shall see you in a few moments. And please," he turned to Mr. Newall politely, "please be composed, Mr. Newall. These matters occasionally happen. Every reasonable care will be taken of you," and he gave a sharp order in Chinese. "Take these people into the room. There's been enough noise here."

A rifle butt was jammed into the small of Rodney's back. They were all being herded into a bare box of a room at the side of the court, where a bandit stood with his rifle outside the door. Then the door was slammed on them and the four of them stood facing each other, silently because there seemed to be nothing to say.

## CHAPTER XV

Mel Newall sank down suddenly on the *kang* at the end of the room. She was no longer crying, but she looked tired. Mr. Newall walked over and sat beside her. "I'm sorry, Mel," he said.

"It doesn't do any good to be sorry," she said. "We're here, aren't we?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "we're here because we're here."

"Shut up!" Paul Steuben said. "They haven't finished with us yet, have they? Don't worry, Mel. I'll get you out of this."

Rodney moved to the rotting window and looked out into the court. Except for the soldier by the door and two men watching from the walls, all the others were gathered in a circle, talking earnestly with Philip Liu and the Golden-haired Rat.

Rodney Jones turned back to Paul Steuben. "You just missed being killed once to-day," he said. "Isn't that enough? Don't be a hero again until to-morrow!"

"You're a hell of a hero yourself, aren't you?" Paul Steuben snapped. "You didn't have the guts to raise your hand."

"That's true," Rodney answered him. "You see, I don't want to be a hero."

"Stop quarreling," Mel Newall said. "How much money do they want?"

Rodney sighed. "No doubt we'll hear," he said, "in a little while. Philip will be in with a proposition. If I know Philip, he'll want enough so that he can get ahead in the world, and he won't believe you until he gets it, either. And then you must think of these other boys. It may take months before we settle this."

Mr. Newall rubbed his hand across his chin and then he laughed silently. "That does seem difficult," he said. "When I left for China, the heart specialist gave me a year to live. I may fool 'em, after all!" The remark carried a strange impression at that time and in that place. It had the effect of a deep shock on Rodney Jones, for it explained a good deal about Mr. Newall. It explained his nervousness and the intensity of his desires and his frequent talk of time.

There seemed nothing to say for a moment and then Mel Newall spoke. "You never told me that, Father," she said. "You're joking, aren't you? It isn't true, is it?"

Mr. Newall laughed in his noiseless way. "That's why I brought the matter up," he said. "The doctor said a sudden shock would be sure to kill me. It seems to me I've had a sudden shock to-day, and I feel very well. I'm grateful to these boys. It's the first time I've felt relieved. I had an idea that I'd like to see something of life, and I've seen it, and now I've had a shock and I'm not dead. If it weren't for you, Mel, being here, I wouldn't mind this ransom business.... Jones, would twenty thousand dollars help? You told me not to bring any money, but I never travel without it. I've got twenty-one thousand dollars bills in the lining of my coat."

Rodney sighed. "And it's your idea to offer them, I suppose," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Newall vaguely. "Something like that. Frankly, I can't think of anything else."

Rodney shook his head. "You might as well be carrying dynamite," he answered. "They'll keep the money and keep you too. They've even got your Yellow."

"Listen, Jones," said Paul Steuben. "If Liu comes in here, we'll grab him."

"He won't want to be grabbed, Paul," Rodney said.

Paul Steuben's face grew red. "You know what you are?" he said deliberately. "You're a yellow-bellied coward. If you weren't a coward, we could clean them out of here."

Rodney grinned at him but for once Paul Steuben had made him angry.

"Hawthorne of the USA!" he said, "be quiet, I'm trying to think!"

He looked out the window and turned back.

"Here comes Philip Liu! It seems to me," he continued softly, "there's only one play we can make." He could hear Philip Liu's boot heels ring across the pavement and his heart fluttered inside him. "Steuben," he said, "I may be yellow, but I have a request to make. You let me talk to Philip for a minute first, and when I'm through, you can do anything you like. It won't matter much after that."

Philip Liu was speaking to the soldier at the door. Then the door opened and closed, and Philip was standing against it with his automatic pistol in his hand, speaking in his informative way, as though nothing at all had happened.

"I have a proposal to make," he said. "We've fixed on a sum of money, outside. I think it is a reasonable sum, considering. Five hundred thousand dollars gold. These men are going to take you somewhere and hide you until you can get the money. I think," he smiled agreeably, "that I can arrange it very quickly. I'm sorry for this—really very sorry.... Don't move, please, Mr. Steuben. I'm a very good shot."

It seemed to Rodney Jones that Philip Liu had never seemed more fantastically impossible. It was like a dream to see him with the pistol in his slender yellowish hand. Rodney was on his feet, perhaps four steps away.

"Are you really sorry, Phil?" he said.

"Yes," said Philip Liu. "I really am sorry. You see—"

"You see, you do get things mixed up, don't you?" said Rodney Jones.

"No," said Philip Liu, "there is nothing mixed up now, I think. Please, please don't move."

Rodney took two paces deliberately toward Philip.

"That's the trouble," he said. "Use your mind. You wouldn't dare to kill me, Phil—not here, where every one could see, because then you'd have to kill every one else, and then you couldn't show your face again, money or no money. You're in a hot spot, Philip, hotter than you think. Think it over for a minute."

Rodney took another step forward.

"I don't think you dare face the consequences of this sort of murder, Phil. Do you want me to tell you why? Because you're all mixed up. You're a University of Pennsylvania boy—just a boy scout at bottom."

Rodney Jones moved suddenly. He whipped out his hand and grabbed Philip by the wrist and forced his wrist down gently, until the pistol pointed at the floor.

"Don't pull that trigger, Phil," he said softly, "and don't make any noise. Do you remember what I said to you a while ago? If you started any funny business, Paul Steuben would break your neck. He'll break it, all right, if you don't keep quiet. And if you do, I'll look out for you, because I like you, Phil. You're a good sport in your way. I said you were number one."

For a moment the place was completely still. Philip Liu was staring stolidly into Rodney's face. Then the calmness of his features broke suddenly and he spoke very gently.

"You are quite right—I did not understand. I couldn't kill you, Rodney Jones."

"No," said Rodney quietly, "because you've had too damn much foreign education, Phil."

Philip Liu spoke again. "You're a very brave man, Mr. Jones," he said, "but what will you do now?"

"You can let Mr. Steuben take your gun," said Rodney. "He's had a hankering for it and you won't need it any more. Mind you, this is going to be all right, Phil. No matter what happens, you won't get hurt. Give Mr. Steuben your gun and then tell the guard in your best Chinese to let me walk out of this door. I'm going to talk to the Golden-haired Rat while you can sit here quietly conversing with Mr. Newall and Miss Newall about Chinese poetry. I want you to trust me,

Philip. There's a bare possibility that everything will be arranged."

Rodney Jones put his hands in his pockets carefully, because his hands had begun to shake, from the reaction which followed that breakdown of Philip Liu. He hated himself for that nervousness, for he could not show a trembling hand or an instant of uncertainty in what he proposed to do next.

He saw them staring at him strangely, all wearing the same expressions. Paul Steuben was holding Philip Liu tightly by the collar and pressing the muzzle of Philip's automatic on the back of his neck.

"Be gentle with him, Paul," said Rodney. "You heard me give him my word. Philip, do as I told you. Tell that guard nicely to let me go past. Say I am carrying a message for you."

Philip Liu began speaking in his native tongue, and Rodney, listening carefully, could not detect a flaw in his tone as Philip gave the order to the guard.

"Rodney," said Mel Newall suddenly, "where are you going? You can't go outside. They'll kill you."

He was pleased that she spoke to him because he felt the tremor leave his hands. "I'm not entirely sure they will," he answered. "Philip didn't kill me, did he? But if I don't come back—" he paused, with an intense desire to think of something worth-while to say, but he could think of nothing, "if I don't," he ended, "let us all set it down to an interesting and broadening experience."

"Jones," said Paul Steuben diffidently, "don't you want this gun?"

"No, Paul," Rodney answered patiently. "See if you can get small arms out of your mind for a little while. Just remember what I told you earlier. There are four hundred and fifty million people in China," and Rodney Jones opened the door of the room.

The guard let him pass incuriously. The strange informality which he had always observed in China had asserted itself among the men in the courtyard. Three or four were working among the horses, and some others were watching the Chinese prisoners. Chin Mao Shu was talking to some others, but no one seemed to be disturbed by the appearance of Rodney Jones.

He did nothing on his part to arouse any doubts. He walked slowly, as though everything was perfectly natural; he paused and looked at the body of Hei Ch'i, which was still lying on the pavement. He even went so far as to bend forward and to look at the dead man's left wrist, but some one had been ahead of him, and his wrist watch was already in other hands. He straightened up, looked at the sky and lighted a cigarette. The shadows in the courtyard were very long and the sun was already dropping behind the hills. He blew a cloud of cigarette smoke and walked straight to the Golden-haired Rat.

The Rat was sitting on a stone which had been designed to support a pole in some religious ceremony. He gazed up at Rodney from his sitting posture without curiosity, seemingly without any emotion.

"Liu has sent you with a message," he said in his execrable dialect. "Tell me the message quickly. It is nearly time to go."

Rodney Jones weighed his answer carefully, because he knew that a good deal depended on it. Several of the Golden-haired Rat's half-disciplined followers had already gathered around them curiously, drawn by that social Chinese desire to listen to conversation.

"I'm afraid," said Rodney, he smiled cordially down on the Golden-haired Rat, "that it is nearly time for you to die. Me, perhaps—you certainly, big brother. No, do not blame me. I am not the one who is going to kill you, but have you really ever trusted Liu?"

The Golden-haired Rat stood up and Rodney Jones drew a deep breath, because his words had worked. His words had molded the clay of the other's features into a lively intelligence. "*Shama?*" the Golden-haired Rat said sharply.



"What is it? What?"

Rodney, still smiling, offered him a cigarette. He was thinking of his words carefully. The circle of the bandits about them was growing and he knew that any word he said might be too much.

"Will you have a cigarette?" he said. "It was most kind of you and of your very good fellows not to have taken them from me. It shows that you are a reasonable and a thoughtful man, with a very great mind. No mind like yours could entirely trust Mr. Liu. I have no desire to see you fellows killed, because all men are brothers—what? Will any one else have a cigarette?"

The Golden-haired Rat reached out a grimy hand and took a cigarette doubtfully. "*Shama!*" he said again. "Have you heard something?"

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, and he allowed his voice to grow louder, "but nothing which is good for you. Consider now; your able mind will tell you I am right. Liu has killed Hei Ch'i. That was very clever and that was understood. Whom did he kill him for? For himself? I think not, brother. For you? I think not, brother. You seriously consider that Philip Liu proposes to become an outlaw? I think not, brother. Liu is too clever for that. Think of it this way and you will understand."

The Golden-haired Rat gave a grunt. His face was growing plastic with his thoughts and Rodney knew that his guess was right. Like himself, the Golden-haired Rat had had his doubts. He had not trusted Philip Liu. "Consider what?" he said.

Rodney pointed to the center of the court, to the body of Hei Ch'i. "We both know, do we not," he explained, "that the dead one there and General Wu had a falling out this morning over price." Rodney did not know it but he guessed it, and he saw that his guess was right. "The general could not kill that one there, because they were in brotherhood, as Hei Ch'i told me himself. You understand now about Liu? I see you understand. General Wu has been ready for this. He has known everything which has occurred. General Wu's hands are closing on you. You will die at dusk, I think, if you are not careful." It was not difficult to tell what the Golden-haired Rat was thinking, for the thoughts moved slowly across his face.

The men in the circle began to murmur.

"A trap," some one was saying; "he is speaking of a trap."

"Yes," said Rodney Jones, "a trap, of course. Has not this all seemed too easy? Soldiers were sent out behind this hill in the early morning—cavalry and machine guns. They will surround this place in half an hour, if they have not already."

"They will?" inquired the Golden-haired Rat. "You really think they will?"

Rodney smiled at him and lighted a cigarette. Now that he had spoken of the soldiers, he could almost believe they were there himself. He had almost succeeded in convincing himself by his own earnestness that his game of bluff was true. He had lost his nervousness in the cogency of his own reasoning, and he knew that words were better in China than a battery of artillery.

"What do you think?" said Rodney. "Use your own reason, brother. You're entirely master here. If you ask a humble one like me, I think you will have to scatter and ride hard to get away. There will be no chance to take prisoners with you. Or else you can stay here and be killed. That is for you to choose."

Lights were creeping behind the Golden-haired Rat's filmy eyes. "Why do you tell me this?" he said. "What does this mean to you?"

"It means I do not wish to be killed," said Rodney promptly. "If there is any fighting here. We have had enough trouble to-day, I think. And consider one thing more. Do you, who are a great man now, want trouble with General Wu? You will be in command over Hei Ch'i's men, will you not? If you ride out of here quickly, you may start negotiations

with the general. You may be a very rich man instead of a dead one, but I certainly should go." Rodney looked up at the sun again. "But, of course," he ended, "that is up to you. You may make your choice."

The Golden-haired Rat stared at him for a second with the little lights dancing more quickly behind his eyes. "How did you get out here?" he asked harshly. "That man Liu never let you out here so that you could tell me this."

Rodney glanced toward the room where the sentry was still standing. "Certainly not," he said. "Liu is a prisoner inside there. I am giving you this chance because we do not wish any further trouble. I shall say a word for you to General Wu, because I admire your capacity very much indeed."

The Golden-haired Rat glanced across the court.

"I think I shall have something to say to Liu," he said.

Rodney spoke quickly.

"It would be a great mistake, I think. In your position, you want no trouble with General Wu."

The Golden-haired Rat did not answer for awhile. He stood looking at Rodney Jones with the lights still dancing in his eyes. "You're either lying," he said suddenly, "like a very clever man, or else you are telling the truth."

Rodney Jones shrugged his shoulders. "It is up to you to decide which," he answered. "It will not take very long to find out, I think."

The Golden-haired Rat looked at the sky; then he suddenly barked out an order.

"Saddle and mount!" he shouted. "We are leaving here!" and he looked back at Rodney Jones thoughtfully. "You are right," he said. "Whether you tell the truth or not, I think I will be leaving."

"I should," said Rodney, "if I were you."

Those men were used to moving quickly. The Rat's horse was being led to him already. "Is there anything else you want?" he asked.

Rodney Jones was amazed at his own effrontery, but the request he made seemed a natural sequence to that dialogue, where murder and logic were mixed so curiously together.

"Some one took my watch from the dead man's wrist," he said. "I should like it back, if it is not too much bother."

The Golden-haired Rat's voice rose to a shout. "Give this Excellent One back his watch," he said. And ten seconds later the wrist watch was in Rodney's hands, and half a minute later the Golden-haired Rat and his men were gone.

They had gone in a clatter of hoofs, like figures in a nightmare, leaving Rodney Jones standing in the center of the temple court, with the dead body of Hei Ch'i lying on its face. They had gone on a wave of Rodney Jones' verbosity, but on the whole that ending was not strange. He remembered again that China was a place of attitudes and words, where death and humor went very close together, and where talk was often the substitute for death. They had gone and they had taken nothing. The ponies were still tied to the pillars of the building, and Mr. Wong and the servants were tied beside the horses. Rodney Jones took a penknife from his pocket and cut the bonds of Mr. Wong.

"They have gone, I think," he said. And Mr. Wong showed no surprise.

He rubbed his wrists carefully. "We've been fortunate," he replied. "There has been bandit trouble in China for two thousand years, though it is more acute now perhaps. I see they have not taken the Ming Yellow. Fortunately, I believe that it is entirely intact."

Rodney Jones was cutting the servants loose. "Get ready to leave at once," he was saying. "Get some whisky here and give it to Liang." He bent over Liang for a moment and touched his hand. "You were right," he said, "and I was

wrong. This has been very dangerous."

Liang groaned and sat up, with that amazing resiliency of his race which makes a Chinese capable of enduring the physical outrage that would lay a foreigner low. "I went to tell the general, Master," he said. "The general merely laughed. He did not believe."

"But he will when we get back," said Rodney. "You will have money for this. You will be too rich to work for me, Liang."

Then Rodney walked across the court and pulled open the door of the room where Mel and Mr. Newall and Paul Steuben and Philip Liu were sitting. The situation was beginning to amuse him then. The reflex of the strain which he had labored under was amusement. "And now," said Rodney, "we can all go home. The swimming picnic is nearly over, unless you'd like another quick dip, Paul.... Yes, Philip, your friends are gone. It seems the Golden-haired Rat did not trust you any more than I do, Philip. But don't worry; you're a hero, and no one's going to know you're not. You saved us when you killed Hei Ch'i."

Mr. Newall looked incredulous and Rodney could hardly blame him, because the whole affair was entirely beyond belief, now that it was over.

"You got 'em out?" Mr. Newall demanded. "How did you get them out?"

Rodney Jones shrugged his shoulders. "By bluff," he said, "bluff and conversation. I told them that Philip was turning them over to his uncle; that there were soldiers just behind the hill."

Philip Liu stood up because Paul Steuben no longer restrained him. "That was very good," he said. "I had not thought of that."

"If you hadn't," said Rodney cordially, "it's the only thing I know you haven't thought of, Phil. Perhaps we'd better be starting now. It's conceivable that the Golden-haired Rat might change his mind. Come on. The ponies are ready."

Then Mel Newall moved toward him and gave a little broken laugh. She seemed to have forgotten they were not alone, or else she did not care, because a moment later for a second time that day he found himself holding her in his arms. "Rodney," she was saying, and her words were far from steady, "you have so many bright ideas."

It did not seem to matter that they were not alone just then.

"Never as bright an idea as this, Beautiful," Rodney heard himself answering, and then Paul Steuben reminded them both that there were others in the room.

"Say," Paul said, "I didn't know this was going on. I didn't—" Paul was rubbing one hand through his shoebrush-hair and still holding Philip's automatic in the other.

"Paul," Mel Newall stammered, "I'm awfully sorry, Paul. I never thought—"

Paul Steuben opened his lips and closed them, and his blue eyes came into focus.

"It seems to me you did some thinking sometime," he remarked, "and I guess you don't look sorry either, Mel."

"I never thought," Mel Newall repeated, as though she had not heard him, "that this would ever happen, or be possible. It's something I never understood. Nothing with you or me was real—you know it, but neither of us would have known it without this. I never knew I could be so happy, Paul."

Paul Steuben opened his lips and closed them, and wrinkled up his forehead.

"Well," he said, "that's that."

"Yes," Mel Newall answered, "I'm afraid so, Paul."

Paul Steuben sighed.

"You said you could look out for yourself in China, Mel," he said, "Maybe you're right. At any rate, you've found a man who has more nerve than I have."

"No, Paul," said Rodney. "Not nerve, just loquacity, but you'll excuse me if I don't say any more. I'm rather surprised myself, Paul. I never knew that this or a lot of things could happen—but we'll have to hurry now. We'll just have time to make a farewell call on General Wu and I think he'd like to see us." Out in the courtyard, Rodney put an arm around Philip's shoulders. "Don't worry, Phil," he said. "You leave everything to me. You're going to be ace high." With the reaction that was on him, he felt kindly disposed to all the world and almost fond of Philip Liu.

## CHAPTER XVI

When he saw the gates of Ho Hsien again, when they were safe inside them, everything that had happened seemed unreal. Everything seemed to fall back into the strangeness of China, where a hundred sights and sounds each day were unbelievable. No part of it was his world or ever would be. That country always would be strange, remote like another planet, or like a new abstruse system of philosophy. Men's motives there were variable, for they always approached an end by a different way from his; and yet in some way the total was magnificent, like a thought which he strove to place into words, but could never completely grasp. He was dealing with an enigma which was superficially simple but basically beyond the province of his imagining. The Golden-haired Rat and Hei Ch'i and Philip Liu were part of it but they all seemed formless abstractions until he stood again in the reception room of General Wu.

General Wu's scar had grown redder and his eyes had snapped abruptly into focus like Paul Steuben's eyes. The five of them stood in front of him a little foolishly, while General Wu's fingers played with the edge of his Sam Brown belt.

"Sit down," said General Wu, and he waved to the stiff-backed chairs. "This was a very serious thing—please describe this trouble."

"Hei Ch'i," said Rodney. "He tried to take them all for ransom, and Philip shot Hei Ch'i. Then Philip told the rest that you were sending troops and Hei Ch'i's men took fright and ran. We are deeply obliged to your nephew, general."

General Wu sat down heavily and bestowed on Philip a deliberate and interested glance.

"I wish I could speak in English good," he said. "You must explain to the others that this is a deep humiliation to me. This is something which happened beyond my planning. I should not have done a thing like this. I hope you understand."

"Certainly," said Rodney, "you would not resort to such methods."

General Wu folded his hands across his stomach.

"No," he said, "very fortunately, I do not have to now. I am glad you comprehend. You have been treated very badly but every care will be taken to get you out from here in complete safety to-morrow. You must feel no further worry." He paused and his eyes grew narrower and he looked up toward the ceiling of his reception room. "It helps that Hei Ch'i is dead," he remarked. "I never liked the fellow." Then some anxiety made his forehead wrinkle. "The Ming Yellow is back, I hope?"

"Yes," said Rodney. "It is here. All of it is here."

General Wu smiled. "Excellent," he said. "Then there is no difficulty at all. How nicely it ends, does it not? With all of us quite happy. Mr. Newall has not changed his mind about the Ming Yellow, I hope."

"No," said Rodney quickly, "why should he? Of course, the bargain stands. He only wishes to get safely away from here. I think he grows a little tired of China."

General Wu looked sympathetically pained. "I am so very sorry," he said, "that your great man should have suffered pain through my poor stupidity. Let him come back in a few years and he will find that things are very different. If the five central provinces can be welded together; if we can organize the resources of the North China plain and hold them all together in a strong government, then South China will come in without our worrying. He will see a different place, with motor roads and factories. There will be no fellows like Hei Ch'i to bother you or Mr. Newall then."

Rodney listened to the General's words as they rang through the room with a brave and deep conviction. Were they words or were they facts? He could not tell which, for it seemed to him that half the deeds of China dissipated into words. General Wu was watching him, heavy-faced, with his narrow eyes alert, and Rodney turned the subject, because he had heard too many war lords speak of a newer, better China.

"We are very grateful to your nephew," he remarked. "Philip was very competent and very, very brave."

Before he answered, General Wu's heavy head turned in the direction of Philip Liu. Rodney was never entirely sure, but it seemed to him that the General's heavy mouth moved slightly and that his thin eyes blinked.

"How nice," said the General, "how very, very nice. He did the only fitting thing."

Then General Wu's eyes were on Rodney Jones. Rodney had not been aware of the depth of their shrewdness or of the intuition of General Wu. Without a word or a sign given, he understood that General Wu knew exactly what had happened. His mind had probed the facts from Rodney's polite falsehoods. General Wu moved his heavy shoulders forward. "Yes," he said, "that is very, very nice, and Philip, I think, needs a vacation for his pains. I shall be very busy here and I shall feel quite sorry to be without him, but youth must have its chance. I think that Philip must have another year in America, to pursue his studies. Philip will go back with you to the railroad. There will be a heavy competent guard, so that no accident may happen to my nephew. Lieutenant Shu himself will see that nothing happens and he will, himself, bring the money back for the Yellow porcelain.... Won't you, Lieutenant Shu?" The general's aide clicked his heels together and bowed. But General Wu did not appear to notice him. His glance still rested thoughtfully on Rodney Jones. "And you, Mr. Jones," he said suddenly, "I am honored to have met you. You are an able man. If you should need any employment—" the General moved his fingers on his knees.

"Your Excellency is very kind," said Rodney, "but I have affairs elsewhere."

General Wu still gazed at him. "You are an able man," he repeated. "Could it be that you give my nephew Philip too much credit? Perhaps you are too modest to take credit to yourself."

"That is not so," said Rodney. "Philip was very brave—and competent."

General Wu cast another glance at Philip Liu, a strange, inscrutable glance.

"You have been very kind to Philip," he said, "very, very kind. And I wish to show my appreciation, if you will understand. This Yellow porcelain—" General Wu raised a finger to his upper lip. "There were nine pieces which I sold. I kept the tenth piece myself—a jar. It is a poor thing, and very ugly, but if you are so generous as not to die with laughter, I hope that you will take it, Mr. Jones.... Lieutenant Shu, tell them to fetch that jar!" General Wu rose slowly. His body and his gray uniform ascended from the chair, cloudlike and monstrous, and he bowed to Mr. Newall and spoke in his broken English. "I have not treated you good," he said. "I have not took care. I was a damn fool. Too many bad men, all time too many bad men in China. I am very sorry. Excuse. I do not talk English so damn good."

Mr. Newall rose, made a grimace of courtesy and bowed. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "What was he saying to you, Rodney?"

"He was talking about the Ming Yellow," Rodney explained. "He has one piece left and he is making me a present. They're bringing it in now."

A servant had entered, carrying a tall yellow vase which he placed upon the table. It was larger than any other piece of Yellow which Mr. Newall had purchased. The color of it seemed to fill the room with a curious half-restless peace and Rodney Jones thought, as he always did when he saw that glaze, that there was no color like that Yellow. Mr. Newall must have thought so too.

"That's superb," he said. "Why, Jones, it's worth the pieces I've got all put together!"

But Rodney Jones had turned to General Wu, struggling to speak with proper courtesy. "This is too much," he said. "I do not dare, I do not dare accept this princely gift."

"It is nothing," said General Wu. "Only a ludicrous thing. Accept it, I beg of you, with kindly memories. Philip begs you to accept it, don't you, Philip?"

"I do not dare," said Rodney. "I do not dare." Philip Liu moistened his lips.

"I beg you to accept," he said. "My gratitude goes with it too—deep gratitude."

The General called to the servant. "Have this poor thing taken to His Excellency's exalted abiding place," he said. And Rodney bowed.

"Thank you," he said, "thank you. The general has honored me much." Then he saw that Mel Newall was standing beside him, looking at the vase.

"What have you been talking about, Rodney?" she asked. "You might tell me, don't you think, under the circumstances."

"Nothing," he said, "just thanking him, Beautiful." Then an idea came to Rodney which was dazzling as the yellow glaze in sunlight.

"Mr. Newall," he said, "when I first met you in Peking, I said if I ever came upon a piece of Ming Yellow I should keep it for myself. I think you're right. This is the best piece I have ever seen, but I'll trade it, Mr. Newall."

Mr. Newall looked at the Yellow vase and touched it with the tips of his fingers. "Trade it for what?" he asked.

And Rodney looked at the girl beside him. "I've been talking to Mel," he answered, "coming down the road. Will you trade her, Mr. Newall, for that Ming Yellow jar?"

"What's that?" said General Wu. "What is he saying? He does not like it?"

"No," said Philip, in Chinese. "I think he likes it very much. He is using it to acquire the Great One's daughter."

General Wu rubbed his hands together and gave a shout of laughter. "Ha, ha," he said in English, "that is very good!"

"Yes," said Mr. Newall, "that is very good, Jones, for me, but not for you. I'll take you up on that trade. You'd have had her anyway."

Then Rodney felt an acute embarrassment. The gesture, now that he had made it, seemed ponderous and foolish, because he had compared Mel Newall to a porcelain vase. He wanted to tell her that he had not meant to compare her with the object on the table, but she was speaking before he could think how to phrase what he wanted to say. She was speaking with her old asperity, but there was no annoyance in her eyes.

"You didn't have to do that, you know," she said. "You could have had us both."

Rodney Jones found himself stammering and he began to laugh. "One at a time's enough," he said. "I'm eccentric, I suppose, but I'd rather have you."

There was no color in the world as beautiful as the depth of her eyes. They were speaking a language which made

everything else less than nothing, although what she actually said was casual enough.

"You always declared," she said, "that one can't have everything at once."

"And I was wrong as usual," Rodney found himself answering, "because I have got everything."

[End of *Ming Yellow*, by John P. Marquand]