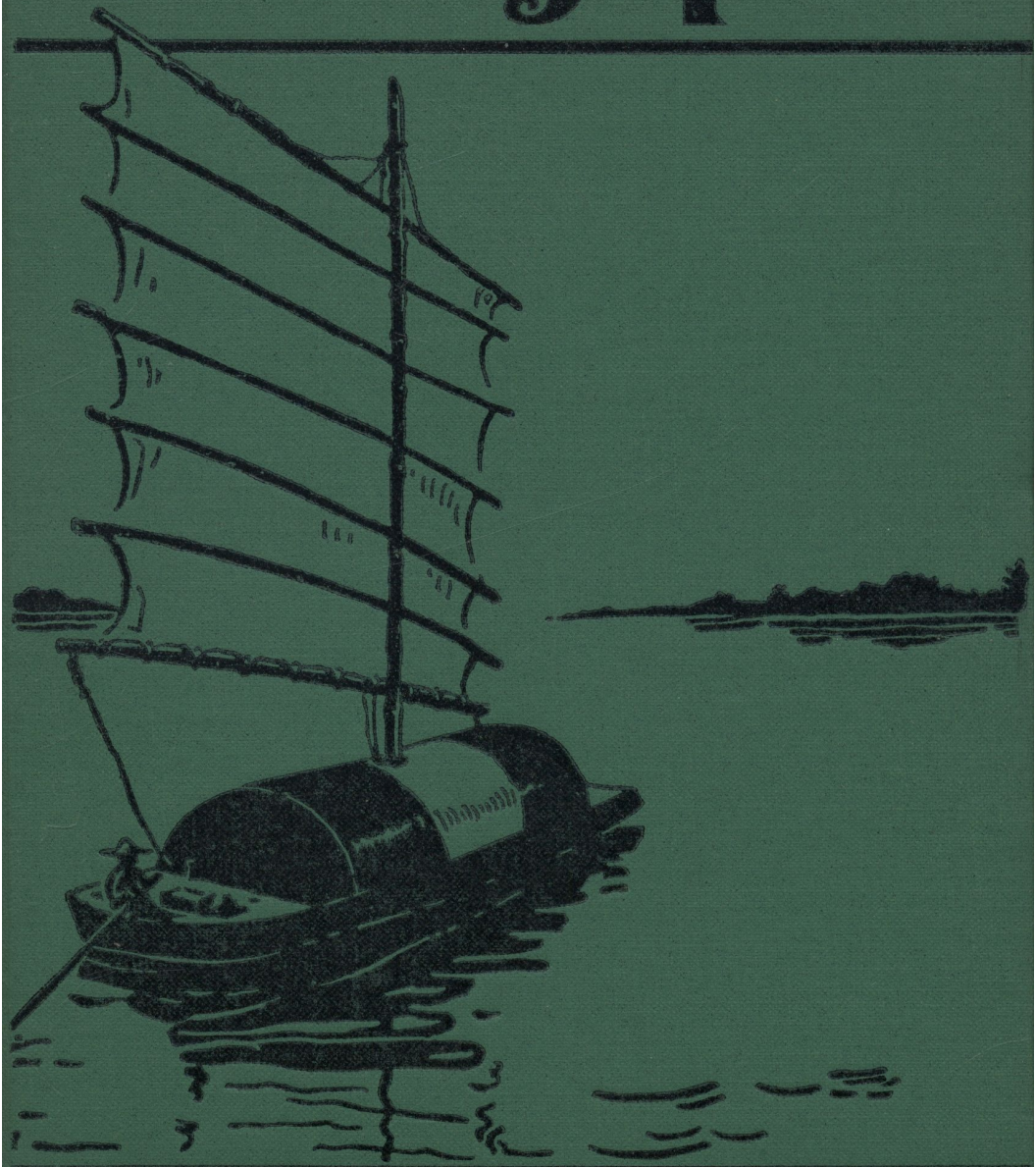
In Singapore



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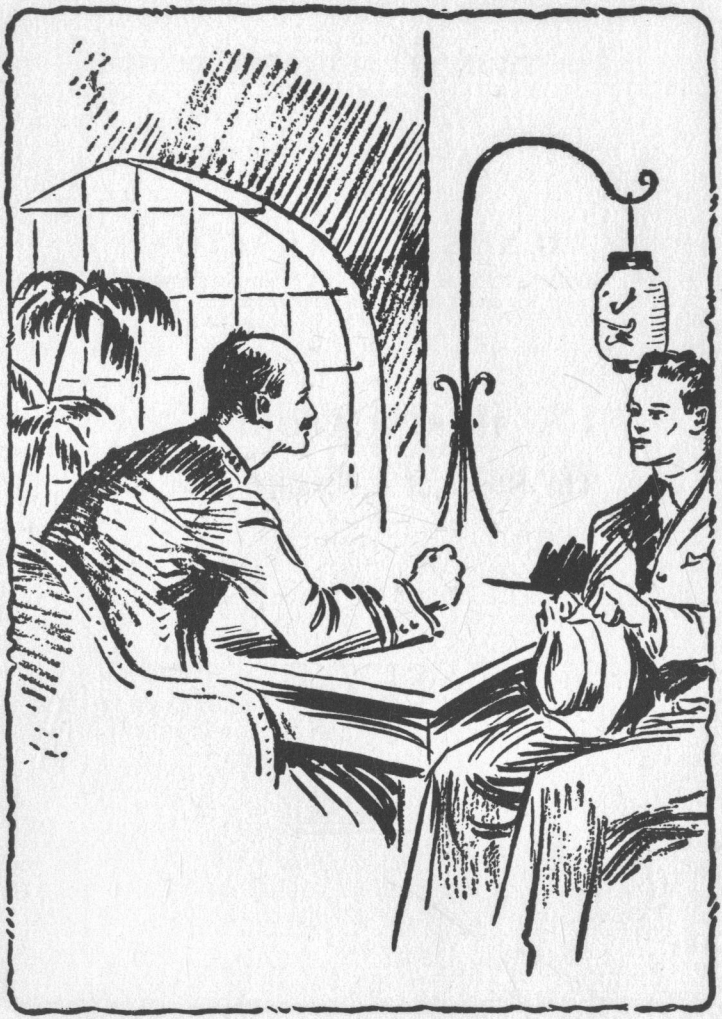
Title: In Singapore: The Story of a Strange Search
Date of first publication: 1932
Author: Clarence Stratton (1880-1951)
Date first posted: Feb. 4, 2021
Date last updated: Feb. 4, 2021
Faded Page eBook #20210231

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net



"WE THINK WE'VE FOUND HIM FOR YOU."—*Page* 96.

IN SINGAPORE

The Story of a Strange Search

By
CLARENCE STRATTON

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and "Robert the Roundhead"

Illustrated by
HAROLD CUE

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Printed in U. S. A.

M'era a grato
Ubbedire alla mia celeste scorta.

DANTE

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IN SINGAPORE

CHAPTER I

ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN

Thomas Dubois, with his knees drawn up under his chin, sat on the forward hatch-covering of the sturdy steamer *Portlander* and for the fiftieth time that day exclaimed half aloud:

"Can water anywhere be bluer than this!"

Never had he seen such depth of blue—deeper than the water in the beautiful Mediterranean, more radiant than the colors of the Red Sea, more brilliant than any blue he had seen in the velvety nights of the mid-Atlantic. The Indian Ocean was casting a spell over him and he felt that he would ask nothing more of Life than to let him float across it forever, just as he was doing on this glorious late afternoon, with the sun blazing from the west over the spreading wake of the steamer.

He rubbed his knees gratefully, because the shadow of the deck structure and the approach of sunset made the air cooler and fresher. Then he let his eyes roam over all he could see of the *Portlander*.

She was an ordinary cargo ship with a rather stumpy nose of a prow and no speed worth speaking of, but to Thomas she was the most adventurous boat that had ever crossed the Atlantic and crawled through the Suez Canal. Hadn't she brought him carefully out among the impertinent tugs and the haughty transatlantic liners and the troublesome beetle-like ferryboats of the lower harbor from the smelly freight docks of Brooklyn? And wouldn't she soon be carrying him past the fabled island of Ceylon, along the spice-laden coasts of India, and up the wriggling river to story-book Calcutta?

No; he changed his wish. His desire was not to go on like this forever, but to go on as rapidly as the throbbing engines of the good old *Portlander* could push her towards the goal of his venturesome voyage to the Far East.

The boy's face changed as his eyes, gazing past the gently dipping and rising railing of the high bow deck, fixed themselves on the vast empty space beyond. Here he was in the Indian Ocean, surrounded by the most glorious blues that ocean waters know, with a golden orange sun disk rapidly slipping into the misty west. But Tom's glance saw none of these beauties. His mind rested on none of these tropical changes. His thoughts were six thousand miles away, in a crowded city, in a narrow dining-room, where he

and Bill Johnson, his lifelong companion, listened to the latter's gray-haired mother, who was finishing her story.

She pushed a crumpled sheet of foreign-looking paper across the table towards Thomas.

"And that's the last we ever heard of him—any of us," she concluded solemnly.

Thomas gazed at the fateful letter.

"From Penang," muttered Bill, repeating one of his mother's phrases in a professional manner; for Bill worked for an importing silk firm and possessed an accurate knowledge of the geography of the Orient.

Tom's eyes seemed charmed by the insignificant scrap of paper. He could not bring himself to touch it—yet. It was the only existing link between him and his unknown and long-lost father, that shadowy yet real person about whom Mrs. Johnson had tried to tell him all she knew. Her knowledge was little enough, for Dubois, just arrived from the interior of the United States, traveling in an attempt to forget the death of the young wife he had married in Guatemala, had not talked much. Finally the desire for wandering had become irresistible and he had entrusted this child to her, with the assurance of regular payments for his maintenance.

"Then he shipped to the East," was about all that Mrs. Johnson could say, as she had repeated to Thomas over and over again for years.

"His notes told me where his ships had touched," she had explained, "and for a long time the money came regular."

"I'm glad of that," Thomas always answered.

"Then—after that letter—all news stopped," she wound up.

"Penang—that's in the Malay Peninsula," Bill added.

Thomas stretched out his hand to pick up his father's last message. He looked at the faded words on the discolored sheet and repeated parts aloud.

"Feeling better than ever," he read. "Going on to Singapore. Let you hear from there. Don't let little Tom forget me."

That was all.

The three sat silent for a time. Then Thomas began to speak in a low voice.

“Anything could have happened—shipwreck, sunstroke, an accident, sickness—it’s terribly unhealthy out there. If I only knew. If I were only certain that he had died.”

“That’s what worries me. With sailors in my boarding-house,” Mrs. Johnson went on, to Tom’s apparent relief at the chance to cover his own true feelings, “I’ve heard some awful disturbing yarns. Men coming home years after their wives, believing themselves widows, had married and were raising new families. Like that Enoch Arden poetry story your sister Anna used to cry over for school lessons. And men who forgot their names and homes for years and were lost to their relatives. Sailors’ lives are fascinating to them but awful wearing on the women folks left at home.”

“Don’t look at me. I didn’t go to sea,” her son Bill maintained stoutly, as he cast a pointed look at his companion.

“No,” she admitted, “but Tom, here, wants to. He’s not content with working on shore, drawing plans for boats and poking about them in port. He wants to take a long voyage on one. Might as well combine his work and try to get some news of his father. This chance made me get out this old letter.”

“It is a wonderful chance!” Tom had burst out enthusiastically. “You’re a brick to let me know, Bill.”

For Bill was really responsible for this family conference. At the offices of his firm, The Peernone Importing Corporation, he had chatted with the purser of the *Portlander* and had reported to Tom that the old fellow would like a clerk on the next voyage to the East. As Tom’s school vacation would permit it, he urged him to try to get into the graces of Old Penwiper, as the ship’s other officers jestingly called him.

Tom’s mind was still thousands of miles away from the deck of the ship on which he was lounging, when he had a strange feeling that curious eyes were fastened upon him. Slowly at first he recalled his concentrated wits to the surroundings of the ship. A blast of curses and a shuffling of heavy feet on the bow deck brought him back with a start. As he recognized the surly voice he muttered to himself:

“That terrible bo’s’n!”

Then he laughed aloud as he recalled his earliest knowledge of this man. When he first jumped at the sound of his brutal orders he had shaken the desk so much that Old Penwiper looked over his bifocal glasses and rapped out:

“It’s only that Eurasian.”

Thomas had never heard that word before. To remember it he jotted it down on the desk blotter. But he spelled it “You Razian.” Later in the day he found his spelling neatly crossed out and above it, in Old Penwiper’s neat British handwriting, the correct word, “Eurasian.” Even then the word puzzled Thomas. Suddenly he saw in it the term “Asian.” The “Eu” must come from “European.” It was as plain as daylight; a Eurasian had one parent Asian, the other European.

THE SILENT FIGURE OF THE SHIP'S CHINESE COOK.

How terrible if all Eurasians were like this boatswain of the *Portlander*!

Yet the scattering of the sailors to the duties of the first of the dog-watches did not remove Tom's feeling that eyes were focused intently upon him. For a few seconds he fidgeted, growing more and more uncomfortable. Suddenly he swung around sharply.

“Oh, that’s all, is it?” he muttered under his breath.

Standing in a seldom opened iron door of the deck-house, in flapping pearl-gray pajamas, was the silent figure of the ship’s Chinese cook.

Thomas would have called out, “Hello, Sing Ho,” except that the fixed gaze of the Celestial restrained him. But he stared back just as hard.

Suddenly the yellow false-face of Sing Ho, on which for weeks Thomas had seen not the slightest flicker of a smile, broke into a hundred wrinkles around a broad grin, and then one of the staring, slanting eyes slowly winked at Thomas.

In astonishment Thomas blinked his eyes for just a second. When he looked again the doorway was empty. Sing Ho seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Puzzle his brain as he might, Thomas could see no reason for the astonishing change in the frozen countenance of the Chinaman, from whom, during the entire voyage, he had heard no sounds except a few mysterious grunts. Then there came to his mind the thought that perhaps Sing Ho was as much disgusted as he was by the bo’s’n’s brutality and had noticed Tom’s involuntary response to it as he sat on the hatch cover. That must be it. But who had taught a silent Chinese cook to express sympathy and understanding by a crafty wink? There was more in this, Thomas felt, than appeared on the surface.

He must puzzle it out.

The boatswain was not attractive to look at. His powerful body was too short. His bull shoulders were not even; they made him look almost as much bent forward as a hunchback. From the deep chest between them his short, broad neck thrust itself forward aggressively. He was so bow-legged that Thomas had remarked to Old Penwiper:

“He looks like a pair of parentheses waddling down the deck.”

But his face was the most singular thing about him. In a ship’s company, where unusual types of men are frequent, where stunted bodies and scarred faces are regular details, where any strange nationality may appear, where stripling boys and hardened old sinners are thrown together for common work in a restricted area—even in such a menagerie of human beings the face of the boatswain was noticeable.

His head was small for his thickset body, but as round as a baseball. His skin was deep red, not browned as were the skins of the other seamen. His

close-cropped hair—light threads on his red skull—seemed never to grow any longer. There were few wrinkles in his face; instead of squinting in the sun, as a seaman's eyes do naturally, his light blue eyes just blinked rapidly. But the shape of those eyes! They were not small, but full, large, and long. They began close to the top of his pudgy nose and stretched out in a sharply sloping line, until it seemed that they would leave no room for his temples. They made Thomas wince every time he looked at them. No wonder the men in his watch hated the boatswain's approach on deck, his commands in the hold, his shouts among the shrouds; for from those eyes, looking most of the time like the unmoving eyes of a dead fish on a dealer's counter, there could spring the deadliest looks, and from his small, close-lipped mouth the most deadly oaths and most horrible threats.

"Scum of some Chinese swamp," Thomas heard a sailor call him behind his back.

"How'd he get that name?" asked his companion as he rolled over beneath the lifeboat they were coating with sticky white paint.

"Father named Hans, I'll bet a thousand."

"Calls himself Hanson, though."

"Sure. Added 'son' for use on British and American ships."

"How much time do you suppose an American court would give a fellow for ridding the world of him?"

"None of that, now," laughed the other. "We all grouch a lot, but none of us has the nerve."

They moved to the next lifeboat. Thomas dared not follow and thus betray his listening.

As the ship approached the river entrance to Calcutta, nerves grew tense and tempers ragged. Thomas himself was all excitement and found even Old Penwiper unreasonable in insisting that landing papers and unloading blanks should be made out carefully and neatly.

"Stop wriggling!" he called out. "When we're in the river you'll see enough different kinds of ship to satisfy your marine architect eyes. Though you'll never want to design boats like most of them," he added in a grumble.

"Sorry," mumbled Thomas. "But India's an old story to you. It's my first trip!"

"Well, get those blanks filled out properly and you'll have all the more time in port to yourself."

The sailors were especially jumpy. They loafed over their work, they answered back when ordered about, they clenched their fists at one another, and sometimes pounded one another for a few seconds until the commands of their boatswain parted them. They appeared in pieces of treasured clothing saved for shore visits, totally unconscious that for the most part they made themselves look like guests at a masquerade party.

Thomas could hardly suppress his laughter as he gazed in wonder at them. It was broiling hot on the glazed surface of the Indian Ocean, and the officers were comfortable in pajamas, or less. But the sailors sacrificed comfort for display.

Sven, a lumbering blond Swede, with a brain rendered slow—some said by a touch of sun in the tropics, others by a severe blow on the head—swaggered about like a boy in his first long trousers. From his seaman's chest he had dug out a heavy felt hat that perched insecurely on the top of his capacious skull. Designed for the frigid snows of Scandinavian winters, it was as inappropriate for the Indian Ocean as anything that might be worn, yet it was Sven's pride and treasure. Once, years ago, it had been black, but rough handling and unsympathetic weather had turned it to a sick-looking green. It was much too small for Sven's giant head. Its narrow brim was sportively turned down in front and up in the rear. Its crown was pushed into a sharp peak, high above. It topped the awkward form of Sven like a tiny bird poised on the crest of a mountain. It was light and airy, and made you believe that at any moment Sven might astonish you by breaking into an amazing series of acrobatic dance steps.

Hanson's nasty face almost smiled when he caught sight of the decoration as he rattled down the steps from the deck structure and saw Sven leaning idly against the side of the vessel.

Thomas was too far away to hear what was said or to interfere in any manner by a look or a remonstrance. Then, too, what happened among the seamen was strictly none of his business, no matter how his blood might boil with indignation.

Hanson gave some sharp order to Sven. The Swede, always slow in getting into motion, was slower than ever,—slow enough to bring a curse from his driving master. A flash of manly intelligence surged over the Swede's countenance just long enough to let him make some sharp retort. The boatswain stood aghast at the Swede's rashness; but a look at his face

showed that the idea of retaliating had been momentary only. The childish look of submission had settled over him again.

In that instant's pause Hanson's first wave of rage had subsided, so Thomas knew that his next move was a deliberately planned act of malicious revenge.

He swung his left hand, and Sven's beautiful peaked head-covering went soaring into the air in a wide, graceful curve. It struck the water with a hollow flop, and in a second was a soaked and bedraggled and shapeless mess.

Sven watched it disappear behind the ship in open-mouthed despair, while Hanson chuckled. Then the Swedish giant turned to face his tormentor. Slowly he raised both fists high above his head and advanced with a deep roar.

"If he falls on Hanson now, he'll mash him flat," Thomas said to himself.

Hanson never moved. He merely swung his right hand into the enraged Swede's range of vision. His fingers gripped a monkey-wrench nearly two feet long. Some recollection of an earlier blow on the head swept into the bewildered Sven's brain; he unclenched his fists to cover his eyes; and his angry roar changed to a plaintive wail of misery.

The boatswain moved on to the forecastle.

"I wish I could get even with you for that!" Thomas heard himself exclaim as he hurried along the deck to spare himself the sight of the tortured Sven.

CHAPTER II

TOM AND THE HOISTING ENGINE

When, a few days later, the *Portlander* entered the unreal Ganges, Thomas could hardly hold himself from wild and unrestrained acts of excitable folly. He envied the crew who had to unfasten the coverings of the hatches, to tighten bolts on the donkey engines about the decks, to thread ropes through pulley blocks, to string lines of electric lights down dark and smelly hatches.

He talked to every one on board; that is, to every one except Sing Ho, who remained the only person on the ship not stirred up over the prospect of landing in story-book Calcutta. He even tried to talk to the Chinaman, but the dull stare from the eyes, and the tightly drawn wrapping-paper skin of the face so dampened his spirits that he stopped in the middle of a jumbled sentence, shrugged his shoulders, turned on his heel, and hurried away to join a group in animated but idle discussion around a rusty hoisting engine from which a dozen spurts of wasted steam were puffing. Every person had advice to offer for making the steam stay in the pipes, but Thomas noticed that no one raised a monkey-wrench or tightened a joint.

"Bad as Sing Ho; all of them," he thought as he passed to an opened hatch, from which sounds of loud argument rose to the deck.

But Thomas was soon to learn that Sing Ho was not so detached from the management of ship duties as he seemed to be; that the sleepy-eyed Oriental did not attend so blindly only to his own kitchen work as he appeared to be doing.

The group of advisers leaning over the leaking hoisting engine finally exhausted their suggestions for making the heap of junk iron steam-tight. The oiler from the engine room, sent to make it workable for the next day's swinging and landing of cargo, had gazed at its rips and seams as long as he dared. He was torn between two feelings. This was his allotted post for discharging cargo. Yet, if the engine could not be made to work, could he be given any other job? All the other hoisting engines had their quota of men to operate them. Could he by hook or by crook get shore leave? It was worth thinking over. So he wriggled on his side, slid on his back, and peered about and in and under with his bleary eyes.

He tapped with a hammer here, and pulled with a bar there, and tightened or loosened with his wrench everywhere. Suddenly a nut at which he was tugging sprang loose with a grunt. A joint split apart and a fountain of hissing steam and boiling water gushed out and struck the palms of the hands that he instinctively held out to protect his face. An idler quickly turned off the main pipe valve, while the bungler, shaking his arms in pain, hurried down to the engineer's room to have oil poured over his burns.

Late that night only the prowling Sing Ho saw an older man quickly put that donkey engine into condition.

It was Sing Ho, also, who next morning noticed that this engine was the only one with no man operating it. It was this same undemonstrative cook who observed the second engineer coming along the deck, bound to discover that one unit of his scheme for discharging cargo was not working. It was this same unchanging Oriental who padded along in his straw slippers until he found Thomas in enchanted contemplation of the distant river bank, touched him on the shoulder, and then, with never even a grunt, pointed forward towards the raving Scotchman who was demanding of all powers in heaven and earth why no one was "standing by" here.

The boy drew closer.

Thomas could just make out through the sneezes and burrs of the thick Scotch speech:

"Is this where that scamp of an oiler scalded his hands?"

"Yes," ventured Thomas, to save the man from a stroke of apoplexy.

"And no one to work her!" the thin Scotchman added, looking in his dark clothes for all the world like a long slate pencil.

The two gazed sadly at the rusty machine as though it were an object of great rarity. The Scotchman tugged at his back pockets and finally dragged to light two enormous gloves.

"Could you run the thing?" He appealed to Thomas with a dirty cloth glove in each extended hand.

"Certainly," Thomas answered; but he did not touch the gloves.

"Will ye?"

"What about union rules and all the other little matters?"

"Do you belong to any union yourself—the Seaman's, for instance?"

“None,” Thomas assured him.

“Well, if we get close to the wharves, drop the levers and throw the gloves overboard—no, not overboard,” he corrected, gazing at them carefully. “Put them under the crossbars, so they won’t blow away, and just stroll off.” Then he added as a promise of reward, “The quicker we get all the cargo on deck for quick movement, the more chances for shore leave.”

Thomas slipped the gloves on, stepped to the little iron platform, and released the brake with his foot. He felt a delightful tingle run over him as the drum of the engine spun round, and the heavy block at the end of the tackle disappeared in the depths of the ship’s hold.

“Anybody below?” bellowed the Second Engineer.

“Aye, aye, sir,” came up from the dark depths.

“Make fast, then.”

Thomas watched the tackle swaying about.

“Haul away!” the Scotchman called to him, making at the same time a peculiar motion with his enormous paws.

Thomas concentrated on the two levers in his hands. He felt that the right hand must control the hoisting. He moved it. The steam hissed as the weight held it. The engine wheezed, the piston struggled, the large drum moved, then raced around, and a huge case darted past the deck and soared like a balloon towards the top of the mast.

“Where ye sending it?” yelled the Second Engineer. “To Heaven?”

Thomas dropped the lever and the case spun round and round in the air.

“Lower away.”

When it was five feet above the deck Thomas remembered the lever in his left hand. He moved it slightly. The case swung clear of the open hatchway, so that it could be deposited on the deck.

“Ye’ll do, if ye don’t fly too high,” approved his superior. “Now I’ll get a man to signal ye. Can ye stand the gaff?”

Tom’s only answer was a saucy ugly face with a smile in the middle of it.

After he had placed a layer of huge cases about the deck Thomas discovered that he need not be so careful, for he was raising nothing but huge rounded bales of soft material.

And when he had almost finished the remaining three hours of his watch he could have cried with delight, for the gods of the ocean, or the fates themselves, delivered the Eurasian boatswain into his power. The circumstances were more than any youth could resist.

Thomas had become strangely conscious that a pair of intent eyes were watching him. In an interval of using both hands and one foot on levers and brake, he turned his eyes behind him to the upper rail of the deck-house. This time he was not astonished to discover Sing Ho lazily scanning the shores of the river and the hazy blue sky above.

"Even he sniffs the land," Thomas said aloud.

The Chinaman seemed to see everything that occurred, even when he was not apparently looking in the direction of the action. His eyes dropped straight at Tom's, then swept to the far side of the deck on which the hoisting engine stood, his look accompanied by the merest shrug of his right shoulder.

"He doesn't wink every time," Thomas mentally noted. "Did he wink at me the other day, or was I only seeing things?"

He turned his own eyes across the tops of packing-cases and bales of freight in the direction in which Sing Ho was gazing, until he saw three heads bobbing about. Hanson and two of his watch had emerged from the forecastle and were busy with some part of the ship's tackle. Soon the boatswain finished his directions to the men. His grating voice ceased, but Thomas caught sight of a flapping hand above the opening hatch and had to lower away.

For five minutes he worked steadily, carefully placing the squashy soft bales, until there seemed no safe space for any more. He swung what must be the last one clear of all those on deck and held it poised in the air until some resting-place could be found or cleared for it.

Then he had leisure to look again for Sing Ho and Hanson. No glance, no sign came from the squinting Chinese cook. His face might have been carved from yellow stone. Hanson had forgotten ship duties and was thinking only of the land. To see better, he had scrambled upon one of the packing-cases and now stood, a bow-legged, dark figure, clearly marked against the brightening sky.

"What a chance!" thought Thomas.

The lever in his left hand moved ever so slightly and with its motion the bale on the hook swayed from side to side in the air. If the ship had been

rolling ever so little, that bale would have swung like a pendulum across the deck from one rail to the other.

Well, why not?

Thomas swept his eyes swiftly up to the front of the deck-house. Sing Ho was seeing nothing. Not a chin or nose or cap visor protruded from the officers' bridge. The two sailors had disappeared behind the piles of cases. Not a soul was paying the slightest attention to Thomas.

He knew that his watch was almost finished. At any second the ship's bell might ring and with it there would appear from the dark passageway behind him the man from the engine-room crew to take over his station for the next four hours.

Dare he risk it?

All these thoughts passed quickly through his mind. Before he had made any decision for himself, his left hand had acted automatically. The lever controlling the sideward movement of the arm of the hoisting crane began to move down, then up. Thomas could not force himself to look at the machinery.

His eyes were fixed for a second on the swaying mass in the air. Then he shifted them to the expansive seat of Hanson's soiled trousers. The bale was swinging beautifully now, and, what was more to his delight, absolutely silently. The exercise that the blocks and tackle had been getting for three hours had finally made them work with perfect rhythm and smoothness.

There must be no tell-tale squeak!

The soft mass was covering fifteen feet in its flight now, yet it moved so slowly that it made no swish through the air, at least not enough to be heard above the swish of the ship through the water.

And still Hanson did not move!

And still no one saw what was happening!

A qualm pricked Tom's conscience. That bale weighed several hundred pounds. If it fell on a man it might crush him. He caught his breath. Then he forced himself to examine the huge mass carefully. It was not solidly packed. It was so soft that its edges were curved and its corners mashed in. A blow from it could knock an elephant off his feet, yet be so carefully struck that his skin would not even be bruised.

Tom swept any thought of hesitation from him. If he could only land the bale on that bulging back pocket!

The huge mass was now swinging within three feet of the blissfully unconscious Hanson. It seemed unbelievable that he could not hear it. The substitute engine tender watched it poise behind the boatswain and then begin its graceful returning curve.

From the corner of his eye he saw Hanson move. Was he going to get down from his perch? It was an anxious moment. No; he merely hitched up his trousers, making that irritating expanse all the more luring a target.

Over to the left swayed the brown bale. It stopped. It hung motionless. Would it never start on its return flight?

Slowly it began its backward swing.

Thomas was tense with emotion. He could hardly stand still. He gazed at the catapult to make it move faster by mere force of his will. After an agonizing pause it began to move across the deck, gathering momentum as it moved.

Then Tom's left hand moved the lever a few inches. There was a muffled spurt of steam. The swinging bale moved faster.

"That will carry it three feet farther!" he whispered through his gritted teeth as he waited.

Directly in the line of that extra three feet stood Hanson, rapturously dreaming of the pleasures of port.

THE BALE STRUCK HIM SQUARELY WHERE THOMAS HAD AIMED IT.

There was no sound as the bale struck him squarely where Thomas had aimed it. Both parties to the blow were too soft to make a resounding thud, but the blow was a powerful one.

Hanson uttered a terrified roar as he was swept slowly from his stand on the packing-case. When the bale reached the limit of its swing, it retired from the flying Eurasian's posterior and left him moving through the air like a successful flying man. To Tom's fascinated gaze his evolutions looked like those of a slowly starting pin-wheel. Over and over he turned as he sank in a wide curve from Tom's vision.

He could hear the astonished yells of the two seamen as they leaned over the rail. He heard a vigorous splash. Some one on the bridge shouted, "Man overboard!" Sing Ho winked once at the reckless young marine architect and then withdrew his head from the rail. Thomas wanted to dash to the side of the ship to see what had become of Hanson, but he was terrified by the risk of discovery.

Hastily fixing the clutches of the engine, he retreated to the depths of the dark passageway behind him and waited, leaning against the wall until his relief reached him.

"Here, put these gloves safely under a rod," he told the young Filipino oiler. "They belong to——"

"Me know. Jerry. Why you in here? Too hot outside, eh?"

Thomas was willing to avoid any explanation. He nodded, and hurried along the corridor to the rear deck.

Some one near the stern had flung a rope to the swimming Hanson and had dragged him aboard. The sight of the infuriated man standing in a puddle of water was a relief to Thomas. Seamen of both watches were gathering in wonder and amusement around the dripping creature. His own men were too terrorized to ask any questions, but the other watch openly guffawed at him.

"Couldn't wait till we anchored to take a swim," laughed one.

"Swim?" retorted another. "Getting swell. Took a quick Henglish plunge bath."

"Who pulled him out?" squeaked the tiniest able-bodied seaman on board.

"Ought to be thrown overboard hisself," a disguised voice called from the interested group.

Just then the comically vacant face of Sven appeared above a bale.

"Vhat's oop?" he asked stupidly.

"The bo's'n very kindly went to look for your lost hat, you old Swede!" some one explained in a loud voice.

Sven looked to see what Hanson was going to do. As he started forward the innocent Scandinavian's countenance broke into an understanding grin that lasted four hours.

Nobody on board could tell Hanson anything about his accident. And Thomas was never able to get a straight look from Sing Ho again.

CHAPTER III

CALCUTTA, PENANG, AND SINGAPORE

Years later, when Thomas visited Calcutta the second time, he realized that he had seen most of it before, but there remained in his remembrance only a blurred and confused impression of that first day of rushing hither and thither in a city as unreal as the capital of Fairyland.

He had tried to prepare himself for strange and astonishing sights, but nothing we see in anticipation is like the sight itself. Thomas caught glimpses of the glowing embers and curling wisps of smoke that marked the burning of the faithful dead on the sacred steps. He saw the countless bathers in the holy water of the Ganges and had a passing recollection of the sunburnt bodies of American pleasure-seekers at a crowded beach on a scorching August afternoon. But these bathers were not acquiring a fashionable coat of tan; they were just naturally brown-skinned. Nor were they bathing for comfort or pleasure in the heat; they were carrying out a serious religious duty.

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," he remarked to his sprightly young guide, "but that water doesn't look very clean to me."

The energetic young British colonial who had taken charge of him upon the deck of the *Portlander* merely grunted.

"Wait till you see the way cows are treated," was his puzzling response.

He took Thomas along back streets that he might see how venerated the American domestic drudge was. Cows—to a normal boy always the most silly and awkward and brainless of country live stock—wandered aimlessly along the sidewalks. When weariness overtook them they flopped down in the middle of the busiest streets. No merchant drove them from before his shop. No hurrying pedestrian kicked their flanks to make a way. Fine ladies walked carefully around them. Automobiles jammed on their brakes to avoid striking them. Delivery carts turned aside to pass without disturbing them.

Never in his wildest dreams had Thomas seen such an annoyance to traffic in a large city. Open-eyed and open-mouthed, he turned to young Smithers.

“Sacred!” explained that young gentleman with a look of deep disgust on his freckled countenance.

Thomas might have been inclined to believe all Britishers quiet and dignified, slow to reply, and deliberate in their movements. But young Smithers, holding a clerkship in a Calcutta silk house, somewhat like that held by Bill Johnson at home, was the liveliest mite of humanity Thomas had ever met.

He seemed to know everything, to be able to explain every difficulty. Thomas found it puzzling at first to understand his speech—he spoke of himself as a “clark” instead of a clerk; he said he received only “small pie” when he meant “small pay”; he called a trolley car a “tram” and an elevator a “lift”—but by looking where Smithers was pointing Thomas guessed right nearly every time he talked with him.

Exactly like a country visitor in New York, Thomas gawked and strained at the marvelously beautiful and imposing buildings in the section called “the City of Palaces,” to the evident delight of the young “clark.”

At first Thomas frankly held his nose in some alleys of the native district, called the Black Town, where Indians swarmed in low mud and rush hovels.

“Get used to smart smells if you plan to see the Orient,” advised Smithers, pointing up to some slowly wheeling buzzards drawn by some rotting carcass in the neighborhood.

“How can you stand it?” demanded the sickened American.

“Not much worse than the hold of an old ship,” Smithers remarked cheerfully.

“You’re right,” his companion asserted. “Only I’m not used to this. Can’t we get out of here quickly?”

The guide chuckled, dived under dark walls, and dodged round a few corners until Thomas breathed naturally again. Then he turned on the visitor from the western world with a bombardment of inquiries about his country.

Was the Statue of Liberty so great? How tall was the highest skyscraper? Had Thomas seen Niagara Falls? Had he ever met Charlie Chaplin? Did California look like India? Were there still any negro slaves? Did Thomas know any who had been slaves? Were the football teams better than British university players? Why did schools have such long vacations? How much could a ‘clark’ earn a week? Was Thomas a Republican or a Democrat?

Would the United States ever join the League of Nations? Were American girls such good sports and playfellows? Why do your cities permit so many murders? How could a fellow get to be a cowboy? How did corn on the cob taste? And a hundred other questions that Thomas answered as best be could.

To save himself Thomas started a questionnaire of his own.

Where was Smithers born? How had he moved from Manchester to Calcutta? Why? How many different religions in India? What games did he play? Had he ever seen a religious war? A sacred white elephant? Could he speak Hindustanee? How much was a rupee worth? Would he rather live in England? Were polo ponies expensive? Why was lunch called 'tiffin'? Had he ever been among the Himalayas? Had he ever had a sunstroke?

"We call it a touch of the sun."

"What does it do to you?"

"Makes you balmy."

Tom's face showed his lack of understanding.

"Puts kinks in your brain, you know. Makes you soft-headed. Forget things—even your name. Sometimes for years."

Thomas lapsed into silence. A "touch of sun" might have affected his father.

Smithers respected his retirement for a second, then launched into a series of hints about "carrying on," as he expressed it, in strange cities of the East. Thomas never forgot the information that the peculiar, agile little fellow gave him. When that afternoon he saw the widening stretch of blue water between the racing mail liner and the stone pier where Smithers, with his legs squeezing an iron stanchion, was riotously waving a blood-red silk handkerchief in farewell, he felt a real lump in his throat at the thought that he might never see the likable chap again. That short association had made them feel like good old friends.

With all his familiarity with plans and specifications for ships, with all his visits to sailing and steam craft of all types and sizes, Thomas could hardly believe he was on a boat. The clean decks, the cool-smelling cork coverings in the passages, the compact light green cabins, the purring electric fans, the noiseless cabin and deck boys in thin silk costumes and brilliant head cloths, the soft-voiced staff of officers, and, above all, the

speed of the enormous liner as she raced through the water—all this took his breath away. He felt enchanted.

On the second day he shook himself doggedly to throw off the spell of the ship and the effect of his hours in Calcutta. He had a purpose in making this long voyage. He must let nothing—no matter how entrancing, no matter how enticing, no matter how hypnotizing—make him for a second forget that purpose.

What had become of his father?

Men on this liner had been sailing to these same Eastern ports month after month for years. Some of them before that had idled about in the smaller cities. Many had, no doubt, skirted along the tropic coast, running in and out of creeks and bays. With changing routes and shifting crews, many deserting and as many being shanghaied, these men must have met thousands of others. And always, in ports or on cruises, except when sleeping, they had been spinning yarns of their experiences or silently listening to yarns spun by their shipmates and drinking cronies.

From some one of these travelers of Oriental seas and lands he must pick up some clew to direct his search, to save valuable time, to spare him from wasting effort and energy.

Back in the United States, the task, as he had talked it over continuously with the Johnson family or with Mr. Powell of the Peernone Importing Corporation, had not seemed beyond him. American cities are so close together. Governments are well organized. Races of citizens are much alike. But here——

He gazed down at the outlandish garb of the deck passengers. He listened to their babble of tongues and thought of their differences of history, life, religion, and occupation, and his heart sank. Plunged into the blackest despair at the hopelessness of his rash undertaking, he buried his face in his hands and almost wept. In some unexplainable manner the only thing he could see floating before his tear-moistened eyes was the rotating figure of the Eurasian boatswain cavorting through the air above the rail of the *Portlander* and dropping in a wide curve towards the water. In spite of his feelings, Thomas had to chuckle to himself; and, although there was a stinging feeling about his eyes and a salty taste in the corners of his mouth, he pulled himself together and began to think.

He rested his head in his hands, and the seething, gesticulating mob on the deck below him was shut out from his sight. In spite of his cool attempt

to weigh accurately all the odds against him, he was a youth in whose heart trust in himself and in the good offices of other people was still strong. No boy who, in spite of all seeming drawbacks, is able to realize the first hopes of his life ambition can remain despondent for long.

His naturally buoyant disposition said to his feeling of insignificance in the immense universe and of weakness against the thousands of individuals he had seen in Calcutta and now on this dashing liner:

"You wanted to get even with Hanson for knocking Sven's hat overboard. When you said that, what hope was there that you could do it? And what happened? Where did you get your hints? Yes, and a lot of help, too? Where you never could have expected it. From that Chink——" he checked himself. That was no way to show his gratitude for what he had received. That was no name to call an understanding helper. He corrected himself and went on:

"From that good old scout, the Chinaman, galley mate, Sing Ho."

He raised his eyes and bored into the restless mob below him.

"My father may have watched just such people on boats in these Eastern waters, may have mixed with them, talked with them. Some one down there may have known him." He corrected that thought. "May know him now—could tell me about him!"

He pounded with his fists on the rail.

"But which one? And how to find him? I may be missing the one chance in a thousand this very minute! What can I do?"

Talk to people! That was the only chance on a boat like this one.

He straightened with a new resolve.

Hurrying to the library he appropriated a thick layer of the ship's largest writing paper, going out by the door farthest from the open eye of the steward. High above, on the sun-blistered and cinder-swept boat deck, he found the boatswain with half of his watch tightening tackle and bolts on the lifeboats and rafts. Edging close to the two men who appeared to be Europeans, Tom began to sketch the curves of the davits and the arrangement of the lowering gear.

If this sketching did nothing else, it passed the time, and it might give him and his office mates hints for ship drawings later. He could mail all the sheets home to Bill Johnson. Thomas was deep in the intricacies of a running slip noose, when he overheard a chuckling voice say:

“Ye should have washed yer face fer the artist, Mike.”

Thomas smiled back at the friendly grins.

“Not an artist,” he protested. “Going to be a ship architect.”

The two seamen sat back on their heels, an Oriental trick that Thomas noticed every one out here had mastered. It wrenched the muscles in his thighs cruelly when he tried it.

He held up his drawing for their rapt inspection.

Their eyes flashed their intelligent appreciation.

“Ye’ll then be wantin’ to see all the new handy gadgets we’ve got on this boat?” asked the first speaker.

“Everything on a ship,” replied Thomas.

“Then come look at this electric thing-um-a-bob for lowering lifeboats when the engine’s out of order and the hold’s full of water.”

Thomas listened to the explanation, wishing that seamen did not like so much to hear themselves talk. He waited for an opening to slip his yarn into the conversation.

“My father was a seaman,” he started, and plunged ahead rapidly to prevent any interruption. “That’s why I like boats. He used to sail these seas.” (To himself he commented, “You talk like an old salt yourself, Tom. Keep going!”) He raced along. “Little fellow; short; wiry; you know. But an all-round A. B. Maybe you knew him. French descent. Lived in Central America. Perhaps you thought he was a foreigner.”

“We’re all foreigners out here,” one of the sailors got in, while Thomas was snatching a breath.

“Ever meet him?” Thomas continued intently.

The two gazed at each other blankly.

“Seems I never did,” said one, his voice dripping with genuine regret.

“Now what did you say his name might be?” gently hinted the other, so gently that Thomas did not flush scarlet as he should have done at the reminder that he was not a good spinner of yarns.

“Dubois—Thomas Dubois; same name as mine.”

The slower-witted sailor struck the other on the shoulder.

“Didn’t we know him? On the old *Capula*, out of Java? French he was, sure enough.”

“Seems like I do remember a Frenchman,” the other agreed slowly. “What did we hear happened to him?”

“Wait, I’ll get it,” exclaimed the other. “Didn’t she go down near Tahiti with all hands aboard?”

The other nodded.

“All lost. I remember when I heard it as though it happened yesterday.” He wet his lips for a good long tale of this tragedy of the sea. “And it was twenty years ago——”

“Here, hold on!” Thomas sprang to his feet. “I’m not twenty years old. That couldn’t have been my father.”

“Guess not,” agreed the other, regretting his lost yarn of the sinking of the *Capula* with all on board. “And anyhow, I just remember, Jock, that Frenchman’s name was Chamberry.”

“Right you are! Remember how we called him Raspberry for short?”

“Excuse me,” said Thomas. “I’ve got to go below. This sketch is finished.”

The two seamen gazed after him.

“Well, all in all, the sinking of the *Capula* is a good yarn for travelers on this boat. That’s the first time we failed to tell it all the way through.”

“And it always,” sighed the other, “brought us at least something to smoke.”

“I wonder if all Americans are as businesslike as that.”

“Fine chance he has of learning anything about his father out here.”

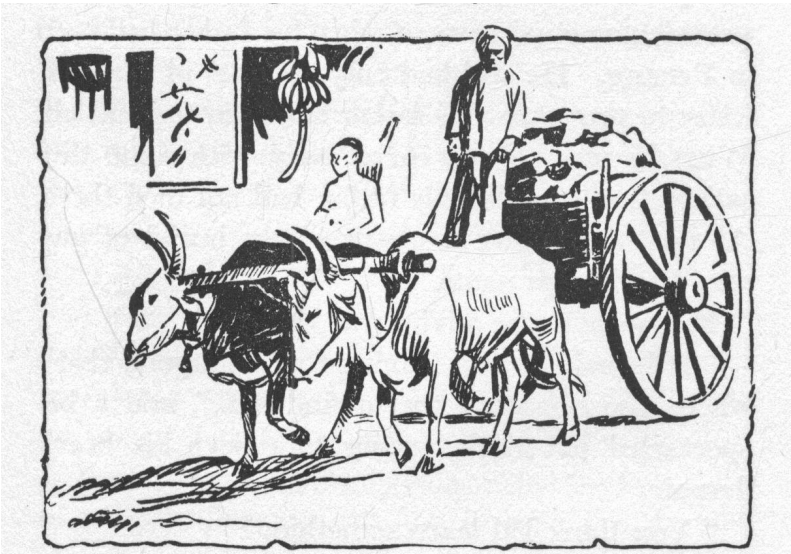
They were right. The voyage to Penang produced dozens of valuable drawings of ship construction but not a hint of the fate of the long-lost seaman.

It was disheartening.

“Oh, well,” Thomas would comfort himself, “this is a crack ocean racehound. What would these fellows know of a hard-working young man on a freighter or a sailing vessel? Just wait till I get to the cities where we know he was!”

He learned that the Malay word for the betel nut chewed by the natives had long ago given the name to the island of Penang because of its shape, but he let all such dull information slide easily off his mind as the ship skirted the land and gave him his first glimpse of the fairylands of the Malay peninsula. The gentle slopes were densely wooded in vivid green from the white edge of the curling surf to the tree-clad peak. Boats and nets of the fisher folk were drawn up to dry beyond the bamboo fishing stakes. The steamer rounded a jutting foreland and made a bee-line for the main street of the city, as though it would go gaily up between its two rows of buildings. The harbor was dotted with bobbing lighters and tacking fishing boats, by Chinese junks and Indian cargo steamers. The liner came to rest in mid-channel while farther in rode the saucy coasters. Above the red and purple roofs of the town he marked the tall tower of the railroad ticket office.

Calcutta and the mixture of races on board this vessel had prepared him somewhat for the surprise of his first Malay city, but no anticipation could remove from that experience its startling shock. For hours—in spite of his resolution to go about his business at once—Thomas was spellbound; for minutes, disgusted and horrified at what he saw; and then, just when his feelings amounted almost to physical nausea, he would chance upon some little picture of unbelievable charm that enchanted him until the next disturbing event shocked him back to the disagreeable reality.



SOME LITTLE PICTURE OF UNBELIEVABLE CHARM.

Surrounded by such sights and smells, Thomas had to exert all his firmness of will to pursue the single purpose for which he was in Penang. A few leading questions put him quickly on the track of records:—the sailors' lodging houses, the registry offices, the employment bureaus, the city recorder's office of vital statistics.

Clerks and department heads were attentive and courteous, but he discovered immediately that of all persons involved in shipping only sailors have the leisure to spin long yarns dug up from the depths of their experiences.

However, Thomas did learn one thing with certainty. The various records he had consulted could provide no actual news of when his father had been in Penang. He still had only the date of that last letter to prove that his father had been there at all. What he was able to carry away with some tiny satisfaction was that his father had not died there. At least there was no entry of the burial of any man bearing his name.

Everywhere the advice was the same.

"If he said he was leaving for Singapore, that's where you ought to try to find him," said a bespectacled old clerk, trying to relieve his heavy despair.

"You think I'll learn something?"

"It's a bigger port than this—one of the three largest in the Orient. They keep better records than we can ever hope to."

Thomas brightened.

"Sounds reasonable," he agreed.

"More experience there, too, in trying to trace people," the old fellow went on.

Thomas looked inquiringly.

"Yes; more experience." The clerk leaned over his table, with its legs standing in cans of water to keep the million ants from crawling to its surface.

Then, as Thomas got wearily to his aching feet, the kind old man dashed all his hopes to earth again.

"You know we call Singapore the 'Port of Missing Men,' " he called after the boy at the parted mat flapping in the doorway.

If that was the reputation of Singapore, the possibility of picking up any trace of an insignificant individual, a single speck among the brilliant colors of the ever-changing mass of population, was remote indeed.

His desires made him want to fly to Singapore, but although he saw a few airplanes, he knew that they were privately owned by native millionaires. He would have traveled by train, but having computed his supply of ready money, he decided that a boat ticket would be the only sensible one for him to buy. The time-tables showed that he would arrive not very much later by water than by train. He had a look at the passenger trains. Knowing that he could not afford to travel in the first-class sleeping coach he was confirmed in his choice of ship by crossing to the mainland and taking a hasty glance at the second and third-class passengers.

While his popping eyes were following a lady in violet jacket and black trousers, with heavy silver bangles on her arms, her sleek head bandaged by a black strip studded with silver ornaments that tinkled as she waddled along the station platform, a series of wailing cries made him jump. Then he saw that the wails came from a pig. It was slung on a pole and was borne along by a family that was stuffing itself into the compartment of a day coach. At the next narrow doorway a middle-aged man in quilted coat, balancing a hat decorated by a demon's mark and two pointed tabs that stuck out like a frightened rabbit's ears, was directing the bearer of a wicker platter, all the while noisily sucking a delicate piece of sugar cane. This platter held the food for his journey,—a tastily roasted little pig, whose odor made Tom's mouth water.

Crates of fowls and ducks were lugged into the coaches as personal baggage, with cooking utensils, bundled babies, and cans of oil. Yelling peddlers warned passengers to lay in stocks of firecrackers, fruit, roast sweet potatoes, sugar cane, and yams.

Porters in rags that disclosed raw sores bore bundles for girls in padded scarlet jackets. A tall slender woman in creamy silk was escorted by her father, whose age and rank were marked by five long white hairs swaying from his tanned chin and a disk of ivory flashing with inlaid gold on his chest. His blue jacket was of silk, stiff enough to stand alone, but his cotton trousers were as filthy as though he had wallowed in a roadside ditch.

Squealing bag-pipes, high-pitched fifes, tinkling bells, the resounding gongs of the train dispatchers, and the agitated barking of countless chow puppies and gutter pups reached their climax as each train rolled into the station or departed.

The passengers had with them not only all their mattresses, bedclothes, food, and cooking utensils, but all the live stock of the family as well. Those same people might be on his ship, but the ocean does sweep the decks with pure smells, and one can walk away from overpowering cooking when not confined in a train.

As the cranky, puffy little craft steamed from the harbor straight into the tinted mists of the setting sun, Thomas cast only a few glances and fewer regrets over the stern at the receding city. It had given him little except despair and distrust.

The first link in his outlined plan had snapped at the first strain. He had tried it and it had broken in his grasp. He hoped he would never have to cast his eyes upon Penang again.

The steamer was turning sharply to the south. The short twilight was being plunged into the deep night of the tropics. The ocean was sparkling with phosphorescent glow.

Somewhere down below was the city where he must risk all for success, or meet final disappointment.

In the gathering darkness Thomas strained towards Singapore with a determined expression on his face.

CHAPTER IV

SOUNDS, SIGHTS, AND SMELLS

On the day of the ship's arrival at Singapore, Thomas was up on deck long before dawn, shivering in that damp wind which, in the tropics, announces the day, with its false hope of cool airs. He wondered again at the skill of the pilots in these waters crowded with irregular islands, these strange-speaking foreigners who miraculously guide their craft along the winding channels of these treacherous seas.

He noticed that the stumpy steamer was higher in the water than she had been on leaving Penang, because of the loss in weight in the coal she had burned, and he thanked his stars there had been no head winds to delay them.

The flashes of the lighthouses were paling in the coming day. The red ones no longer showed at all. On his right, through breaks in the mist, he could catch glimpses of tall mountains, their crests and sides tinted with the gray and pink of mother-of-pearl by the rays of the still invisible sun. They were so airy, so delicate, as they hung poised in the atmosphere with no view of their lower slopes or bases or even of the island from which they sprang, that he could hardly believe they were real.

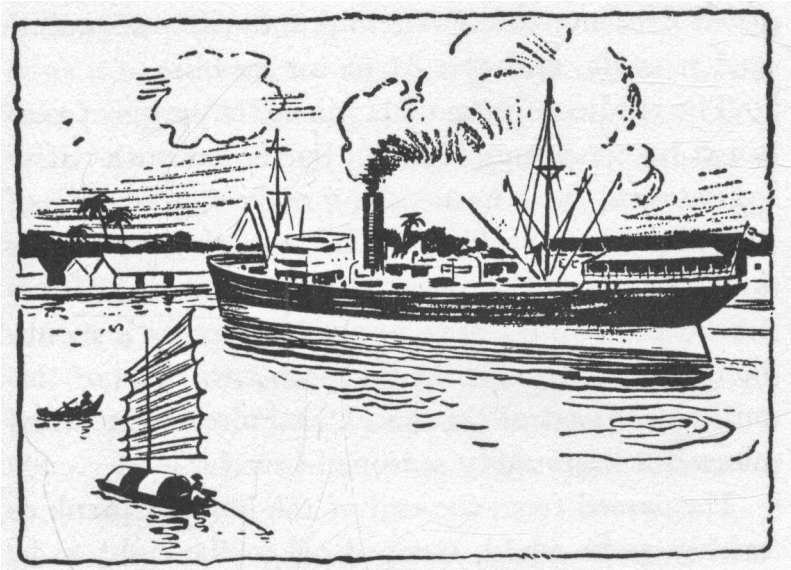
He rubbed his eyes and thought of Sindbad. Why, certainly! That was why he had recalled the *Arabian Nights*, read years ago. Wasn't it somewhere in these islands that Sindbad the Sailor had rubbed his magic lamp and had found grinning and prancing apes and little brown men that resembled them? If only, now that he was on the spot, he could read those fascinating tales of magic again! Perhaps he could, during evenings when he should be waiting for the events of the next day.

He could now make out clearly the island on which Singapore is built. The channel here swung far out to turn the edge of the shallows. There bobbed the dumpy little lightship, just extinguishing its beacons. All the craft on the surface of the oily water were steering straight for that white tower on the crest of Lighthouse Hill. That rising trail of smoke on the horizon might be mounting from an active volcano.

How long it took to reach the port! In that air, against the unreflecting surface of the sunless ocean, objects can be seen at amazing distances. Where did all the ships come from? The answer to that question was easy.

They came from all over the globe, for Singapore is the corridor to both the East and the West.

Could the harbor accommodate all these boats steering towards it as rapidly as their propelling force—steam, electricity, gas, wind, hand, and foot power—could make them move? Then he felt reassured that there would be space, for he noticed that just as many craft were making away from the harbor and were scattering to all points of the compass.



HIS SHIP WAS CLOSE IN.

His ship was close in before the risen sun threw the regular morning haze across the wide waters. He could see fat Chinese and slender Malays sousing the decks of their sampans or painting their timbers. Every one of these strange contraptions seemed to have a pet duck tied to its rear deck.

About the rickety old wharves so many small boats were made fast that it was possible to walk for miles without touching the mainland. The docks and decks were piled with masses of commodities that Thomas later learned were tortoises, sharks' fins, copra, bales of rice and tea, cases of chopsticks, pots of grease, baskets of golden pork, cases of noodles, piles of live fish and stacks of dried fish, sun-cured vegetables, buckets of watermelon seeds, and tins of motor gasoline.

The wild confusion of landing, the heaps of personal baggage lugged about by the uncouth native passengers, the "Come along now; step lively," of the calm British officials, the jabbering in twenty languages, and the

uncertainty of what he had better do first would have appalled Thomas a month before. But by now he had seen two cities of this outlandish part of the world, and already he called himself a thoroughly seasoned traveler.

He passed from the end of the landing plank as briskly as he could, stepped off to the right to be out of the surging current of pushing humanity hurrying from the steamer, dropped his American looking suitcases beside him, and frankly stared all around him.

Across the strip of narrow water he could see the soaring crests of the mountain ranges outlined against the cloudless sky.

"Sumatra," he reminded himself, like a schoolboy mastering a geography lesson.

The city before him seemed more compact at close range than it had from the water. From right to left swept the stately Harbor Front Road, with its imposing hotels and large business blocks. He regarded the rows with curiosity, realizing that with his reduced pocketbook their luxuries and wares were not for him.

Should he find the post-office and ask for mail? There could hardly be any letters for him yet. Besides, the lure of the city made itself felt. He must start out at once to explore. If he chanced on the post-office, well and good; —he might go in, if something more enticing were not drawing him along behind it.

Wealthy Europeans must live in the villas he had noticed in terraces on the overtopping hill above the massed roofs of the main city. Well, he very likely had seen all of them that was necessary for him. Did Oriental hotels have a room where he could check his baggage, as hotels had at home? He could find out.

He decided to cross the road.

Resisting the assaults of half a hundred willing workers of all shades of skin and of all varieties of dress, he carried his own bags across the road, narrowly escaping collisions with loping jinrickshas and racing motor cars, and once being forced to walk round a parked cart drawn by two beautiful wide-horned white oxen.

His entrance into the most expensive hotel in the entire Malay Peninsula, carrying his own baggage, caused a mild riot, although the attendants never once let Thomas know how peculiar an animal they considered him in this land where no white man does any physical labor for himself, so cheap is native help. He later learned that if he should be sitting four feet from the

pitcher of water and the glasses, and the native servant were forty yards away, it was too much effort to cross the four feet to pour his own glass of water. No; the house-boy should be called from forty yards away to do this strenuous bit of work.

In fifteen minutes the alert American youth learned that the city—like several western mushroom towns of his own land—made a good showing only on the outside to the casual visitor. It "put up a good front," as he wrote to Bill Johnson. Only the European residents and (this was astonishing to Tom) the Chinese lived in quarters that were better than slums. The other Chinese section and the Indian and Japanese districts were tawdry and mean, no matter how picturesque at first glance.

He had been told on the *Portlander* that Chinatown was the district to live in. He was drawn by the odors of the outdoor Chinese cook shops, with their fat-bellied owners; but he decided he could never learn to juggle a bowl of food and two long chopsticks on a street curb in the gaze of passing Russians, British, Malays, Portuguese, Dutchmen, Japanese, and slumming American tourists.

He wondered whether the closed fronts of buildings hid opium dens, gambling joints, or joss temples. He fell in beside a parade led by a Chinese brass band, blaring away at a tune he thought he knew. But, for the life of him, he could not be sure. A strain that sounded familiar was swept away by some terrible discords from the clarinet and bass horn. The booming of the big drum was terrible. The procession wound in and out along the narrowing streets and along alleys darkened by tall houses, whose overhanging balconies were crowded with spectators.

His pulse beat faster as the musicians banged and blew, and his feet moved along in perfect time with the marked rhythm. Only after an hour of twisting and doubling did it dawn on him that perhaps this parade was not getting anywhere very promptly. A pair of white sailors turned around from a sloppy dish of noodles and rice which they were sharing from the top of a barrel.

"Pipe the brass band," he heard one exclaim.

"Rats!" the other objected. "It's only a Chinese funeral."

Thomas turned back and in vexation at himself plunged down the first narrow opening that led towards the water-front.

It was impossible for him to go directly to any point; first, because he had no real reason for trying to get anywhere; and second, because, like all

boys, he had eyes in his head and inquisitive feelings all over him. In this narrow alley he came upon the most amazing store he had ever seen. No pet shop in any city he knew could be put in the same class with it. He thought of the usual assortment of pet canaries, a cage or two of kittens, a few runs of fashionable puppies for ladies, the certain bowl of goldfish, once in a long while a parrot, and, more rarely still, a timid little monkey.

But this Singapore pet shop! There were birds like darting flames or bouquets of flowers; a score of various kinds of monkeys, of all sizes and colors, long-haired, short-haired, bearded, and shaved; parrots screeching in all languages; giant lizards; chameleons that flashed new colors upon their bodies while you watched them do it; pet ducks for house porch or boat deck; dome-shelled lumbering tortoises and their soft-skinned eggs; cute little snakes like lengths of colored cord; huge puffy serpents, too slow to harm any one; sharp-eyed mongooses, that would be only too happy to pounce upon all these snakes, sink their sharp teeth into their necks just below their heads, and hang on for dear life through all the thrashing of the long bodies; cormorants to be used in fishing, with the metal ring around their necks so they could not swallow the fish they seize; pet crickets in tiny cages—the delight of poor Chinese youngsters; in the large aquarium, a fish with the brilliant red, yellow, and blue of a gorgeous parrot and a beak that could bite through wood; other fish as transparent as folded tissue paper; painted sparrows and birds of paradise; cockatoos and golden pheasants.

A strange feeling in the pit of his stomach made Thomas realize that a menagerie is not a pleasant place to live in. The closeness of the atmosphere and the terrific odors of the establishment drove him to the outer air, gasping for relief.

Decidedly, the food and the smell made it impossible for him to think of living in the Chinese quarter.

Business was not very brisk at the Sailors' Mission, and there he found a small room. Here, even if he could not have the three native servants entirely at his beck and call, he could be as cool as the tropics permit and, more attractive still, as odorless. Best of all, he could be clean.

Early that evening he took a hot bath and tumbled into bed. He did not wake up for fourteen hours. This long sleep was just what a healthy, thoroughly tired boy needed, and he awoke next morning with new courage for the great quest in which he had, so far, seemingly made but little progress.

CHAPTER V

SHIPS MAY START FOR PORTS

At his very first visit to the authorities of the city, Thomas felt the difference between the crisp, efficient manner in which affairs were conducted here and the aimless, leisurely fashion he had seen in other city offices.

He was telling his tale to the young clerk at the City Hall, as he called it, when that young man, no older than Thomas himself, stopped him, before he had hardly started, with an impersonal direction:

"Central Police Station, 240 Johore Road, Room 56. Captain R. C. Dalton. Good-morning."

Thomas was so shocked by the heartlessness of this dismissal that he stood and stared at the clerk with the green eye-shade. The other caught the blank face of the inquirer with the tail of his eye and looked up quickly from his blotter.

"Don't think me curt," he said kindly. "You must remember that on some days I have a score of inquiries like yours. And besides," and here his blue eyes twinkled for a second, "if you want to find a trace of your father, the sooner you get to Captain Dalton, the sooner he can begin working on the case."

The truth of that observation struck Thomas at once. His hearty, "You're right. Thank you," was called back over his shoulder as he dashed through the door into the corridor leading to the street.

"Must remember that," he told himself as he walked smartly towards Johore Road. "Out here, not what you say but what you do counts."

The quiet of the police offices was at first disappointing. He recalled his one experience in an American court room, and now the absence of people darting in and out, the absence of loud voices in the corridors, the absence of banging doors, the quieter voices of the officers, and, above all, the deadened footfalls of the natives who moved noiselessly about made the whole building much more impressive than it deserved to be.

The assistant in Captain Dalton's anteroom listened more than he spoke. His pointed questions, asked in a matter-of-fact tone, nettled Thomas. Did

this fellow realize that he had traveled halfway around the globe to talk to him? Did he know that he had come from America? In a brave attempt to impress this immense distance upon the automatic underling, Thomas broke out:

"I've come almost around the world!"

The young man understood the youth before him much better than the latter did himself.

"Nice little trip, isn't it?" was all he answered. "I've been around the world myself—four times, in fact. And I worked nearly six months in your city of Chicago, too."

"What is the use," Thomas thought to himself, while the other's nimble pen scratched on a blue report blank, "of trying to tell these people anything? They know it all in advance."

"The last ships your father sailed on? Their names?"

The list that Thomas could give seemed woefully lacking, now that he was actually involved in starting his investigation.

"Know the one he sailed on into Penang?"

"No," Thomas faltered.

"Sorry. Now the one he sailed in from Penang to Singapore."

Thomas could only wiggle his head from left to right.

"That's unfortunate."

The stranger from the United States realized that he was not offering the police much help.

"Then how do you know he ever came here?"

Thomas could only gaze in astonishment.

"Why, his last letter said he was coming," was all he could get out in a weak voice.

"Many a sailor or ship starts out for a place and never reaches it," observed the clerk, leaning back in his chair.

That remark struck all Tom's hopes and plans as a tidal wave might overwhelm a small boat. Down they went, totally wrecked. His thoughts leaped back to Penang, to the shipping he had so little regarded in the harbor, to the outlandish riggings from all the known and unknown ports of

both hemispheres. How frightening was the remark that a ship could start out for a place and never reach it. He had never seen a wreck or a fatal collision. In his own harbor he had gazed on vessels with mashed-in bows slowly making their way up the channel. He had seen dismasted coasting schooners towed to shipyards by tugs. Ferryboats had collided in soupy fogs. Ocean liners had cut holes in the steel sides of cargo tramps. Newspapers had printed stories of heroic rescues in mid-ocean and accounts of total losses with no lives saved. But even though he was fitting himself to design ships that would be hammered by waves, beaten by storms, grazed by reefs, and pounded by rocks, he had never before felt the consequences of these misfortunes by wind and water to the people still on land.

With a suddenness that left him white and speechless the tremendous power of the waters of the globe swept over him. Often in jest his companions had uttered the meaningless phrases, “watery grave” and “trackless ocean,” without arousing in his mind any real picture of the horror of a grave in the depths of the mysterious seas or the helplessness of a disabled ship among running billows. The tragedy of the word “trackless” held him fixed:—the straining timbers, the hissing rigging, the sloping decks, the splintering masts, the cries of the men, the sucking whirlpools that mark the spot for a short time only, the few pieces of wreckage carried by winds and currents to distant shores; but where the tragedy occurred there are no marks to proclaim it to passers, no help to later seekers; and after the fury of the storm had exhausted itself, the waters would become as gentle and blue and inviting as any part of the smiling, beautiful ocean can be.

For the first time a sickening sense of the treacherous power of these masses of water—which until now he had instinctively admired and loved—took possession of his entire being. Before this untamed, strong thing he cowered, feeling himself no more than the weakest kind of insect in the immense universe.

He hardly heard the clerk’s cheery voice.

“All right. Just a minute now.”

Thomas was not aware that he had disappeared into the inner office. He sat huddled on the bench against the wall. For a few minutes longer he let his fancy dwell on all the terrors and horrors of the sea. Then resolutely he set his shoulders and drew his lips together firmly. He rubbed his fingers, for they had grown cold and numb with his fright. He set his eyes resolutely on the dull face of the office clock.

The sense of suffocation beat upon his aching chest exactly as it did when he stayed under water too long. That feeling jerked his mind back to himself. When that agony of holding his breath under water grew so keen that his eyes wavered and his senses began to reel, when the pressure on his chest threatened to crush his bones in another second, he had always found some degree of relief by beginning to let his stored-up breath out very gradually and to turn his gaze upwards towards the lightened surface of the water.

In an effort to gain some relief from the oppressive terror of the pictures in his brain, he did the same thing now. There was nothing on the ceiling to make him think of tempests and waves. He could gaze calmly on the cool green of its paint. His chest was filled to the bursting point with air that, in his emotional excitement, he had drawn in with deep breaths. Conscious that he was not forced to hold any in reserve until he reached the surface, he opened his mouth and released his chest muscles with a sound like that of steam escaping from the exhaust pipe of an engine.

MEN AND SHIPS HAD GONE DOWN.

Men and ships had gone down, of course, but both ships and men had weathered gales and typhoons; wooden bottoms torn by collision and rocks had held until port had been safely gained; hundreds of persons had been rescued in all seas; and men in small boats had crossed thousands of miles to reach land.

Storm and water, rocks and fire could do much; but man could do more.

Those few minutes in a bare room in a police office in far-away Singapore made Thomas suffer as much as any other equal length of time in his entire life. In compensation they gave him a truer respect for the elemental force his life-work would deal with, and a truer sense of the responsibility his profession would demand.

He had entered that building somewhat perky and over-confident. A few words from an unregarding clerk—who never suspected the effect of his utterly commonplace yet true words—had plunged Thomas into the depths of despondency. When he left that building he was a changed person. His boyish perkiness had been cast off. But he was no less confident in himself, for the determination that had spurred him on for months was too strong to be shaken by an emotion. He was more quietly and cautiously confident in his own abilities, less likely to make impulsive beginnings, stronger in endurance, and more patient in striving against hindrances.

The sense of swimming in an immensity was still strong upon him, for he brought himself back to his present surroundings by a vigorous shake of his head, exactly as he always did when he threw the water from his matted hair.

Had something been said to him that he had not heard?

He was on his feet facing the clerk, whose extended hand offered him a small identification card. Five minutes before, the clerk's direction would have plunged him into deep despair over the delay. Now he could bear it calmly.

"Come back in three days, please."

CHAPTER VI

GAMBLING AT “THE YELLOW POPPY”

When the short twilight deepened into darkness, the narrow streets, alleys, and passages of the Chinese quarter, in which natives and visitors in the early morning and late afternoon carried on the necessary business of the day, slowly stretched and turned over, as if waking from troubled sleep, and then sprang rapidly into excited agitation.

Midday and midnight were as different as—well, as day and night could be. Midday, instead of being noisy and animated, was dull and sleepy; and midnight, instead of being subdued and silent, was crowded and joyous.

The shambling, gently swaying white oxen, drawing delivery wagons and goods carts, disappeared from the streets. Their places were taken by every kind of conveyance that can be utilized by man for transporting himself over long and short distances. Ponies; blooded riding horses; motor cars with frightening horns; dogcarts; open barouches drawn by exactly matched horses throwing their legs in perfect unison; tandems; jinrickshas bouncing behind their agile, yelling runners; an occasional swaying litter; motorcycles; omnibuses; wheeled chairs; and countless bicycles brought to the cafés, the restaurants, the joss houses, the shops, the cabarets, the theaters, and the gambling establishments all the motley population of this city situated at the crossroads of the world.

Fronts of houses, boarded up and somber during the daylight hours, were swiftly and silently uncovered, revealing carving and gilding and red and yellow lacquers that writhed and glittered beneath brilliant electric clusters. Pipes wheezed, horns puffed, and drums rattled. Dishes and glasses clattered and clinked. Guests called and gesticulated; waiters answered and darted about; snatches of song were whistled and clouds of smoke blew about.

In the most dignified stretch of a quiet street the narrow front of a dark building had all day appeared like the wall of a warehouse in which business was not good. All day long not a person entered or left the one narrow door; not a blind in any of the closed shutters moved to let a ray of light penetrate to the interior; not a sound came from its empty spaces.

Long after dark had settled in the street like a wad of soft wool, a solitary figure shuffled down the long dark corridor that led from the rear of the building to this single front door. His eyes were still dull, for he had just

awakened from his regular day's sleep. With the sureness developed by long habit, he pressed a concealed button under one of the panels of the door, and a bit of the woolly night puffed into his face as a six-inch square opening was made by a sliding sheet of steel. The watcher's keen eyes blinked up and down the empty street. Then he touched a switch and a dull electric bulb shone dimly above the door.

With this signal at its main entrance, the best-regulated gambling house in Singapore was open for the night's business and pleasure.

Patrons arrived in dozens after eleven o'clock, many making their way into the rooms by side and rear doors, never suspected by the uninformed of giving access to the most celebrated gambling establishment in the Far East. But most came in twos and threes along this quiet street, too narrow for motor cars. Even the jinricksha men put down their passengers at the end of the road and directed them to come to the door on foot.

Beneath that glimmering circle of light every person who mounted the single step was scrutinized searchingly by those glinting eyes behind the dark square opening. When the door swung inward, the owner of those examining eyes silently covered himself behind it. As the patrons walked down the corridor towards the light at the end, he pressed a signaling button in the wall. It was rumored that this guard never forgot a face or a figure. Trouble-makers never passed that portal a second time. Some who were allowed to pass, but whose manner, once they were in the corridor, failed to satisfy the observer, found, at the end of the passage, an inviting door open on their right, and a light showing the way. Once beyond that door, they heard it lock behind them. The light went out. They were in a side alley leading to the lighted street before them. Few persons treated in this manner ever tried to get in again, but contented themselves with patronizing less particular places, where they could lose their money with less exclusiveness.

At exactly eleven o'clock the money changers tucked away their balance sheets and the attendants took their places behind their tables, their stacks of coins before them, their wooden rakes close to their right hands. The plainly furnished rooms, dimly lighted by green-shaded clustered lights, throwing all their rays upon the playing tables, were a shock to casual visitors whose curiosity about the place was keener than their desire to win. But those patrons—regular and occasional—to whom playing for stakes was the breath of life, or its one great diversion, found the surroundings entirely appropriate. In a gambling establishment nothing should distract attention from the games themselves.

The Chinese director of the finances of the institution—a cultured graduate of a European university—moved among the tables easily, exchanging a few words in polished tones with some of the early arrivals.

When Thomas saw him, he gasped at the dignified power of the man.

For Thomas was there—all eyes and ears.

The day clerk at his lodging place had assured him that he must see such an establishment or he would never comprehend the real nature of dwellers in the East and of travelers in it. Not a regular patron himself, he knew many who were. He had felt the thrills of winning the smallest stakes, as well as the disappointment of seeing his small wagers scooped up by others. He summed up his opinion and code of behavior in a single sentence:

"When I can spare five dollars, I get more fun there than in going to a theater or eating too much in a restaurant."

He was going to have what he termed "a ten-dollar fling" that night. If Thomas wanted to go along, he would be glad to take him. If Thomas had the courage to risk five dollars himself, it would add to the fun. Bill Johnson had poked a bill into his pocket as a parting gift, with the remark, "Now, Tom, some time when you want to spend money you shouldn't, or have some fun you can't afford, dig up my note and spend it recklessly."

Should he do it?

He would! In his enthusiasm he nodded over the wire cage to young Manchester and then spent the remainder of the day repenting his hasty promise. But he was too proud to back out of the adventure.

For the first hour in the gambling establishment, as most beginners do, Thomas felt cheated. Manchester delayed playing as long as he could, in order to make the evening seem longer. Wandering from room to room, from table to table, trying to grasp the differences of the various plays, Thomas felt like asking:

"But doesn't anything ever happen?"

Around the tables quiet groups sat or stood with eyes intent on the game, pushing forward their money, hardly moving unless a winning play forced them to stretch for the stakes. If a player had won or lost enough, he pushed back his chair, but his place was filled immediately and the game suffered no interruption. The card games were especially quiet and dignified. Even fan-tan, the reputed curse of Chinese gamblers, was conducted like a

ceremony. The voices of the attendants of other kinds of play repeated their directions monotonously:

"*Faites vos jeux, Mesdames, Messieurs. Faites vos jeux.* Make your plays, Ladies and Gentlemen. Make your plays!"

The English words helped Thomas grasp the meaning of the French, but the expressions in other tongues were utterly incomprehensible to him.

He began to grow sleepy. This might be entertaining for Manchester, who knew the intricacies of all the moves, but for a healthy young American who had walked about the warm streets nearly all day, sleep was more welcome than the stealthy, catlike watchfulness that all these patrons exhibited. A pistol shot would have been a positive relief. He touched his guide's arm.

"Say, don't think I'm a savage, but when is somebody going to shoot himself over his losses?"

Manchester silenced him with a frightened look and gesture.

"Well, why not stake your money, lose it, and get the agony over?" Thomas went on jestingly.

"Don't talk about losing. It's a bad sign."

"I expect to lose my five dollars. That's the price I'm willing to pay for what I thought would be exciting—at least entertaining. It's not—if I may be allowed to tell the truth."

"You ought to win. All beginners are lucky."

"Never found anything valuable, never won anything valuable."

"Then your luck should change. Do you carry anything for luck?"

Thomas stared in unbelief. Could this grown Englishman believe in charms and hoodoos? Had he been so long among superstitious sailors and charmed Orientals that he had let his reason sink beneath stories of witch doctors and workers of black magic? Thomas could hardly credit his senses.

Then he swept his eyes around and wondered how long it would take to make him accept as real the surroundings into which his youthful curiosity had led him. That old Chinese gentleman on the opposite side of the table might have been an antique carved statue from a joss house, come to life for this one night only. His bronzed face was set in a thousand wrinkles; his delicate fingers had nails so long they had to be protected by tapering gold guards shaped like lengthened thimbles. The horn-rimmed spectacles on his

arched nose framed the only signs of life in his stationary figure, his slanting eyes darting hither and thither with every play.

Next to him sat an English lady with a high-pitched voice. She had come from a dinner party or dance, for her fur-edged cloak dropped back from her emerald-green evening gown. Behind her stood her escort in immaculate black and white evening clothes. Near his side, pushing his fat, swarthy fist under his very elbow to place his bets, stood a dumpy man of uncertain nationality—paymaster, perhaps, from a Dutch man-of-war.

Was all this real? Was he actually among these people? He? Three months ago he had been among the usual quiet scenes of his daily routine. He began to be slightly troubled. Let him once accept as real persons all these figures from a play he was witnessing, and he might be led to accept as true all their varied and strange beliefs. Never had he dreamed of such picturesque persons.

Suppose he had to live out here for years. Could he still remain a common-sensed American? Or should he be transformed into some peculiar person with no racial marks, no individuality of his own? What did that automatic attendant in the middle of the long side of the table think of the company that pressed close about him, night after night, year after year? He seemed not to be aware of their existence. To him nothing mattered except the sharp tinkling of the little whirling ball in the singing wheel and the scattered coins and bank notes on the squares before him. Until the wheel came to rest and the marble, with its voice of fate, clicked sharply into its resting compartment, the players and spectators held their breath in anxiety. The short, stocky attendant called out the number briskly, and a series of quick sighs came from those straining faces.

To the attendant all this did not exist. Only the decorated board meant anything. With a few nervous sweeps of his wooden rake, he drew towards him all the forfeited moneys. Then, spinning the wheel and tossing the ball in opposite directions again, he skilfully sorted the mass of money into piles by countries and then stacked it neatly by denominations, all the while repeating his monotonous chant urging the players to place their stakes.

Manchester had been reducing his wanderings to this one room and had been hovering longer and longer about this narrow table. Here, evidently, he had decided to risk his money.

“I’ll play first,” he explained. “Then if I win I’ll go on playing. That will make it last longer.”

“Not too long, I hope,” Thomas answered frankly. “I’m sleepy. Lose it soon, then I’ll lose mine, and we’ll go home to bed.”

Manchester wriggled cautiously between two spectators, who courteously made room as soon as they saw that he was going to play. He threw a coin so that it fell on the intersection of two lines and thus touched four squares.

“Four chances of winning something,” he whispered to the observing Thomas.

“But only one-fourth as much,” the other retorted, for so much was easy to understand.

Expecting his companion to be stripped of his funds in a few seconds, Thomas retreated to the outer line and waited. But Manchester darted forward and made two movements to place two coins, for the first turn had brought him winnings.

The attendant droned, the coins clicked, the wheel whirred, the marble clicked, and still Manchester curved his shoulders forward and straightened them again. In spite of his first indifference, Thomas found himself edging closer and closer, until by some readjustment he was behind Manchester’s left elbow and leaning close over the steady gamblers in their chairs.

Manchester’s eyes were tense, his breath was labored, and his face was flushed and pale.

“What’s up?” asked Thomas.

“Had a streak of good luck running. It changed just now.”

No longer was he darting forward to gather his winnings in his fingers or to rearrange the coins on the cloth for larger risks. Now he repeated only one movement. Waiting as long as he dared before the attendant called that no more bets might be made, he would consider every chance before he decided where to place his money. All his delays, all his careful calculations produced one always-repeated result:—his money was swept away by the rake towards the winnings of the establishment. All that Manchester had thought was his own had now slipped from his possession, back again to the bank that is so seldom exhausted.

“That’s all,” he muttered, rubbing his dry brow.

Thomas looked at him inquiringly.

“You’ll have to play now, or we’ll have to move back,” Manchester explained.

Thomas would have asked for more advice, but the regular patrons cast angry looks at these two young disturbers of the quiet of the evening. With no more thought than if he were casting a pebble into water, Thomas tossed his gold sovereign upon the marked cloth. It fell across a line and lay partly on two squares.

The ball ran down through its last dwindling noises and gave its final sound. Voices murmured the number, “Thirty-two.”

Tom’s sleepy lids opened as he glanced hastily at one of the squares touched by his coin. Could he believe his eyes? The rake had swept the board almost clear of money. Near his stake rested five other pieces of various values. He must have won! He felt Manchester’s touch on his arm, signaling him to pick up his winnings. He leaned over the hunched shoulders of the figure in the chair before him and clutched all the money belonging to him.

Before he had raised his hand two inches from the table he felt his wrist seized in a grip that pressed like steel. His fingers flew open and the coins dropped with a clatter. The powerful hand forced his arm up until his elbow and shoulder ached and he found the wrathful face of the attendant scowling at him.

Thomas could only stare helplessly.

THE COINS DROPPED WITH A CLATTER.

Manchester had presence of mind to call into his ear, “Twenty-two was yours, you chump.”

His captor muttered several words in a language Thomas did not recognize. Several ugly faces threatened him as his wrist was freed.

His hasty, “I’m terribly sorry. I made a mistake,” was reënforced by an explanation from Manchester, and the angry countenances returned to the game. A second later the effects of the slight disturbance had disappeared as completely as a ripple on the surface of the water, except that Thomas was rubbing his pained wrist and Manchester was hurrying him towards an exit.

“If you couldn’t find any excitement in there, you certainly made some for yourself,” Manchester said when they reached the refreshing night air.

“For a moment I thought I was a goner,” Thomas admitted. “That man has a grip like steel.”

“He’s the steadiest fellow in the business. Been here for years. No one ever gets the best of him.”

“What was that language he jabbered in?”

“Some French, some Portuguese.”

“I hope I didn’t spoil your pleasure.”

“No; I couldn’t have hung around much longer. All my money was gone. I’d had my fun.”

“Why didn’t you stop when you had won all that I saw in your fist?”

Manchester uttered a quick, nervous laugh.

“Oh, innocent youth! That’s the mystery of all such gambling. We simply can’t stop in time.”

“Foolish, I call it,” Thomas pronounced.

“Give me credit for some sense. I never take more than I can afford to lose.”

“What’s the name of that place? Chinese?”

“Yes. In English it means ‘The Yellow Poppy.’ ”

“Forgetfulness, eh?” Thomas grinned. “How do the losers forget?”

He could see that a shudder of disturbance passed over Manchester at the disagreeable topic. Then his initiated companion remarked lightly:

“Some take to opium. Others just walk off the docks all along the water-front.”

Thomas shuddered at the hardness of the speaker’s voice. Then a trembling seized him. Had his father met either of those fates?

Manchester had noticed the tremor that ran over the younger man’s body.

“Let’s hurry,” he advised. “You’re cold. This night air gets you visitors before you know it. It’s not too pleasant for me, either.”

And with no trace of regret for the money he had thrown away for the fun that Thomas considered a dull hour in an uncomfortable place, Manchester whistled shrilly as he quickened his pace along the quiet streets in the mysterious velvet blackness of the tropical night.

CHAPTER VII

TOM LEARNS WHERE HIS FATHER WORKS

When Thomas, three days later, was introduced to Inspector Allmayer, he was not surprised to see a police detective who looked like a prosperous grocer or candy store owner. He had enough sense to know that detectives are made to appear like foxes, bloodhounds, and hawks only in books and in films. Inspector Allmayer was so far removed from story-book conventions as to have a shining bald head.

Thomas waited anxiously but quietly in the chair to which the police agent had motioned him. Should he begin by asking questions? Should he just let things take their natural course?

Mr. Allmayer drew his gaze back from the screened window through which he had been absentmindedly scanning the motley group of passers-by and turned to Thomas. The boy was held fascinated by the depths in those blue eyes. He had heard and read of eyes that bored through one, he had himself gazed into the faces of persons of many different races, yet never had he met a pair of eyes like these. The silence under their scrutiny was becoming uncomfortable. He knew that he must not display any embarrassment by shifting his position, so he simply gazed back.

Then came the questions—the cross-examination, Thomas later called it when he told about it. Once or twice only did any flicker of change register itself on the calm and kindly countenance of the detective. Many of the inquiries appeared totally unnecessary to the boy. He was desirous of learning something definite, and of being relieved of this eternal attempt by authorities to get information and more information from him. Most of his annoyance was caused by the realization that he had so little information to furnish.

The early bombardment he met promptly and easily.

“What’s your name? How old? Where born? What are you doing now? How did you get out here from the States? Any adventures on the way?”

Thomas hesitated for a second, then briefly outlined the happy “accident” by which he had squared accounts with Hanson for Sven’s lost hat.

Inspector Allmayer's face showed not the trace of a smile and the hero's pleasure in his achievement oozed away.

"Why go to Calcutta? Why to Penang? What did you learn there? Why did you come here? Where are you living?"

The next question made Thomas jump in his chair.

"Can you handle firearms?"

As the reply was not prompt in coming, he modified it slightly.

"Ever carry a revolver?"

The youth felt somewhat less imposing because he had to say, "No." But, for the life of him, he could not see what this had to do with his predicament.

"Why didn't you write all this to us before you arrived, to save time?"

Thomas felt that the questions were "getting warmer."

"Did your father have any nicknames?"

He knew now that they were getting close to the real business.

"Could he speak any languages besides English?"

Thomas hesitated. Inspector Allmayer led him on.

"French?"

"He might know some. He had a French name."

"Ever hear him called 'Frenchie'?"

Thomas shook his head. "I don't remember."

The Inspector took up another thread.

"Any other languages possibly?"

That "possibly" gave the boy an idea;—strange that he had not seen its significance before.

"What's the language of Guatemala? Spanish, isn't it? At least, American Spanish. He must have known some of that."

"There's more Portuguese than Spanish out here."

Was the Inspector trying to lead him to grasp something for himself?

“Wouldn’t the Spanish help him with Portuguese?” the boy asked, pleased with himself at being able to hurl a question at his examiner.

The next query led away from this topic just when Thomas believed it was producing results.

“What was your father’s figure like?”

“Not very tall. But strong. Must have been to be a seaman. Perhaps like me.”

He stood up and turned round.

“Are you strong?”

“Stronger than you think,” Thomas reported proudly.

Then his youthful pride, pricked by a question, collapsed as a toy balloon would.

“How do you know you are strong?”

Thomas floundered about and caught at the only reason he could think of.

“The way I swim and stay under water.”

“Swim fast?”

He wanted to answer, “Yes.” But honesty prevented.

“No. But for a long time. And stay under water longer than any other fellow I know.”

The questions were shifted without any warning.

“Could your father be called ‘Goose Frenchie’?”

The son bridled with indignation at the idea of the silly word “goose” being applied to any one belonging to him.

“Certainly not!” he exclaimed, then caught the glance in those blue eyes. “I don’t see how. Can you explain it, sir?”

“Can you think it out?”

Thomas ran his thoughts back quickly over all their questions and answers and pounced upon the only word uttered that bore any similarity to “goose.”

“Portuguese,” he said half aloud. “Most often called ’Guese. Portuguese Frenchie—then Guese Frenchie—then Goose Frenchie. Am I right?”

He was sure that he was.

“Suppose, for a minute, you’re correct. Why would ‘Goose’ hang on to a man long after it was changed from ‘Geese’ and no one could see that it started as ‘Portuguese’?”

Thomas dropped his hands and clenched the seat of his chair. Then “Goose” did have some meaning—in spite of the silliness of its sound—to his father!

“Tell me!” he cried. “What do you know about my father?”

In spite of himself the words of the first interview kept singing themselves over and over again through his throbbing brain:—“Many ships and men start out for ports they never reach.”

The agonized youth’s next utterance pierced the quiet of the room like a pistol shot.

“Is he here?”

Allmayer held up a warning hand.

“Gently! Gently!”

The boy’s face had gone white with anxiety.

“It’s too early to say,” the man went on in a low tone, trying to restore Thomas’s self-command. He paused, looking intently at the drawn face before him, in which the muscles had grown so tight that the lids remained wide apart on the protruding eyeballs.

It was harder for the lad than the Inspector had anticipated. He must break this spell at once.

“Don’t hope for too much,” he tried to warn him. “We think we’ve found him for you.”

In spite of his blank expression, Thomas heard the words and understood them. His parted dry lips uttered a low moan, his distended eyeballs began to roll, his muscles softened with a creaking sound, and his stretched-out arms thudded on the table. As his body slumped forward, Inspector Allmayer, to whom such a collapse was a daily occurrence, adroitly saved his ink from being overturned and his papers from being crumpled.

He waited quietly.

In a moment Thomas had shaken himself together and was trying to sit upright in his chair.

“There’s the water,” the Inspector told him, for he knew that his recovery would be all the quicker if he were engaged in doing something for himself.

“Here, in Singapore!” The boy spoke in an awed tone as he resumed his seat.

The Inspector’s warning hand made its slight gesture again.

“We mustn’t go too fast,” he restrained Thomas’s optimism. “We mustn’t jump to conclusions.”

“But you said——”

“I said, ‘We *think* we’ve found him.’ But in my work I have seen as many failures as successes. So it’s my rule not to let people hope too soon. It saves heartbreaks later. And besides, people who are all stirred up with emotional hopes can’t help us when we need them most in tight places.”

“Tight places?” repeated Thomas, a sense of the seriousness of this interview beginning to dawn on him. “Tight places? Was that why you asked if I had ever carried firearms or could use a pistol?”

For the first and only time, Inspector Allmayer hesitated before he replied.

“That may have been it. Remember, only *may* have been. Now, I’ve finished firing questions at you, so you must be fair and not pitch any at my defenseless bald head. On shipboard you’ve listened to seamen spinning yarns?”

Thomas nodded.

“Then listen to this one. For I’ve a yarn to spin to you.”

He began to speak in a low voice, making no reference to any notes or records for a date, a fact, a name. Every detail of this narrative he had mastered so well that it sounded like a story from a book he was reading.

The boy was spellbound.

“Nearly thirteen years ago, a battered old tramp steamer, short-handed and in bad condition, cleared from Penang for Singapore. On it your father had shipped as an A. B. in spite of the fact that on previous trips he had held higher positions. If his whole energy and mind had been set on advancing in his work, he might easily have gone on up the scale rapidly. But he seemed to have some other plan in his mind; likely he had saved some money, wanted to get home as quickly as possible, and jumped at the first ship to get away from a small port to a larger one.

“Soon after getting out to sea, the boat was hit—and hit hard—by one of those sudden fierce storms;—not quite a typhoon, but so close that you and I can’t tell the difference. That damaged the steering gear and the old tub rolled and pitched for days in the high seas.

“The story told here was that in one of the sudden lurches of the ship, your father was pitched head first against a steel bulkhead, and that all his senses were knocked out of him.”

“I knew it must be something like that,” Thomas inserted in a low voice.

“That made the ship even shorter-handed than before and delayed its run here, so you can believe that the officers and crew were not an agreeable lot when they finally got here—provisions low, ship damaged, and coal almost all burned. She was fitted and repaired as much as could be, and, as the weather was fine, she pushed on to Shanghai for a waiting cargo.

“All the stories about your father tallied exactly and, although we weren’t quite satisfied, there was nothing we could do to make the men change their reports. We could fasten no suspicion on any one. So your father stayed behind in the hospital.”

“He’s not there still?”

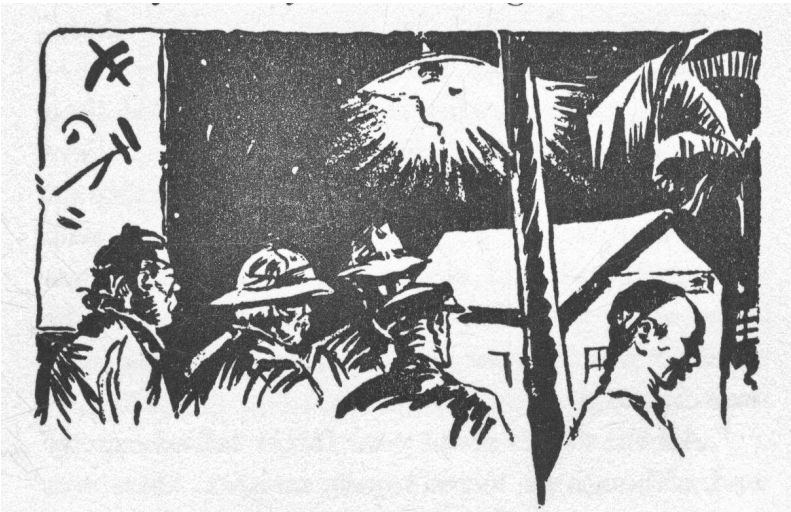
“No. He got well rather quickly. Did your father have any enemies?”

Thomas shook his head emphatically.

“Well, a long time later a story drifted back here from the China coast and after being passed from mouth to mouth, it came to our ears here. But even then it didn’t mean anything. All along the Chinese coast, sailors from that tramp steamer had more money to squander than they could have earned rightly.”

Thomas leaned forward.

“They stole my father’s savings!”



THE DRIFTING SAILORS.

"Natural conclusion. We, who remembered the case, thought that, too. The drifting sailors who gassed about the men let out other things—nothing very definite, but enough to keep the thing in our minds, and we became morally certain that the story of the fall against the bulkhead to account for the skull wound was false."

"They beat my father to steal his money!"

"Your father was a quiet little man who minded his own business strictly?"

Thomas nodded.

"Just the kind of man to provoke bullies in the fo'castle. That's the story we picked up piece by piece and fitted together. We are certain that some brutal attack was made on him."

"For his money." Thomas was certain of this motive.

"At any rate, some one passed on the boasting story of a huge European who told that he had 'done for a sneaking, babbling little French-American who knew too much.' Other circumstances we knew made us apply this bragging to your father. But you know what liars sailors can be in a grog shop with an admiring crowd of hangers-on around them, greedily drinking up the story-teller's money."

Thomas smiled in spite of himself.

"No; I don't know that."

“Of course you don’t! Well, no matter. Take my word for it. They can lie like a blue streak. That’s what this fellow may have been doing.”

“You know better than I do; but this money must have been stolen from my father. It all fits together so perfectly.”

“You would say that. But detective work—I mean investigating teaches us some strange certainties that always turn out wrong.”

He paused for a few seconds.

“It is almost a certain thing now that the whole outfit from that ship is engaged in illegal trade in opium.”

The effect on his listener was not so great as he had expected. Evidently this young adventurer from the other side of the globe had no conception of the villainy and conspiracies, the wickedness and profits, the brains and world-wide combinations, the apparent innocence of its worst plotters, the depths of depravity in the execution of its plans, the eternal watchfulness and far-flung detective force attempting to track down its owners and paid servants. He stared at the boy in amazement at his ignorance of this network of criminal operations.

“Why, even the League of Nations——” he began to explain. Then he broke off.

“If those men are opium smugglers,” he resumed, “that easily accounts for all their money, and knocks out the theory that they assaulted your father to get his small savings.”

“Then I don’t understand why——”

“Would you join a gang of opium smugglers? Certainly not. Would your father? In that storm, in that crazy, straining old hulk, things must have come to light that your father had never suspected before. Food and water were not so precious to those men as the safety of that vile drug. And when your father suspected or knew about it, unless he joined them and shared in their profits, he was an unsafe shipmate.”

The thought of the terrible danger drove the blood from Thomas’s face.

“We were all surprised that they didn’t throw him overboard.”

Thomas gasped.

“And they would have done that if his wits hadn’t been made harmless by the blow that closed his lips against them. They ran no danger from him after that. They might have hoped to be able to make use of him. They likely

hope that still. They may be doing it. He may be helping them against his will, not knowing that he's doing it."

The son's mind rushed sharply back to the purpose of this disclosure, obscured for a time by the unrealness of the tale that was being unfolded to his unbelieving ears.

"How could he help?" he cried.

"Ever hear of amnesia?"

It aroused only a recollection of magnesia, but he knew it must mean something else. His blank look answered for him.

"Ever hear of aphasia?"

"Loss of speech after some shock?" he said.

Inspector Allmayer beamed at his cleverness.

"Amnesia's the same thing, only in the brain. All the past is wiped clean off the slate. No memory, no recollections, no reminiscences. Begins life all over again."

"I've read of cases in large cities picked up by the police."

"Exactly. Your father's case. Shocked clean out of himself. Not sure of his nationality. He might be Spanish or Portuguese or French. In fact, his French is most fluent. That came back soonest. By the way, was he good at figures?"

"I don't know. But I find mathematics easy in school."

"You would, then."

One thing still puzzled Thomas.

"How could he help opium smugglers in spite of himself?"

"He's close to influential Chinese here—powerful and wealthy, crafty and skilful beyond belief. Everybody knows he was a seafaring man. What more natural, then, than for seafaring men to keep up their acquaintance with him? Visit him and talk over sea experiences—even if he doesn't remember any of his? He may listen without remembering, too. Another good thing. Living among Chinese on one hand and seamen on the other, he may innocently be the medium between the controlling minds and the most distant workers. And never a lasting trace in his mind, never a fact to be brought out in court, never a deed by him that involves any other person. A

peaceful, quiet, law-abiding citizen going about his regular work as steadily as any other man in Singapore."

"His work?" exclaimed Thomas.

"Work? Certainly. He's worked steadily for years and years."

"At what?"

Inspector Allmayer hesitated before replying.

"He's a croupier."

The boy's face showed no comprehension.

"He has charge of the table with the highest stakes in the best-regulated gambling house in Singapore."

Thomas clutched the edge of the table.

"What's it called?"

The Inspector emitted a few meaningless syllables of Chinese.

"In English," Thomas insisted.

"The Yellow Poppy."

The boy sprang to his feet.

"Then I've seen him!" he cried. "I made him angry! He gripped me by the wrist. I thought he was going to have me beaten and thrown out!"

He gasped for breath, swayed uncertainly for a moment, then pitched headlong across the table, unconscious.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO OTHERS ARRIVE IN SINGAPORE

The crack coast steamer *De Luxe* put into Penang one morning to discharge a few passengers of varying degrees of wealth and smartness. The waiting line of hotel runners scanned the few persons who stepped upon the stone quay from the bobbing little landing launch and sighed gloomily or shrugged their shoulders in mute protest against the dullness of the season. The jinricksha men—Malays more accustomed to accept poor business as part of destiny's decree for the lot of man—stared blankly into the sun from beneath their low conical straw hats and rested on their shafts.

If a few of that undistinguished line of travelers wanted jinrickshas instead of the hotel motor busses, they would ask for them.

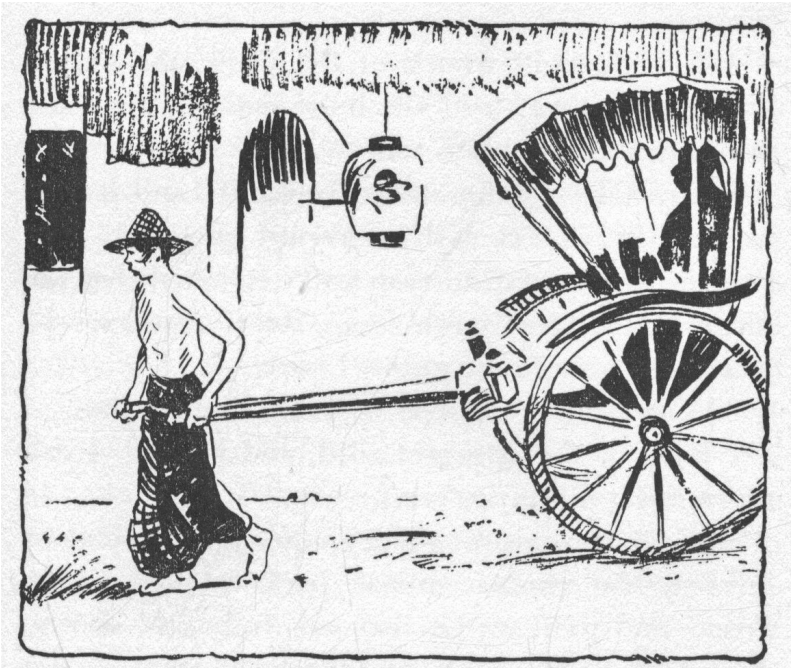
The common deck passengers, held behind iron gates on the tender's lower decks until the wealthier passengers had mounted to the pier, scrambled up the plank, piled their bulging bundles and countless packages around their waists, on their backs, on their shoulders, and high on their heads, and waddled off with the straight spines and rotating hips developed by bearing burdens on their heads.

One of this last group, a slouching dark-clad coolie, slung over his shoulder a bundle caught in the crook of a staff. Because this was his only burden, he succeeded in getting started before most of the first-class travelers, picking out their bags and tipping their porters, had been able to extricate themselves and start on their way.

The slouching Chinaman shambled towards the waiting line of jinricksha runners, peering keenly at their faces as he approached. Before the third one he paused for a second and drew his hand across his blinking eyes, at the same time sputtering something in a low voice to the clean-limbed Malay. The latter grunted in agreement. Any one noticing the momentary encounter would have explained it as a chance remark upon the weather.

As the jinricksha customers neared, there was a temporary spell of inattention on the part of this third Malay, by which he lost the patronage of a prosperous-looking European whose tip would have been a week's wages. But he was all alert for the next customer, though the huge body and the unpleasant face made him appear anything but an easy rider or a generous payer.

A European would have set this customer down as a low-born colonist, probably Dutch, whose own dogged application to hard work and grinding supervision of his native labor had raised him to the rank of stock-owning overseer or proprietor of a small plantation. Satisfied with that classification, he would have added a thought of thankfulness that he was not one of his workmen or one of his customers, and would have dismissed him from his mind. Had this same observer watched this man walk, he might have wondered where he had acquired and where he used the strange, short-stepped, rolling gait he practised.



THE JINRICKSHA GRATED OVER THE ROADWAY.

The runner, now listening to his guttural voice issuing directions in up-country Malay, had no difficulty in placing his race and occupation. This man was a low-born child of Asiatic and European parents, and he was now, or had been, a toiler on the seas.

The high, light wheels of the jinricksha grated over the roadway and the huge mass of red flesh sank back in complete content. At a turn into a side street he sprang suddenly to life and leaned forward in his seat with an abrupt question. The runner came to a dead stop and explained that the direct route was rough from street repairs;—he was going over to the parallel route.

The passenger's orders sounded like a curse.

"Back to that straight road, and hurry! I can stand any jolting you can give me!"

Patient and unprotesting as any driven beast of burden, the runner turned back into the main artery and went on his way carefully and slowly, not caring to put to the test the burly rider's boast of endurance.

The paunchy neck of the prosperous planter bulged into horizontal ridges above his tight collar; his buttons strained across his distended stomach; his bowlegs turned his knees outward; his freckled hands jostled on the cushions of the seat and on the arm-rests; his staring eyes gazed upon the comfortable buildings lining the street; he seemed actually to bask like some tropical animal in the sun that most persons avoided.

When they arrived at the fifth-class hotel, with its gaudy, narrow entrance, the Malay was able to retain his hold on one piece of baggage in spite of the grabs of the hotel boy, and thus he was enabled to trail after the guest to the small oilcloth-covered table that served as desk. The old, wrinkle-faced German—clerk as well as proprietor—held his pen poised in air as the broad hulk of a man darkened the brilliant patch of sunlight in the doorway. When the waddling gait had brought the moving figure into range of his short sight, a grin began to spread over his inquiring face.

The Malay had leaned over to deposit the bag he was carrying, but his ear caught the hotel owner's welcoming remark.

"Hello, Hanson," he said. "Back again?"

A grin beneath Hanson's nose was the only answer as the Malay pattered down the passage to the pavement.

It was strange that now, with no passenger's comfort to regard and with the best chances for another fare among the walkers on this principal avenue, the runner should turn into a cross-street to reach that parallel route along which he had thoughtfully intended to conduct the transformed Hanson—the brawling, driving, cursing ship's boatswain, magically moving about like a moneyed landowner. The odds were all against his finding any business along this back street, oversupplied as it was by extra runners avoiding the roughness of the paving on the main route. But good luck was his, for the most unpromising pedestrian selected him from a line of walking jinricksha drivers and halted him at the curb. Unpromising this person had appeared to every other seeker after custom, for he was a weak old Chinaman shuffling along in a drab coolie costume, carrying his few

worldly possessions in a cloth swinging from the notch in a staff on his shoulder.

If the Malay had ever before laid eyes on this inconspicuous figure, or had ever heard the sound of his voice, with its Malay words highly colored by a crude Chinese laborer's accent, he betrayed no sign of recognition or recollection as he pressed his chest against the bar between the shafts and jogged away. Yet, whether he knew it or not, his hunched-over, swaying passenger was the same coolie who had landed on the dock from the steamship tender, half an hour earlier.

The subsequent actions of this strangely assorted pair were even more unusual. Had any one been able to follow all the changes of that day and the next he would have been tempted to call them mystifying. But no one marked them—at least the Malay jinricksha owner hoped that no one had followed them.

Arrived at the quiet little lodging-house at the termination of that first drive, a brief question brought the information that all the lodgers were out at work or were sight-seeing. Thus no person was idling about to wonder at the strange spectacle of a Malay politely attending a poor old Chinaman to his room in an obscure lodging-house.

When the Malay unlocked and pushed back the chamber door, the coolie gave a quick glance into the room and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. On the chair between the bed and the wall was a low, stout traveling-box of European manufacture. From a cord around his neck he detached a key, and the Malay, as quick and wide-awake as he had seemed dull and unnoticing in the street, promptly threw back the lid, while the supposed coolie was rapidly dropping his tattered clothes in a pile on the floor.

In a few rapid phrases the attending Malay reported on his first passenger.

"Good!" approved the Chinaman. "You heard his name? Though there was no chance of mistaking him. And his hotel? He'll stay over to-night, at least. I must know when he's leaving. But I'll get that information for myself."

The Malay raised his head from near the floor, where he was sorting the discarded garments.

"What name here?" he asked.

"Same as usual."

"Where next, do you think?"

"Not certain. Singapore, I think."

"That's good," the Malay commented.

"Yes. It's always easier to work in cities. Crowds of people always help us."

A delighted smile broke over the Malay's placid countenance. The game this time must be a large and certain one to make the chief say so much. Compared with most of their meetings, this one was making both of them positively talkative. They might even go so far as to talk about themselves and what they wanted.

He wanted to go to Singapore. He said so.

The Chinaman—busy with the contents of the box—snapped his teeth. His answer was an end to that kind of conversation.

"Perhaps."

In silence he drew forth his wearing apparel.

The apparent bundle of clothes swinging from his staff was next revealed as a worn leather traveling-bag. When the Malay descended from the room a few minutes later, he carried under his arm a small bulging parcel wrapped in a piece of the Penang newspaper. It might contain a pair of shoes for the cobbler or soiled linen for the neighborhood laundry. That night in his suburb hut the Malay burned the coolie disguise of his visiting chief.

Two days later Hanson boarded the train from Penang. His only thought was of the thin cigar he was puffing. He had had too much association and experience with the Orient to look down with any air of superiority upon the mixture of races on the station platform, simply because he happened to have some European blood in his veins while they were not so blessed. But his general satisfaction with the world at large and the good cigar he was rolling between his lips and teeth made him inattentive to people who simply did not concern him.

Fashions and peculiarities of dress, which strike the eyes and draw the smothered laughter of first-time visitors to this land of contrasts, no longer meant anything to Hanson. Even had he let his thoughts concern themselves with the neatly clad occupant of the last compartment in his coach, he would have accepted him as some hard-working Chinaman who had made enough money in Europe or America to retire and, now returning to his native land, had not yet had the urge to discard the shoes, the coat, the trousers, and the

hat of his Western life. Or he might have thought contemptuously that the simple-minded Celestial wanted to flash his attire on his native townspeople and dazzle them with his tailored magnificence.

His cigar would have lost its flavor and the day its comfort, however, could he have known that the Chinaman, on whom his eyes rested for a moment unreflectingly, had observed keenly from behind his horn-rimmed glasses every detail of Hanson, every movement he made. The taste of the tobacco on his tongue would have turned sour and the odor of the smoke in his nostrils would have become blistering had he suspected that the slight Chinaman knew his name, his former position, where he had spent the past year, how long he had been in Penang, where he was going, and for what purpose. Ignorant of all these disturbing things, Hanson stretched and yawned with pleasant comfort as the express drew slowly from the station platform and gained its racing speed for the long run to the southern end of the peninsula.

Other passengers might fret and fume over the heat and dirt of the train ride, but the prosperous Eurasian and the tidy Europeanized Chinese gentleman never lost their perfect composure. Several times they passed each other in the corridor, or one of them let his eyes glide over the other, but never was there the slightest change in their expressions to show that one was closely observing every movement of the other. Hanson's stupid exterior masked not only a cruel mind and a beastly nature, but a shrewdness and cunning almost animal in many of its powers. But his voyage from America as a hard-working boatswain, he reasoned, must have thrown off the scent any person with any interest in his actions or suspicion of his plans. His desertion of the ship bothered him not at all. There were dozens of men in Indian ports anxious to work on return voyages to the States.

Only one thing rankled in his mind when he thought about it. Who on that ship had dared to throw him overboard? That it was an accident he refused to believe. Had he stayed on the vessel he would have learned by now, if he had had to strangle the senses out of some man to find out.

His thoughts turned pleasantly to the present journey through flat lands and jungle edges familiar to him, and dwelt with satisfied anticipation on the purpose of this trip and its profits to a large number of persons—but most of all its huge returns to him.

Just then the trim figure of the Chinese passed the opening of the compartment. As his shadow flitted across Hanson's face he turned his eyes towards him.

“Stuck-up Chink!” was his inward comment. And he dismissed him from his mind.

An hour after his arrival at the most luxurious hotel in Singapore, the retired Chinese, looking more than ever like a wealthy, loitering tourist, saw approaching him on the main avenue the young purser’s assistant from the *Portlander*. Thomas’s staring eyes seemed fixed upon the advancing man, but in reality he was seeing nothing, for the events of the night before at The Yellow Poppy were still fresh in his mind and he was aimlessly pacing the streets to fill in the days before he should return to the police for the report on his father.

The Chinaman swerved sharply to the right and became absorbed in the window display of a dealer in jewelry and carved ivory. Pieces of cheap Oriental craftsmanship for which he would not give two cents suddenly became of supreme attraction. With one eye fixed upon the line of parading elephants carved from a tusk—the commonest souvenir from the Orient—he could still observe the reflection of passers-by in the show-window glass.

He became overcautious. Drawing his soft white handkerchief from his pocket he pressed it against his face. The gesture appeared perfectly natural —he might have been perspiring; but he used this screen to prevent his face from being seen by any one.

The boy’s glance never wavered for an instant from straight before him.

The mysterious Chinese gentleman reproved himself with a shrug, folded the fair white square carefully, shifted his native malacca cane, and glanced at the receding figure of the absorbed boy.

“Silly of me, perhaps,” the man told himself as he resumed his leisurely stroll. “His mind is intent on his own affairs.”

And with his trained eyes he picked out the lumbering back of Hanson half a block away and followed him as he had been doing before Thomas’s approach had flustered him.

The unseeing Thomas had in three minutes passed within touching distance of a twisting thread of many lives that was destined to coil tightly about his own.

CHAPTER IX

A SON'S RIGHTS OVER HIS FATHER

Enough aspects of his father's malady were explained to Thomas to make him realize the hopelessness of any sudden change in his disposition or mode of living. Cut off, as his mind was, from all connection with his own past, it was impossible to predict his action in any circumstance based on that past. His early days, his travels, his marriage, his son, his short stay with the Johnsons, his separation from Thomas, his remittances of money to pay for the child's clothes and rearing, his wanderings about the world, the brawl on the ship, the hospital stay—all these facts of his former existence had vanished totally from his brain.

When asked about his youth, if he answered at all, he made up some vague yarn about a boyhood on ships, but always ships coasting in the Orient. His American associations had ceased to exist for him. His belief in his imagined life was strengthened by the quickness of his reversion to Spanish and French, the languages he spoke years before his accident. He pieced together bits from other men's lives and innocently appropriated them for himself. No one could say him nay when he—as he rarely did—replied to inquiries about his early years. The Singapore authorities with whom he had contacts at his first arrival understood his case medically, but had no clews to base identification upon. He was merely another living lost soul. When he found regular work in The Yellow Poppy and could support himself decently and quietly, giving no offense, causing no trouble, needing no charity, asking no assistance, showing pride in the recovery of his health, they felt there was nothing they could do for him.

Nothing in this agreeable arrangement was changed except that Thomas's yearning for certain news of his parent had been powerful enough to draw him halfway round the globe. Now that he had seen his father, there rose in his youthful mind a doubt of his mission.

Had he—total stranger that he now was—the right to step in and upset the pleasant life his father was leading? Twice at least the poor man had suffered terrible shocks; the second was merciful because it left upon him no mental anguish, no terrifying regrets for his vanished youth, no longings for his own people, no anguish for his stranger son. If not of great moment here in the world's affairs, he certainly was passably happy. Who would be rash enough to dispel that content?

Yet he belonged to Thomas, and Thomas belonged to him. More than that, the son believed, they belonged not only *to* each other but *with* each other. His heart yearned towards his unsuspecting father. Happy and content his existence might appear; but shall a man be content only with what satisfies him at any one time? All the children Thomas knew had been happy with their families, yet that did not prevent them from being ambitious to carve out careers for themselves. Why, he himself could have gone on always being a common laborer about the harbor docks, but he had determined to be a marine architect. He was already on the rungs—the lowest ones, it was true—of the ladder of success.

In his present condition his father might be perfectly content with the Orient, knowing nothing better, asking nothing better for himself. There were better things that life should give him. As the years went on, what future could he have? What old age?

Suppose by some healing process of time, or by some sudden stroke that the cloud upon his mind should be lifted, the darkness cleared. Suppose some spark of ambition should glow again, only to be quenched because alone he could not keep it burning. Suppose there were some brawl at The Yellow Poppy. There might be a blow with a chair, a thrust with a knife, a shot with a pistol—and a tiny paragraph of a death notice in the Singapore newspapers; not even a notice to Thomas, unless he provided long in advance for its being mailed to him.

Thomas's face flushed every time he thought of the work his father was doing. Attendant in a gambling joint! A croupier! A parasite, paid with the money lost by infected persons who spurned hard, honest toil, who hoped for ease and affluence from the turn of a card, the roll of dice, the click of a whirring wheel. There had been games and innocent amusements in the Johnson home, but there had been a simple, homely insistence upon the worth of real work, upon the foolishness of trusting only to luck, upon the soundness of honest ambition to rise in the world. The ups and downs—mostly downs—of improvident neighbors had afforded sterling Mrs. Johnson with all the illustrations she needed to point her morals and adorn her tales. Delicately, yet firmly, she had imbedded in Thomas the knowledge that his future was in his own control, the feeling that he should rise to an important place in the affairs of life. Thomas had teased Bill Johnson for wanting to become a merchant prince; yet now, years later in lonely, distant Singapore, he recognized in that desire of the son the helpful affection of the mother.

His own father deserved a better life than the one afforded by these Malay States.

If Thomas had been reunited to a prosperous father with all his faculties intact, he would have felt an awkwardness amounting to embarrassment. A sense of prying into another man's affairs would have overpowered him and stifled his natural affection. The older man would have awed him, boy that he still was.

On the surface, if his father had been normal, Thomas's feelings would have been more difficult, his open acts easier to control. In the circumstances in which he now found himself, his emotions were straightforward and sweeping, but his necessary actions were so wrapped in uncertainty that the boy was plunged almost to the depths of despair. The clearness of his reason urged him to let well enough alone—to take the first steamer he could get to rejoin the *Portlander* and hurry home. Any one who heard the details could not blame him. For hours he forced himself to study conditions carefully and to examine this resolution. Why not? The present was sure; any change was risky, fraught with appalling dangers.

He was assured in his own mind that the police authorities of the city took this view and that Inspector Allmayer expected him to return with this decision. One morning he had started from his room to tell him so; and one afternoon he had turned from gazing on the crowded shipping in the harbor. Neither time had he reached the Inspector's office. Both times his steps, guided by his yearning, while his reason counseled a different plan, had drawn him into the quiet streets in the neighborhood of The Yellow Poppy.

On the other hand, how much influence may one person owe the life of another? How much responsibility may a son assume over the life of his father? Is affection a safe guide for influencing the life of another person?

Even his few years had given Thomas the opportunity of observing near-tragedies caused by interference based on selfish affection. He had seen blind love act like a cruel tyrant over the lives of others.

He writhed in agony over his own feelings. Was his overmastering desire to take his father away from his present life merely a false show of supremacy, the ungenerous display of the control of the strong over the weak? Was his affection no more than a selfish one?

As a child he had smarted under the irregularity of his position. Other children had, if not both mother and father, at least one parent living in the same house. The fortunes of seafaring folk might separate relatives for long

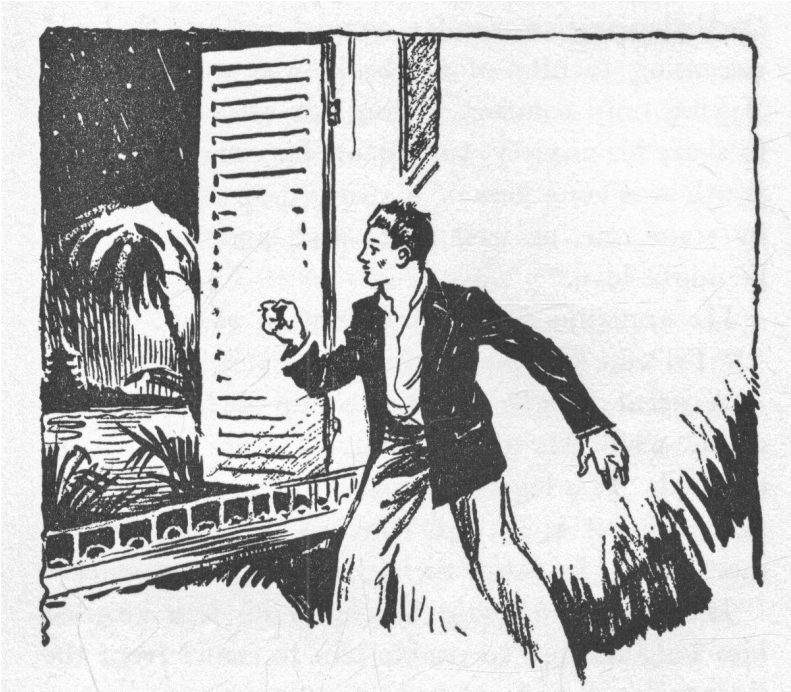
periods, but other boys knew where their fathers happened to be, the names of their ships, the locations of their ports, their temporary homes. Best of all for these other boys, they could boast of the approaching home-coming of these wanderers upon all the seas of the globe; and when the fabled strangers did appear, the boys could retell to their gaping fellows snatches of the travelers' stories. For Thomas there had been none of these joys.

Was his strong desire to take his father back to his native land a continuance of that boyish sense of incompleteness in his family relationships?

Over and over again, back and forth through his wearied brain, these thoughts and feelings passed and surged until he had no sleep by night, no calm by day. Torn between these two possible decisions he tossed upon his bed, praying for the light of day to bring relief. By day he forced his aching legs to bear him along the sea front, in and out of streets, through all the quarters, out along the marsh roads, and up into the hills, in a vain effort to tire his body to exhaustion and so gain a night of refreshing sleep.

Stung by a waking vision of the treatment his father had been subjected to on his last ship, Thomas, racked with mental and physical anguish, sprang from his bed early one morning and rushed to his window. There he steadied himself by clinging to the frame and forcing his eyes to watch the slow changes of the approaching dawn.

"I must settle this now." He spoke aloud to impress his determination upon his faculties.



THOMAS RUSHED TO HIS WINDOW.

"I must settle this now," he repeated, "or I shall go mad. Then there would be two of us lost. And I will not be!"

He breathed in a cool draught of air. Only at this time in the whole cycle of twenty-four hours did the air seem refreshing in this sun-kindled land.

His determination to help himself grew.

"And I will not be!" he told himself in a firmer tone.

Weakened by long wakefulness, and weary of the balancing of results against causes, the cold reasoning faculty of his brain was worn to rest. Asking only comfort, crying for some loving one to share his anxiety, to comfort his cries, the lonely youth was conscious of a rising desire to be loved by some one, as well as to find some one whom he might love.

He announced his determination aloud.

"I'll take you away from all of this, Father."

A great weight seemed to slip away from his chest, while his thoughts grew more and more clouded. His legs bent under the dead weight of his

worn-out body. A wave of darkness rose to meet him as he sank; then everything went black.

Hours later a cramp in one of his legs aroused him long enough to enable him to crawl from the floor to his disordered bed.

He slept throughout the day, rising to hear the clatter of dishes at the evening meal.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST SQUARE BOX

It was a much changed Thomas that paced the streets the day after he had awakened from the refreshing sleep produced by his mental struggle and the unwavering decision he had made.

On his arrival in Singapore he had looked with mild amusement on those Westerners who aped the garb and habits of the East. But now that he had a definite purpose, he felt less like a Westerner than before; he wanted to enter as fully as he could into all the Oriental customs.

With a jauntiness he would have called impossible, he donned immaculate white trousers and coat and—wonder of wonders—clapped upon his erect skull one of those turtle-shaped white pith helmets of which he had read in books and over which he had pondered before haberdashery windows. The hat seemed peculiar to him for a day, but he pronounced it sensible at once. The little patch of shade it threw on the tender back of his neck and the free circulation of air through his tousled hair were its first comforts.

Keen eyes had photographed his looks that first time he had entered and left The Yellow Poppy. But keener still would have been the eyes that found in this dapper figure the crestfallen player who had made his way out after the little disturbance he had caused.

He changed his habits to conform to the hours of the gambling establishments. He slept in the daytime, rose at five or six o'clock, and went to bed in the morning after the night life of the city had sunk to inaction.

The first time he could summon up enough courage and coolness he sought admittance at The Yellow Poppy. He was almost the earliest arrival. Hurrying to the table where he had seen his father, he found him calmly and methodically sorting and piling coins. The older man cast an incurious look at this youth, whom he took for an overanxious sight-seer too ready to lose his superfluous cash.

"Let him," was his inward comment.

Thomas, whose heart beat fast and whose breath came hard in spite of all his apparent control of himself, sank into the chair at the croupier's right.

The man seemed unaware of his arrival.

“Too early?” Thomas asked.

Immediately he felt the question silly.

There was no answer.

“How late do you stay here?”

The eyes gazed on him for a second.

“Play stops at five o’clock.”

Thomas gulped at the boldness of his next question.

“Do you sleep—live here—in this building?”

A flicker of wonder passed over the face of the older Dubois, but he did answer.

“What’s that to you?”

Thomas had pledged himself to keep perfectly calm and to force all his remarks to seem absolutely casual, but he was young and impetuous and in no way aware of the complicated and long relationships that his slightest move might disturb. He glanced around quickly to see if the superior Chinese accountant was in sight.

“Listen,” he began to plead in quick, low tones, on the verge of giving all his hopes eloquent phrases, but saving himself from complete disclosure just in time. “Listen,” he began again, “I’d like to talk with you so we’ll not be disturbed. If you live here, when may I come?”

He waited breathlessly. Oh, why wouldn’t the cloud pass from his father’s mind! Why couldn’t he simply call to him, “I’m Thomas, your boy! I’ve come to take you away with me!”

The other was not at all impressed by the young man’s request. He heard too many foolish and unreasonable remarks. Did this young fool believe there was a “system” of beating the game and making off with all the stakes? Other fabulously wealthy or mathematically trained gamblers had tried before this to bribe him into fixing the wheel or betraying its mechanical defects. Did the winning numbers run in series that could be predicted? Many of the habitués of the game pretended that they could see a regular sequence. If they could only learn how and when that sequence was interrupted by some change in the delicate adjustment of the disc!

A faint smile broke at the corner of his lips. The youngster's plot was so transparent!

"It's no go, sonny," he said. "Try another tack. Play here if you want to, but don't work for any inside information."

This was maddening. Other early arrivals were strolling about the room now; soon the tables would be surrounded and the regular monotonous business of the night would begin.

"I must see you," Thomas insisted. "Not for my own sake, but for yours!"

His father's eyes stared at him searchingly.

"What could you have to do with me?" he asked pointedly. "I never saw you before."

"Oh, yes, you have!" Thomas exclaimed, about to declare their relationship. But he snapped his teeth shut. It was a lame conclusion, but he did add, "I've been here before."

"So have thousands of others," retorted Dubois as if to end the pointless conversation.

And try as he would, the balked Thomas could elicit no other reply. He racked his brain for every possible topic to induce talk, until nearly all the chairs around the table were occupied. Then his father turned to him politely.

"Unless you're going to play steadily, I wonder if you'd mind letting me have that chair."

Thomas humbly rose, while a fat Chinese merchant puffed into his accustomed place, and the first call of "Faites vos jeux, Mesdames, Messieurs" floated through the room.

Thomas, standing opposite to watch his father, staked a coin. What happened he did not comprehend, but eight other coins were adroitly pushed towards him, and his neighbor nudged him to gather them in. The gaming desire seized him. His first impulse was to wager one of the new coins at once, but a thought checked him. If he played only rarely, these coins would permit him to stay longer in The Yellow Poppy. He would space his plays as far apart as he dared.

In the earliest of the short recesses, when the attendants carried moneys and reports to the office and made change and rested, a burly figure brushed

past Thomas and overtook Dubois. Timing his step with that of the shorter man, he leaned down and spoke a few words close to the other's ear. Thomas, watching his back, could see the animation that marked his attention and his answers.

Returning from the wire-cage desk, Dubois was again met by the same acquaintance. The expressions that passed over his countenance were so different from his impassiveness at the roulette table that Thomas circled about the walls of the lobby to learn what kind of man this might be who could so easily interest his father.

His feet faltered; his heart pounded. He moved behind a chatting group to be out of the creature's range of vision. There was no mistaking the fact. In spite of barber and tailor, in spite of lowered voice instead of yelling curses, in spite of hands stuck deep into trousers' pockets instead of dealing blows, that man with whom Dubois was exchanging understanding looks and meaning remarks was the boatswain of the *Portlander*—Hanson!

It was unbelievable!

"Beg pardon," muttered Thomas to the man he had jostled in his blundering haste to get into some distant place. He wanted to let this frightening fact sink into his comprehension and pull himself together before he observed any other unbelievable things.

Halfway across the room from the chatting Hanson and Dubois stood two Chinese, clad in the most luxurious dark-colored silks, discussing the rice market in scattered sentences.

The older, by glancing above the other's shoulder—apparently at the stopped clock on the mantel—could take in, as if by accident, the sides of the croupier and the former seaman. Into his range of vision he had watched Thomas move. From the boy's fixed stare he had learned that he, also, was watching the same pair. He saw the startled change in the youth's face; he watched him falter and grasp the chair; he observed that though he was plainly drawn by Dubois, he was affected by the recognition of Hanson; he watched his uncertain flight from the room.

"Go on talking," he directed his companion in a low voice.

But he paid absolutely no attention to anything the other said as he outlined the prospects of a surplus of rice with a resulting drop in the price.

"That boy again," the older man was saying to himself. "And Hanson. But where does Dubois come in?"

The transformed boatswain swayed on his legs. His eyes might turn in their direction. So the watcher delicately trailed his long fingers across his brow, as if in absorbed attention to the rice market prospect, but at the same time effectually concealing most of his face from any chance observer.

For this wealthy native was the same Chinese who had traveled on the train with Hanson, the same faultlessly dressed Europeanized Oriental who had been startled into covering his face with his handkerchief when he had seen Thomas approaching on the street.

Hanson and Dubois he thought he could understand. But why the young man?

Almost hypnotized by the acquaintance between Dubois and Hanson, Thomas followed every movement of the latter with consuming attention. When Hanson turned from a rapid game of faro and directed his course to the outer door Thomas followed as though he were tracking an animal. His task was easy—too easy; it resulted only in bitter disappointment. Hanson was going nowhere except to his dull hotel.

Fifteen minutes before the closing hour at The Yellow Poppy Thomas slunk down the narrow passage leading to the dim electric globe that, with all its dull glow, was still helpful in the depths of the narrow canyon into which the approaching light of day had not yet penetrated fully.

It must help him.

He scanned its whole length, seeking some place to hide. There was not a projection behind which he could flatten himself. He passed along it with silent tread, pressing his hands against the smooth walls in search of some sheltering recess that his eye had not detected. He found nothing.

Then he hit on a plan of action that would keep him in the passageway without arousing suspicion in the doorkeeper, who expected no new arrivals at this time, and who, therefore, had nothing to do except to open the door for departing patrons. He would not—if luck favored Thomas—peer through his peep-hole. So he stood near the door and when he heard the steps of leaving guests he casually sauntered away from the door in plain view of them, appearing like a patron who had left just before they did. Then he would make his way back as far as he could before the next departures. If many seemed about to leave, he would wait a short distance from the steps, as if expecting to be joined by members of a party.

When he was certain that the guests had all gone he flattened himself against the wall beside the doorway and hoped that the employees would

hurry out and make their way home. If only his father would come!

So long did his wait last that he feared there must be another exit for the attendants, or that they might sleep and live in the building.

A few tired figures clattered wearily down the steps and, with never a glance to right or left, made a bee-line down the middle of the way to the street. The departures became fewer and fewer, yet Thomas waited.

His heart gave a great leap. That was his father's back receding before him. Stealthily he began to move after him, praying that there might be enough early workers on the streets to mask his movements. Into the byways he had to plunge almost at once, quickening his steps to keep his father's moving figure in sight. Darker and darker grew the air; closer and closer together leaned the rickety balconies of the tall houses above him; rougher and rougher became the paving beneath his feet; more and more populated the slums; smellier and smellier the foods displayed for sale or stored behind the front walls; more and more overpowering the odors wafted upwards from damp cellars and out of twisting entrances.

Thomas thanked his lucky stars that Orientals, especially Chinese, are so incurious, at least appear so little concerned by what goes on around them. He was in mortal terror lest his father be told of the Westerner so plainly following him, or lest some leering street beggar bar his way with loud cries, or lest some quarreler drag him into a broil. If they did notice him, they let him see no sign of it.

"Probably put me down as a white fool," he commented to himself. "Maybe they're right, at that."

The damp stench, rather than any clear view, told him that they were near the huddled mess of rat-trap, match-box structures near the Chinese water-front. In the narrow alley, whose stenches almost made him sick, he could just make out his father close to the left wall. And then he wasn't there at all!

Hastening his steps, Thomas found the door through which he must have vanished. Gathering all his courage he pushed against it. Locked!

Here, then, he must wait to see if his father would come out again.

Was this where he lived? The thought turned Thomas's stomach. From this kind of existence he must be rescued, no matter what the cost or effort.

Moving farther on, so that he would not be seen by his father if he should appear again, Thomas watched. Less than five minutes later his

father reappeared, bearing a square package neatly wrapped. He set off at a brisk pace in the direction from which he had come, but soon turned away from the center of the city and walked rapidly towards the suburbs.

"Then he does live in a decent place," Thomas rejoiced, "though he certainly goes to an awful hole for some of his supplies."

There were fewer pedestrians on this well-kept street, but regularly planted trees afforded Thomas places at which to stop for the apparent purpose of making a botanical study.

"Look sharp!" he ordered himself, swerving to take advantage of one of these welcome screens.

He had caught sight of Hanson, not fifty feet from his father, approaching at a leisurely stroll. Where had he come from? Had he been sheltered by a tree trunk farther along the roadway?

"HE'S CARRYING THAT PACKAGE NOW!"

The two men met and stopped. Their few remarks seemed animated; at any rate, Thomas could see a great deal of gesticulating on the part of Hanson. When they separated Dubois walked on rapidly, his arms swinging vigorously. Dragging his eyes from him and watching Hanson, who soon crossed to the other side of the road, Thomas had to clap his hand over his mouth to smother his exclamation of astonishment.

“He’s carrying that package now!”

It was true. Dubois had not been laying in supplies for himself. He had procured something for Hanson. What was it?

Hanson was not the man to carry it back to town. He hailed a loitering jinricksha and clambered in. As it flashed past, Thomas could see the square box held firmly between Hanson’s feet. Mysterious as all this was, he was not following Hanson. He turned to gaze after his father.

He had vanished.

Puzzled though Thomas was, the explanation was no mystery. A jinricksha, used to carry Hanson from the city, had been ordered to wait and bear Dubois for a morning ride to the outskirts of the city and back.

Thomas turned his lagging feet homeward, his brain a jumble of the experiences of the night, a blank concerning his next movements.

Hanson and his precious package were soon deposited at his hotel. His jinricksha’s next fare, picked up at the corner, was a dilapidated coolie, who gossiped with the Malay driver in low chuckles. No one would have thought of listening to their sing-song phrases interrupted by gasps and jolts, but had Thomas overheard and been able to understand their strange dialect his hair would have risen from his head.

“Dubois—one square box,” called the Malay runner.

“Yes. I saw it. Must have changed the shape.”

“Holds a lot.”

“Looks now like tin box of biscuits,” observed the Chinese.

“Met on road outside city, thirty minutes away from here.”

“Dubois got it same place, I suppose?”

“Think so.”

“American boy following Dubois,” added the Malay.

“That boy? Again? I’ll have to think all this over.”

And the coolie’s face became much more intelligent than any coolie’s face should be, so its owner drew his conical hat down over his brow and pretended to doze.

CHAPTER XI

KIDNAPED

That day Thomas slept late. Again, after his evening meal, he undressed and went to bed at once, lying quietly until sheer boredom forced him into a slumber that lasted for hours. He had borrowed Manchester's alarm clock, promising to reset it for him and place it just inside his door so that it would rout him at his accustomed hour.

"Don't forget to do that," Manchester had warned him. "I swear at that thing every morning of my life. The day wouldn't be right if I began it in any other way."

So Thomas turned over at two-thirty, when it began to tremble with its shrill pulsations, buried it under the covers, shut off its strident tones, and slipped quietly from his bed. Dressing hurriedly, he paused at Manchester's door to deposit the metal disturber, then walked slowly towards The Yellow Poppy.

This time he believed he could stay inside until closing time—no, after closing time.

He moved among the patrons, wondering how many of them were attendants in disguise, ready to spring upon any person who disturbed the calm routine of the night's work. He searched for a possible hiding place. Screens were out of the question; they were too easily overturned or folded up flat. Just off the roulette room he noticed a door. Where did it lead?

Chance favored him. A slight pressure on the knob told him that it was unlocked. He passed it again five minutes later. He was quite alone. Beyond the door was blackness, and a damp smell of cellars. Steps led down. He could slip in there and wait.

And be locked in when the servant went his rounds to make all safe for the night?

He ran the tips of his fingers along the end of the round iron bolt. It was roughly corroded. He could, by using the point of his penknife blade, move it back if it were pushed into the staple.

In the general bustle that marked the last fifteen minutes of play, Thomas was able to slip unobserved through this door and close it behind him. He

descended three steps and sat down to wait until the rooms should clear. Then he would venture out.

When all sounds ceased, he pushed the door open until a thin vertical line of yellow light shone through. Two spectacled Chinese clerks, bearing bags of coin and tally sheets from the various rooms, passed him. He heard their soft shoes pause at his father's place; a few words of conversation sounded indistinctly; then they pattered on their rounds.

Was his father alone now?

Slowly at first, then more boldly, Thomas pushed the door open wide enough to let his body slip from the dark steps. There was no sound. He advanced to the arch that led to the large room. There before him, lolling back in his comfortable chair and stretching his arms above his head, sat his father, relaxing after the steady work of the night.

Thomas moved rapidly to his side and was almost seated in a chair before the unsuspecting man noticed and recognized him as an intruder. His right hand dropped, with the rapidity of a seagull swooping on a fish, to a little shelf below the table top, where his fingers closed on the handle of an unpolished revolver.

He breathed easily, for he remembered that his money had been taken on to the office, and he saw that his visitor was merely a boy. But Thomas, who realized the meaning of that dropped hand, sat for a few seconds petrified with terror.

He met the other's cold stare steadily and ran his tongue over his dry lips.

"Let me talk with you a few moments," he pleaded.

A half-humorous glint showed in the man's eyes. He uttered no refusal, although his shrugged shoulders said plainly, "What's the use?"

There was a moment's silence.

It was difficult for Thomas to phrase a suitable question, but he hit on one that might open a conversation.

"Didn't you live in the United States once?"

"They tell me I did."

"Don't you remember?" Thomas leaned forward.

Dubois shook his head.

“Or Guatemala?”

“Maybe.” The conversation was getting away from Thomas’s plan.

“You must know whether you lived in the United States,” he insisted.

Only a dark, sullen glance replied to this. The thoughts of Dubois had not for years been turned in this direction.

“Aren’t you American?” The boy held tight to his purpose now. What could he do to revive in this man some glimmer of his past life? Was it a hopeless attempt?

Dubois shrugged his shoulders again and spread out both hands—empty. He had relinquished the revolver. This visitor had no evil intentions. Anyhow, the money was safely stowed away by now.

If questioning was of no avail, perhaps telling him might set his mind working.

Thomas spoke slowly and distinctly; winningly, as one speaks to a child.

“You must remember you were married. You worked in Guatemala. You were a Mississippi River steamboat man;—stern-wheelers. Then you came to the Eastern coast. You lived with the Johnson family and went to sea from there.”

He waited for the effect of these words.

The man looked at him witheringly.

“What a lot you think you know about me!” he sneered. “Fairy tales!”

“But you must remember!” cried Thomas, rapidly losing his calm, in spite of all his plans.

“Never heard of all this nonsense.” Dubois tried to put an end to the discussion.

“It will all come back to you! Only come away with me! Away from all this! Back to America with me!”

Dubois could not help smiling at this harmless but preposterous lunatic before him. Crazy as a loon, no doubt. Or likely a strong touch of the tropical sun. All his wits knocked away; that was plain.

“Go away with you?” he repeated. “Now, that’s a splendid idea! And generous of you, too!”

The boy shook his head and waved his hands in protest against this treatment of him as a wilful child. The other kept up his bantering tone.

"Wouldn't that be nice! Go away from here! Give up my job. For what? What makes you want to be so good to me—a stranger?"

Goaded to desperation by the impassable wall between them, Thomas cast all his prearranged discretion to the winds. Springing to his feet he leaned over the upturned face of the unmoved man.

"Not good! But because it's my duty and my right. Don't you see that I'm the baby you left to be brought up by the Johnsons?"

Dubois chuckled aloud. There was something keenly ludicrous in the word "baby" applied to the serious young man opposite him. He was certainly no baby in his utterances and no baby in size, for he was taller than Dubois himself.

That mocking chuckle exasperated Thomas.

"Don't you see that I'm your son?"

This was no longer a matter of mild humor. It was becoming too serious to be carried any further. Let a demented young cub like this go about Singapore claiming to be his son, and there might be no end of trouble.

Dubois slid the fingers of his left hand beneath the edge of the table until they sank into a round depression, where his nail felt the polished surface of an ivory button.

Thomas leaned closer. His appeal had turned to orders.

"You must come away with me! I don't know what you're doing with him, but you've got to break with that scoundrel Hanson!"

The moment the words had slipped from his lips, Thomas would have given anything to call them back. All tolerating humor and mild interest vanished from Dubois's face as he involuntarily straightened himself against this sudden attack.

Angry words sprang to his lips, but he was able—gamblers must develop self-control—by a sudden effort to keep them unsaid. But the contemptuous look with which he measured this accusing stranger almost froze Thomas where he stood and choked in his throat any explanation he might try to make.

What he had said was true. But he was foolish to have said it at that time. Every attempt he made to speak to his father, and every sentence he

delivered when he found these rare opportunities, instead of leading him nearer, only thrust him farther away. Rack his brains as he would, he could think of nothing to cover up the disclosure he had made. Its consequences crowded upon him. If Dubois told Hanson, there would be another opponent to deal with, and a brutal and ruthless one.

Had Thomas's ears been tuned to catch the sound, he might have heard a low buzz several rooms away. There was a soft patter of rapidly moving feet, and three coolies slipped into the astonished boy's vision.

The first to arrive rattled off a few syllables.

A HUGE BROWN HAND CLOSED THOMAS'S HALF-OPEN MOUTH.

Dubois shook his head and replied quietly with a few unintelligible Chinese exclamations.

A huge brown hand closed Thomas's half-open mouth, and a powerful thumb and forefinger on his nose shut off his breath. His arms felt numb in the fists that seized them. The familiar rooms sped past his rolling eyes, but the door which opened for his exit was one he had never noticed before.

Prevented from breathing, he was almost unconscious by this time; but the pressure was suddenly released and the air rushed into his aching chest. Far behind him he heard a door close with a dull thud. High above him, between the quiet buildings, he could see the pale light of the Malay dawn.

The next two days were days of exquisite torture.

Should he try to get into The Yellow Poppy again? Perhaps his ejection might not be so mild the next time.

Should he apply to the police for aid? On what grounds? He marshaled all the facts and passed them in review with keen examination. They were of absolutely no help in presenting a case to the police. He had but a few suspicions with no foundations, a few things he had observed—for all of which he could himself furnish a dozen natural causes. The supposition that this man was his father—certain as he himself was—was, after all, merely a supposition. He had a strong yearning for the man—"sentimental sympathy" Inspector Allmayer would call it—and a hope that he could return to the United States the proud son of a loving father. Well, most orphan boys could raise such hopes.

Inactivity was the worst suffering he could be forced to endure. He would make one more attempt; then he would consider the police.

The idea that The Yellow Poppy might call in the police against him never entered his busy brain.

As he approached the entrance to The Yellow Poppy shortly after midnight, he would have remarked, had any one asked him, that this portion of the way was no more lonely and deserted than any other section. He noted a jinricksha trundling slowly along towards him, bearing a sleepy passenger; a couple of coolies were chatting in high-pitched voices before a doorway; behind him a Chinese workman was carrying a rolled-up rug on his shoulders; decidedly, there were as many signs of city life here as one should expect at this time on a dark night.

The only unnatural fact about all these persons was that, although they seemed total strangers, they were all moving parts in a well-timed plan that was rapidly converging to a crisis. The unsuspecting Thomas was, however, the only one of the players who had not been coached in the rôle he was to act.

With a gesture one of the two conversing Chinese stepped back from his companion and stood directly in Thomas's path. He paused just for a second to give the man time to move back to his former position or to give himself

time to avoid jostling him by curving around his back. Those two men bulked large enough, in their bulging sleeves and flapping jackets, to conceal from chance lookers-on what the next two seconds contained.

The companion of the rug man was not six inches from Thomas's back. His viselike grip closed the boy's mouth and snapped his head back so sharply that only his skilful ju-jutsu methods saved him from breaking the creaking neck. As Thomas went limp, the rug opened hospitably and enfolded him in its muffling and suffocating depths.

The jinricksha had halted a yard away. No longer sleepy and lolling, but wide-awake and alert, the nimble Hanson sprang lightly to the ground. A second later the two chattering Chinese had pattered through the doorway behind them, Hanson and the other Chinese had passed each other without so much as a nod, the strolling American lad had vanished into the night air, and all that the trim policeman on the cross-street saw was a dull old rug man riding in a jinricksha with a long thick roll of his wares wedged into the narrow seat beside him.

CHAPTER XII

HEAT-LIGHTNING AND THUNDER

The rocking motion of the speeding jinricksha occasionally jolted its muffled freight into a dim dream of semi-consciousness in which, for a second, he would assemble his thoughts and try to make them work properly. The regular rise and fall, the hum of the wheels, the rapid forward motion—these reached him as echoes from a far-off place and an earlier life. Just when he had succeeded in forming the thought, "jinricksha," his mind would swing away from the present and dart far back into the past, and he would satisfy himself by substituting the idea of "boat" for that of the land vehicle. Then all thoughts would blur; his will to think would subside; and only a mastering wish to be soothed to unfeeling sleep possessed him.

It was in one of these periods of blankness that the roll of rug was unceremoniously transferred to another waiting conveyance.

And this time the slightly aroused Thomas did master two connected thoughts. Perhaps the damp night air had reached his head and helped to produce a quicker response of his tired brain to his forceful wish to piece his ideas and feelings together into some connected whole. His half-opened eyes still could see nothing but blackness; his dry lips were irritated by the fluffy threads from the stuff wound around him; but his skin felt some reviving power in the little air that reached his face.

"Breeze in the jinricksha," he might have said if he could have formed words with his set mouth. Then the syllable "sha" repeated itself over and over again in his aching head like the sing-song refrain of an Oriental chant. How long he had been hearing it in his ears he did not know, but he was aware that the syllable had in its monotonous repetition become two, and that they were different from the first. Now the tune was changed also. It went more slowly; it was more soothing to his senses; it promised more rest to his tired body.

Some change—he did not know or care what—was now making his senses sing, not "sha-sha-sha-sha" world without end, but "boat-wave; boat-wave; boat-wave." And with those long-familiar sounds came a small degree of relief.

What was being done to him now? The heavy rug was being unwound, and he spun over and over against the bottom of what he was certain was a

boat. There! His head was free. He gulped the refreshing night air just once. The second time he opened his mouth to draw in a deep breath he was stifled by the pressure of a wad of fine silk between his teeth. The cords, instantly knotted behind his head, held it securely. So terrified was he by this fresh change in his condition that he forgot to use his nose until the pressure within his chest made his eyes start from his head and his brain reel dizzily. He heaved with the agony of his suffering, for his wrists were bound tightly behind his back and his ankles were cut by thongs.

Feeling more helpless now than in the depths of the rug, he lay on his side in the rounded bottom of the rowboat, moaning piteously to himself.

Against the velvet darkness of the misty night he could discern two figures in the boat. Beyond his head was the oarsman, an habitual man of the water, for his strokes were easy and short, with the unexpected pull at the end which no landsman ever masters. Propelled with so little effort, the boat was moving rapidly and evenly through the ripples made by a breeze from the land.

Thomas could see more plainly the hulk of the Chinaman crouched on the stern—the powerful rug-bearer.

Until now Thomas had merely observed and registered what he saw. The intention of his captors might be any one of several plans. He shuddered as the possibility of being delivered to a departing ship crossed his mind. Just above the gunwale he could see in the sky the glow of the lights in the city. Was he being taken beyond the harbor or were they skirting the mainland of the peninsula? With a Chinese sitting guard over him, doubtless the oarsman was Chinese, too. Was he to be a prisoner on a native junk?

But who had done this thing to him? Certainly not the owners of The Yellow Poppy. They would never dare to make way with an inoffensive visitor. He forced his mind back. What had caused the sudden change in his father's demeanor? His mention of Hanson's name? That must be it! It was the only explanation.

With that conclusion he felt his situation all the more dangerous. Had the gamblers been responsible for his kidnaping, there could have been a direct inquiry made. Manchester knew that he went to The Yellow Poppy. Inspector Allmayer knew a little of his plans and all about his hopes. But who in all the Orient—except two persons on the far-away *Portlander* who would never hear of his fate—knew anything about his crossing the path of Hanson? Yet Hanson himself had never suspected that it was the purser's

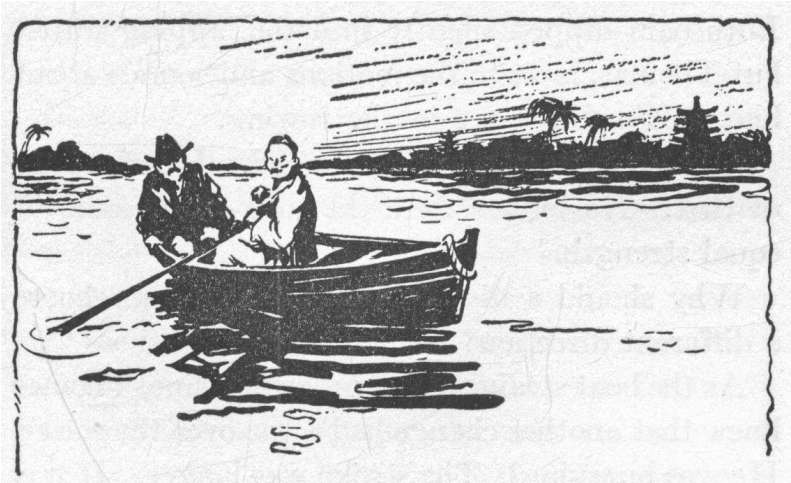
insignificant assistant clerk—half employee, half passenger—who had avenged the stupid Scandinavian common sailor.

There could be no help from the outside. He could depend on nothing, on no one. He was doomed to suffer a horrible imprisonment in a floating Chinese hulk, where no violence would have to be exerted on him to make him want to die. It would be better if these two men in the boat would end his torture by strangling him and tossing his body overboard.

He had heard of the horrible refined methods of Oriental punishments. They could strangle and leave no marks; they could paralyze by pressure on main nerves. Let them do one of these things to him, and when his unbruised floating body should be found, testimony would establish the fact of his visits to The Yellow Poppy. No clew of the kidnaping would be uncovered. He would be pronounced a suicide, either because of gambling losses or because of recurring mental derangements. All his recent actions would give color to such an explanation, and if the conversations with Dubois were traced and his testimony on his behavior with him reported, he would be dubbed a rash young crank, and forgotten.

Hopelessly plunged into the deepest dejection, he blinked unheedingly at the darkness of the night. He wept silently for just one glimpse of the daylight he would never behold again. This, then, was the unnoticed end of all his hopes, his ambitions, his plans, his search. Better that no one should ever learn how terribly he had failed. He was resigned.

It is a comfortable fact of life that no matter how willing a person may be to accept death, no healthy boy can keep his mind on such a decision for many minutes at a time. So Thomas—quite resigned as he was to his fate—could not help yearning for daylight once again, before everything should become totally black for him. Though his thoughts might be on his own misfortunes, his eyes were gazing into the misty darkness above.



THE OARSMAN NOTICED THE CHANGE.

The first time he saw a dim spread of heat-lightning he paid no attention to it. The second time he saw it, he let himself wonder whether here in Malaya lightning foretold a thunder shower. The third time he saw the diffused glow he thought that the storm was traveling rapidly. With one ear separated from the water by the thin wooden strips of the boat, he thought he could just hear the dull, continuous rumble of the distant thunder.

"There's the lightning again," he told himself.

A few seconds later the oarsman noticed the change in the weather. He held the oars poised in the air for the time of one stroke and spoke to his companion. This hulk of brawn squirmed around in his seat and watched. When he faced the rower he spoke rapidly, as if issuing an order. Both oars dipped silently into the lapping water, but Thomas, alert to the motions and sounds about him, felt a difference in the rowing.

Their course was being changed. He was sure of that. No longer were the tugs at the oars of equal strength.

Why should a distant storm make them choose a different direction?

As the boat straightened on the new line, Thomas knew that another change had come over the rower. He was hurrying! The stroke was longer. It was finished more rapidly. The recovery was quicker. Every time the lightning flashed the boat was propelled through the water faster. It fairly leaped along the surface.

Thomas listened. If the gag had not been in his mouth he would have shouted. His ear could not deceive him. Distant thunder it might be to a landlubber, but he had grown up on a lively harbor. The sound, coming through the water, was more distinct to him than to the men above. It was no inoffensive forerunner of a shower. It was the throbbing of a high-speed motor launch! It had been coming towards this rowboat. And the lightning? That had been the flash of a powerful light that was piercing the misty darkness and spreading its glow about. Still too far away to spot the fleeing rowboat, it had disturbed its two occupants. Now, plainly, they were fleeing from its path, if not its pursuit.

Thomas's ankles were tied, but his legs were free. He could pound with them on the bottom of the boat, and that tattoo must attract attention. Not yet, though; it was too soon—the motor boat was too far away. Could he wait? This agony was worse than the agony of waiting for the death that he had felt, five minutes earlier, was to be his without doubt.

Two persons *may* have the same thought at the same time.

The giant in the stern seat brought both his felt-shod feet down on Thomas's shins and ground his knees into the boy's chest. The thwarts of the boat cut his legs cruelly from below. The weight of the Chinaman pressed down upon his bones from above.

Both sound and light faded. Thomas had lost consciousness.

The Chinaman who was grinding his legs under his weight perceived this and announced it to the rower, who paused again in his stroke to listen to the direction from which the hum of the motor was coming. There was no certainty yet that this chance cruiser in the night was seeking them or pursuing them, though its presence in this part of the water was sufficient to make them wary. It might not be pursuing them at all, yet it was safer to turn aside and try to get closer to the port, where the dozens of other moving and tied craft would make it harder to pick them out and overtake them.

The flash of light no longer looked like heat-lightning. It was piercing the mist in a long concentrated beam, and when it struck the water it made a wide oval in which not a floating twig could be lost. The stern watcher squirmed uncomfortably at his post. The oarsman again changed his course and pulled furiously. The motor's hum would cover the noise of their oars, but it would not be long now before that fiendish light could span the distance between the boats, and then——

There was only one thing to do. A gesture from the rower, an answering grunt from the Chinese rug-bearer, and both leaned over the quiet boy. His weight was so slight in their powerful grasp that they hardly had to rise from their seats. Twice they swung him between them; and then, with a heave they would not have risked had the motor boat been near enough to hear, they flung the limp body as far as they could.

The lightened rowboat sped faster and faster towards the crowded waters of the port.

CHAPTER XIII

ALL CHINAMEN LOOK ALIKE

Less than a minute after the rug man had hailed the approaching jinricksha, deposited his burden in a corner of the narrow seat, and wedged himself in beside it, a second jinricksha, this one empty, swung into the street, now clear of all pedestrians. The Malay runner looked aghast at the bare walks, for he had been certain that here he would be able to overtake and pass the figures he was following.

There was nothing to do now but to try to pick up the clew at the next cross-street. There he slackened before the patrolling policeman.

"See man with heavy roll of rugs?" the Malay called to him.

"Lost your fare, sonny," the officer replied, ready for a chat to relieve the monotony of this too peaceful section of the city. Nothing had happened that day to make him needed there. "The fellow with the rugs picked up a 'sha just round the corner, stowed his bundle and his fat self in it, and passed here going twelve miles an hour." Involuntarily he nodded in the direction the laden vehicle had gone, although he would have sworn that he gave this business-hunting laborer no clew. "Too bad you missed him," he went on. "He looked generous."

The undemonstrative Malay shrugged his shoulders.

"Hunt other passenger at big hotel," he comforted himself, and was off like a flash, while the officer wondered how he would like to go chasing all over the streets to pick up his living.

When the liveried bell-boy announced to the Europeanized Chinese gentleman that his regular jinricksha was waiting below as he had ordered, the occupant of the room laid his English newspaper down quietly and thanked the boy calmly.

"I'll be down at once," was all he said. But his eyes glowed with anticipation of the news he was to hear, and he had to time himself deliberately lest he show too much haste in going out for a late night ride.

He exchanged a few words with the runner as he took his seat and a few more after the runner had raised the shafts and had started away from the hotel entrance.

Briefly the Malay recounted what he had seen and heard.

“You saw the American boy?” the rider asked incredulously.

“Yes. Hanson talked with Dubois yesterday. Got another square tin box. Maybe Dubois told Hanson something about this boy.”

“Possibly. Did you catch up with the ’ricksha?”

The Malay nodded as he trotted.

“Saw it far away. Going out of town to shore cove. Had roll in it.”

“Why didn’t you follow it and ’phone me?”

“Saw Hanson take automobile and go in same direction, but not speak to man with rug in passing.”

“Both going to their boat?”

“Think so. Came to you then.”

“Stop at next open store. I’ll get some cigarettes. Hurry to launch. I’ll be there soon.”

That was their whole conversation, but their subsequent actions fitted together like the movements of a clock.

When the jinricksha pulled up at the curb, the passenger fumbled with his loose change in a perfectly natural manner, and selected some coins. But the piece he actually deposited in the waiting Malay’s extended palm had no relation at all to the real price of the ride he had taken. Yet the servant was seemingly satisfied to be underpaid.

While this peculiar patron strolled into the store, the Malay trotted towards the water-front, gradually increased his pace, and was soon speeding along briskly. No raised hand, no agitated cane, no sharp whistle of any prospective fare caught his eye. On he sped, past all of them.

“Imitation of a Malay savage running amok,” remarked an American visitor to the girl he was escorting. “Crazed with hashish, I suppose.” And he went on inventing a fanciful story that was tame compared to the actual events in which the fleet-footed Malay was playing an important part.

He knew he must force his speed to its utmost, for in instances like this his chief never used slow means of transportation. If he slackened his pace, the high-powered automobile would reach the slip first, and he would “lose face,” as the Orientals quaintly express it.

Not a second to spare! He had just roused the sleeping boy in the launch when their Chinese chief moved rapidly from the throbbing car, across the quay, and down the stairs, and took his place at the steering wheel.

"Full speed ahead," he signaled, and the purring engine forced the dark mahogany craft across the deep blue surface of the water. Threading its way among the small bobbing craft and the anchored ships, it soon turned sharply westward. Noting every light and taking into account every treacherous long spit of land and rising sand-bar, the men shaped its course to allow for the start which would permit Hanson and the rug-carrier to get their small rowboat out of its deep cove and into the open channel. If they could come upon it soon, say at the entrance to the cove, or better still, within it, so much to their advantage. Once outside, on the broad waters under this dark sky, the chances were one in a thousand that they would ever come up with it.

Certain now that they were approaching the wide mouth of the cove or that they were almost abreast of it, the Malay, crouched beside the steersman, began playing the narrow-beamed but powerful light about the surface of the water.

The little rowboat had covered more distance than its pursuers had estimated, however, and was well outside the lines of the cove. Only after the light had swept the surface of the water and the low-lying shores of the cove did the Chinese admit regretfully that they must take a long chance farther outside. He turned the launch directly away from the land and it was then that the staring boy in the bottom of the rowboat had seen the first flashes of "heat-lightning."

There was so great a distance between the two boats that all the little circles made by the dipping oars had been wiped out by the fitful ripples. The oarsman was also right in his belief that as long as the motor hummed, no ear on the launch could detect the direction or distance of his rowing.

Backwards and forwards, to the right and to the left the Malay directed the oval of brilliance, scanning its field with eager and keen eyes. But he saw nothing! At least nothing that signified anything to him and his companion. Swollen fruit rinds, broken boards from cases of goods, half-submerged tin cans, a length of bamboo stalk, a decaying fish, tufts of sodden seaweed, a small cracked rudder, browned banana skins, then a long waving line of yellow scum, white spume in delicate tracery, and matted refuse showed where the fresh current cut along the shallows, where only the rising and falling tide makes any changes.

The ripples became longer and stronger swells, marked by no drifting waste of any sort. Oar whirls would be even less visible here. Added to the motor's noise was the louder splash of waves against the shoulders of the launch and the swish of the spray thrown out by her descending bow.

The sweep of the patch of light was wider now.

"Not much chance now," the steering Chinese said.

"No. Their boat could be going anywhere out here," the Malay agreed.

Then the pupils of his dark eyes suddenly shone. He dropped the light on the seat beside him.

"I heard a splash," he cried. "Stop the engine!"

A few gasps, and the motor was dead. The Malay clambered far out on the bow of the launch and lay flat on his stomach, peering into the darkness before him. The Chinese leaned far over the gunwale, for he, too, thought that he had caught the sound of a single splash. The launch floated idly, rising and falling with the swell. The vast silence of the night was broken only by the lapping of the waters alongside the boat.

The three occupants of the launch hardly breathed, yet they heard nothing. The Chinese straightened, placed his right hand on the steering wheel, and had already turned to give an order to the boy at attention above the motor, when the Malay's quick ear—six feet nearer the surface than that of the Chinese—caught a faint sound from the darkness.

"Wait!" he called back as quietly as he could. "A little to the right. But far away. What is it?"

With his attention thus directed the Chinese leaned far out and strained his ears. After an interval he thought he made out a peculiar "swish" of the waters that was not caused by the waves and was not at all the noise of water against a stationary boat.

The Malay was back at his post beside him.

"Something moving," was all he said.

"Fish?" asked the Chinese.

"Don't know—yet."

"Ahead—slow," the steering Chinese ordered.

In the pauses between the chugs of the motor and the revolutions of the propeller, they thought they could distinguish the regular swish they had

heard at first. When it seemed to cease they stopped the engine until they could pick up its position again. At times, its regular recurrence would cease altogether and they would fear that they had lost it; then it would begin again. The light showed them nothing yet. They were playing it against a deceptive white mist that, despite its delicate appearance, tantalizingly curtained their search.

Stopping, drifting, starting, zigzagging, hesitating, groping, the launch pursued its uncertain course under the dark night.

The Thomas whose body made a short curve through the night air was an unconscious form. The Thomas whose body struck the water with a resounding splash was a shivering boy. The Thomas whose limp figure sank from sight was a sputtering youth waking from a horrible nightmare. The Thomas who, as the wetness chilled his body, as the salty taste soaked through and around the gag in his mouth, as the choking sensation went up his nose and down his throat, as the sting opened his eyes wide, began to kick for his life, was the Thomas who, from his childhood, had always felt perfectly comfortable in the water.

Reared on the harbor, he had never been a swift or showy swimmer, but he had endurance greater than that of most of his swimming mates, and he could swim longer under water than any of them. Yet, with all that power and confidence in himself, he did not, at the present moment, wish to stay under water any longer than he must.

He felt the tightening cords around his ankles, shrunk by the moisture, cut more cruelly than before into his skin. Yet he could bend his knees, though his arms ached frightfully behind his body. He kicked again and again until his nose rose into the welcome air, and he sneezed the water from his lungs and throat.

Except that every stroke cut into his flesh, he felt he could keep himself afloat for hours by swimming on his back. If he could keep his head clear and not get excited; if he could refrain from forcing his stroke and get some notion of the direction of the shore; then he might be able to consider this adventure no more hazardous than a stunt in his old familiar harbor waters.

There was that glow of heat-lightning again.

Had that come from the land before? It was worth trying for. He pushed his head in that direction. He moved slowly, timing the movements of his

fettered legs to get the maximum of distance with the minimum of effort. His breath was of more importance to him than anything else.

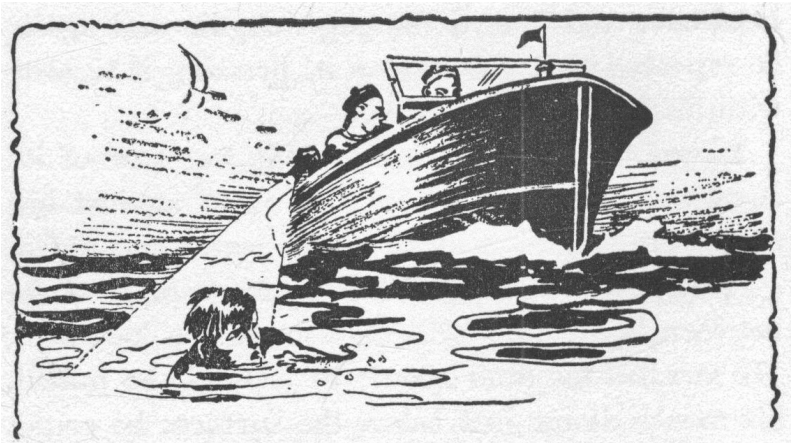
Then, after a twinge of pain caused by the shrunken cords, he thought: "If *they* shrink, why won't this soggy silk wad in my mouth?"

Why not? It was worth trying. He rolled his head over and soaked the gag. Again and again he repeated this, chewing on it, pressing it tighter with his jaws between dips.

It was tighter and smaller! He was sure of it. A tickling shred of it plastered itself against his chin. He slashed it about in the water and noted gleefully that he had dislodged more of it from between his teeth. Still more might be loosened. He swished his head about; he chewed; he pulled his mouth along just below the surface; he could feel shreds and ends of the silk flapping in his eyes and against his cheeks. There must be a long streamer extending through the water as he swam. With jerks that threatened to sever his head from his spinal column he swished rapidly from side to side. Air rushed through his mouth and down his windpipe for the first time. There! It was gone! A mouthful of salt water felt welcome. In his joy he tilted his head back and squirted it high above him, as every boy learns to do in his early water days when he indulges in such sports as "playing whale."

Absorbed in this difficult feat Thomas had ceased to pay any attention to the heat-lightning. Now, after a few lusty strokes, he noticed it playing about the water. Diffused as it was when he saw it again, there was no mistaking it now.

A boat!



THE GLOW FELL ABOUT HIM.

But before he could call, the glow fell about him. He gave an energetic propulsion with his legs and then listened to the exclamations that proved he had been seen. There was no need to waste his breath now. He could content himself with remaining afloat.

How tired he was! He made no effort to help himself as the two men dragged him from the water and laid him in the bottom of the launch. He merely felt relieved at the support beneath his back and at the freedom to move his arms.

They drifted until he felt able to tell his story briefly.

No; he could not say who had rowed the boat. Yes, they had evidently feared pursuit and had turned when they heard the boat or saw the light. Back towards the city, if the city was over there. He had only had a fleeting look at the rug man.

“Could you recognize him if you saw him again?”

The Chinese leaned towards him. Thomas felt so comfortable now, in spite of his dripping garments, that he replied jovially:

“I don’t know. All Chinamen look alike to me.”

Then he caught his breath. How would this Oriental take such a piece of Western pertness? He glanced quickly at the man’s face. He nodded and the eyes twinkled humorously, more humorously than Thomas suspected.

Then, in a tone which signified more than Thomas guessed and which he understood only later, the Chinese remarked as he turned back to his steering wheel:

“I know they do.”

CHAPTER XIV

REFINED TORTURE

So elated was Thomas over his escape from the terrible fate he had anticipated from his kidnaping that he failed to ask any questions in his turn. He expressed his deep gratitude for being pulled out of the water, but with a boy's understandable pride in his own prowess he asked anxiously:

"Was I headed for the shore when you heard me splashing with my legs?"

"You were," the Chinese replied approvingly.

"I'm glad I was," Thomas went on enthusiastically. "I always thought I had a good sense of direction."

"If we hadn't come along, I'm afraid you would have needed it."

"I certainly would. Ouch! I feel stiff."

He settled himself comfortably and noticed with satisfaction that his clothes were drying rapidly. After all, he would not be such a frightful-looking spectacle as he entered his lodging. Anyway, at this early morning hour there would probably be no one to see him except the sleepy door-boy.

He even dozed a little on the way back to the slip. His spell of drowsiness was on him still, for he displayed no astonishment when the Malay boat hand stepped to his waiting chair and became a regular jinricksha owner. Before he was awake to events, Thomas was escorted to its comfortable seat and was asked:

"Where to?"

It was his answer to that inquiry that furnished his address to the listening Chinese who, from all appearances, was still busy with the launch.

Only when he awoke several hours later and lay pleasantly in bed watching the flickering of the mosquito netting about him did he realize that he knew absolutely nothing about his rescuers except their nationalities. The Malay puzzled him as much as anything.

"He was on that boat—and wasn't she a beauty? Evidently he belonged there. Yet, as soon as we got ashore, there was his jinricksha. That's odd. And he's a regular worker at it, for he knew the city and ran me home. Oh, I

see;—the Chinese owner's private man. That's it! But who's the Chinaman?"

Since no explanations of these puzzles occurred to his wandering reflections he let them pass.

"But why were they cruising out there at that time of night? Pleasure? Why the light? Those fellows who had me were afraid of them, all right! Well, they would be of any boat that happened to see their load. I must have looked funny tied up like a kicking pig. Asked me if I'd recognize the Chink again, in case I informed the police, I suppose. I think I'd better not. It might complicate the other thing I'm trying to do."

His thoughts wandered to the perfect poise and calm control of the Chinese owner of that powerful launch.

"He knew his way about," Thomas pronounced.

Then a biting doubt entered his mind.

"Did I thank him enough for picking me up? These Orientals are sticklers for politeness and courtesy, and I may not have shown all I felt. He pumped a lot of information out of me, but I don't even know his name!"

That worried him.

"Oh, well," he tried to console himself, "it's nothing in his life. Probably he thinks I'm some ship-boy or water-front loafer. He may be hardened to fishing worthless water rats from slimy graves."

His mind would not be set at rest.

"I don't even know his name. I did mess that up terribly. I might find the launch along the quays and be able to tell him all I should have said last night."

To decide on such a course of action was, for Thomas, the signal to begin to act. Half an hour later he was pacing the piers and slips, scanning the hundreds of craft, some of which he dismissed with a valuing glance, others of which he lingered over lovingly, his fingers itching to sketch their general lines, his investigating mind luring him to examine their unusual details.

"If I can remember some of these novelties, won't I surprise the draftsmen back home, though?" he chuckled gleefully.

Often he thought he had spied the launch he sought, but a young British official in clean white ducks would board her with the air of ownership, or a

radical difference in arrangement of the deck and wheel would show that this was not the launch he had ridden in.

"Why didn't I get her name?" He could have kicked himself for his stupidity—he, a studying marine designer, who had never glanced at her bow or stern.

"Couldn't see them," he tried to silence his reproaches.

Hours of trudging and clambering about in the fierce sun convinced him that his search was useless, so he made his weary way home, too tired now to fix in his mind any of those clever devices he should put on paper at once if he was going to astonish his fellow workers back home.

"Message for you." The clerk stopped him as he entered. He passed over his scribbled memorandum.

Thomas could make out the name of a hotel clearly enough, but the other entry might have been the signboard of a chop suey restaurant.

"Who left it?"

"A Malay. The man who wants to see you is Mr. Wan. Know him?"

"Not unless——"

"Owns a boat you rode in last night."

"What——!" Thomas cut off his sudden exclamation and covered his tenseness with another question. "Did the messenger have a jinricksha?"

"Yes."

"It's all right, then," said Thomas, relieved. "I know what it's about."

Thomas frankly stared at every detail of the outlandish costume of the subdued hotel boy who escorted him to the door of Mr. Wan's room, while the native seemed almost unconscious of the visitor's existence. But Thomas would have been astounded could he have known how much more the unnoticing native knew about him and all his clothes than he with all his open-eyed gaze knew about the other. In all his experiences the Western lad never became fully aware of this valuable quality in Easterners. His disregard of it repeatedly brought him into awkward situations and threw him into false lines of behavior.

Mr. Wan, in a long, somber dressing-gown, looked too languid and too lazy to be the owner and pilot of a high-powered motor launch. Every

movement he made, every word he spoke added to the impression of his having a long, long time in which to do the nothing that occupied him.

"I'm sorry I wasn't in when your message came," Thomas began. "I wanted to thank you again for all you did last night. I must have seemed careless at the time. I suppose I was somewhat done up and tired and thoughtless. It worried me to-day that I didn't even ask your name. I didn't know how to find you."

The older man smiled.

"So you went hunting among the boats to find the launch and learn my name in that way."

Thomas stared in amazement at the Oriental's report of his actions.

"How did you know that?"

"Simplest thing in the world, my boy. Exactly what every young man would do. But I miscalculated your sleep. I thought you needed more rest than you did."

"So far I know only half your name, Mr. Wan."

"It's an easy one to get:—Wan Tu."

"One Two?" repeated Thomas, thinking that Mr. Wan might have learned his speech from an Irishman.

"No; not One Two, but Wan Tu," the other spoke clearly.

"I have it now. Don't you want mine?"

The other paused with a twinkle in his eyes and a faint smile on his lips.

"I have it."

"But I never told it to you!"

"No. But my messenger had to describe you to the clerk, and he told it."

The simple explanation of the mystery made them both laugh.

"Why do you suppose those Chinese snatched you last night?"

"That's what I want to know. Do they shanghai many fellows here for native boats? That's all I could think of."

"Might be. And you're as good as the next fellow for working on a ship. They'd hardly tackle a Westerner for that unless there were some particular reason."

They thought this over for a short time.

"Any one here who might want to do you a bad turn?"

Thomas shook his head.

"Any one here who might be an enemy, or want to get square with you for anything?"

"Only one. But he doesn't know I did anything to him. At least I think he doesn't know I did it."

The Chinese compressed his lips for a second.

"Did what?"

"Bumped Hanson into the water with a bale."

"Hanson? Who's he?"

Rapidly Thomas told of the glorious revenge he had achieved with the aid of the *Portlander's* donkey engine.

"He might want to get even," he concluded.

"But you say he doesn't know you propelled him through space."

"He can't know that."

"Any other way he could have been stirred up against you?"

Mr. Wan waited patiently.

Thomas had determined to say nothing about his other contact. The more concealed he kept his real purpose in staying in Singapore the better were his chances of doing what he intended. Who was this foreigner, anyhow? Generously, however, Thomas pushed this question aside. The man had saved him from a long exhausting swim, if not from something much more serious. He had been thoughtful enough to send his man for him to-day. He was a kind, thoughtful, interesting old soul. There was no reason for withholding anything from him.

"Perhaps my father," he began lamely.

The other covered his start of astonishment by rearranging the books and papers on the low table at his elbow.

"Your father—here?" he spoke slowly to help the embarrassed son.

"I warned my father against Hanson. He may have told Hanson to look out for me," Thomas blurted out his upsetting fear. It was the only

explanation he had made to himself that satisfactorily accounted for the events of the past twenty-four hours.

"Of course—same name," Mr. Wan had murmured under his breath, but Thomas had not heard him. His tongue unloosed, the lonely boy, relieved at having found a listener more sympathetic than matter-of-fact Inspector Allmayer, poured out his story from the time of his landing in Calcutta. Mr. Wan let him talk; and Thomas, who had missed such understanding listeners as Bill Johnson, or the whole Johnson establishment, for that matter, talked more freely than he had been able to talk for months. He had felt bottled up. At times he felt that he would burst with all he had in him to say. As Bill Johnson would have described it, he was now "getting it off his chest" with a vengeance.

He heaved a great sigh of relief when he had finished and sat calmly watching his listener. Again the latter moved the articles on the table slightly.

"It looks like Hanson," the man declared.

"Yes. And that's exactly what I can't understand. Allowing for all the relations that spring up on ships or in these distant places, I still can't see why anything I say about Hanson should touch my father—or the reverse."

"You say you saw a package transferred from one to the other?" Mr. Wan was starting on a new train of thought.

"Yes, but what's important about that?"

"We of the East," the other explained gently, "always look for the important in the smallest detail. Your threat to your father may be a very important matter to Hanson."

"I don't see——"

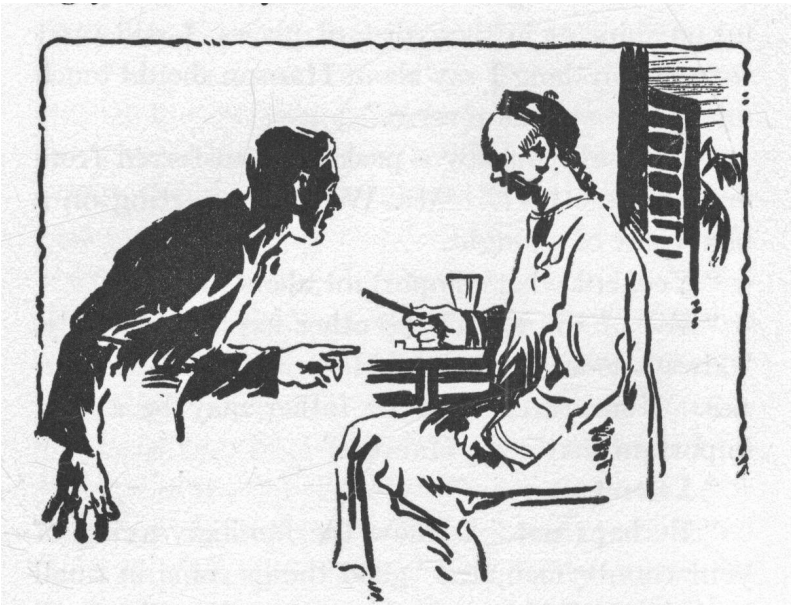
"Perhaps not. I know the familiar saying of your countrymen that 'good things come in small packages.' Did it ever occur to you that the small package handed over to Hanson might have been worth thousands of your dollars?"

"You're not accusing my father of theft!" the boy exclaimed hotly.

"Not at all. But you know, don't you, that some businesses can be perfectly legitimate in one country yet illegal in another?"

Thomas had no idea what his host was driving at, but he listened politely.

"I should not, perhaps, tell you this, since I know nothing certain about it, but did it never strike you that Hanson might be engaged in violating your country's laws?"



"YOU'RE NOT ACCUSING MY FATHER OF THEFT!"

"How could he?" Thomas was beyond his depth now. "Boatswain on a freighter? 'Way out here in Singapore?"

"Ever hear of any one smuggling opium into the United States?" Mr. Wan asked more sharply.

For a moment Thomas was stunned. He railed inwardly at his stupidity. Yet he could justify himself by a simple explanation:—he had always associated the opium business with the country of China itself. Why, just before he had sailed from home he had read in the newspapers that the wife of a Chinese official had been in trouble with the customs department because of a charge of opium smuggling. There flashed back into his memory a statement that one person's baggage might conceal opium in cans to the value of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The thought made him dizzy. His work on freighters in the harbor had brought him close to the realities of importing commodities into his country; they were dirty, laborious, ordinary details of daily toil. The little he had heard or read of opium smoking had sounded like a far-away, romantic story; almost poetic, to his imagination. That was the word:—poetic. But it could not be poetic

way down here at the southern tip of Asia; not about his father; and not while it involved such a heavy, unromantic person as Hanson!

"You can't mean my father's a criminal!"

The boy was indignant.

"Far from it. Out here the business may be carried on—under conditions."

"Why do they use him, then?"

"I don't know. My guess is that he is close to the source of supply; maybe the same people own the opium supply and The Yellow Poppy. Why not? It's what you Americans call big business. Your father may be able to get it at a low price. If he can supply Hanson and others, they make all the larger profit. But remember, all this is mere conjecture."

If Thomas had not been so intent on the views Mr. Wan was presenting he would not have failed to wonder at two things—the clear explanation the man was giving him and his knowledge of current American speech. He would have wondered more at the little he had learned about him. Never a word about himself escaped Mr. Wan's lips. Never for a second did he let Thomas feel like asking any questions about him and his possible occupation. All he knew of him was what he had been able to see.

He owned and could operate his own power boat. He had been cruising about in her last night. He lived in a good but quiet hotel. He had a Malay servant, or could command the services of one. He spoke several languages. He was keenly interested in Thomas's story;—but that could have been easily explained as the natural curiosity of the man who had conferred a service. He was an idle man, doubtless, for he seemed to have no regular occupation.

The lonely boy appealed to this clear-thinking man, who knew both East and West so well.

"How can I get my father away from here?"

"How? That's the question."

"Shall I go to the police again—to Inspector Allmayer?"

"Let us see," Mr. Wan began thoughtfully. "The British police have a high regard for the personal rights of the individual, sometimes more regard than your own police, I believe." He smiled to rob the remark of its harsh

criticism. “They hesitate to interfere in merely personal matters. They can’t arrest Dubois, can they?”

“Certainly not,” flared the son.

“Well, there you are.”

“But he’s my father.”

“Even that is not an offense to be punished by arrest. Can you prove that he is?”

Thomas began to despair again. The other pressed him harder.

“Can you even prove to Dubois yourself that he is your father? Can you make him believe it? Admit it?”

The boy was suffering agonies at the cruel truths the other was announcing in his calm, even tone. He felt sick at his stomach, but he forced his feelings aside, to listen more intently. The sweat on his forehead and on the palms of his hands was cold moisture not caused by the heat, for the room was fresh and pleasant.

“Why should the police interfere? Dubois is living a perfectly harmless quiet life here; earning his own way; disturbing no one; quite able to take care of himself. What do you purpose to do? Drag out of an agreeable situation a man to whom you mean nothing, who does not wish to go with you. For what? What could he do in your land? He can’t be a croupier, can he? Or a common sailor again? What can you prove? And the police are careful about demanding proofs before they act.”

“Inspector Allmayer told me——”

“I know he told you a great deal. But did he do anything?”

For a blind second Thomas felt that he could hate this man who so coolly and calmly said things that tortured him more than anything Hanson had ever done to him. And the brute of a boatswain had not acted with such devilish mental cruelty as this man was displaying. Every statement, every question cut him deeper and more painfully than any twist of a cord or thrust of a gag had done.

This deliberate torturer might be one of Hanson’s acquaintances merely pumping him to see how much he knew and what he intended to do. A second’s reflection would have shown Thomas the unreasonableness of this mistaken view, but he was in no mood for reflection now. He was goaded to desperation. Driven to bay, helpless, alone, weak in himself, turning and

writhing to find a way out of his difficulties, he yet could hold firm to two consuming intentions.

It might be the last cry of the defeated and cornered boy, but he could, at least, give himself the satisfaction of having shut off that stream of tormenting phrases from across the table.

He pushed back his chair and sprang to face Mr. Wan. The latter heard the back of the chair thud against the floor-matting.

"Stop it!" the boy commanded; and astonishingly the older man stopped. "Tell all those things to yourself—to anybody you please," Thomas added recklessly, "but let me tell you something. I'm going to get my father away from all this—in spite of what you call his 'agreeable situation.' That's the first thing I want to tell you. Here's the second. I'll never rest until I tell Hanson straight in the face that I knocked him overboard from the *Portlander*. That's all!"

His knees trembled and he wanted to sit down. Where was his chair? Never mind, he could stand long enough to see where his hat was lying, then he would leave that room without another word. But his roaming eyes could not find his hat, search as he might.

"Fine! That's the way to talk! I'm glad to hear you!"

Thomas could hardly believe his ears. He groped for the seat of his chair, set it upon its four legs, and sank upon it in wonderment.

He had not been mistaken in what he had heard. The cold eyes across the low table were glowing with approval.

Mr. Wan waited until the youth could regain some composure.

"I hoped you'd answer in that manner."

"Can you help me?" Thomas spoke respectfully.

Mr. Wan leaned forward.

CHAPTER XV

THE SMUGGLING RING AROUND THE WORLD

What became of the neatly wrapped square packages, looking like tin boxes of biscuits, that passed so mysteriously from Dubois to Hanson? Did they continue to accumulate in the latter's hotel room until he had a large enough supply for shipment to the United States?

Competition for the trade in opium was so keen in the Malay Peninsula that every person involved in the highly lucrative business of importation in China, the largest market in the world, tried to keep all the details of his activities known to as few persons as possible. Some of the owners of The Yellow Poppy made as much from silent partnerships in the opium export trade as in their open and known holdings in well regulated gambling. They bought the drug in huge quantities and kept their costs very low. It was this attractive cheapness that gave Hanson his opportunity of reaping huge profits.

He had gained the confidence of the weakened Dubois soon after his discharge from the hospital. When Dubois had gained employment in The Yellow Poppy, Hanson had patronized his table as often as he could and frequently sent his acquaintances there. In the almost blank mind of the frail seaman there had grown a feeling of gratitude to the big man, so able to take care of himself physically in any encounter or tight place.

Every white worker in the Orient looks forward to retiring in his later years upon his savings or pension, to enjoy his old age in quiet and safety. The Government employees can expect this with absolute certainty. It is part of the inducement by which colonization goes on among the yellow and brown races of the earth. Likewise, the great trading organizations and transportation companies provide the same kind of lure for continuous residence far from home by schemes of deferred bonuses and small but assured pensions. Western workers in the East are influenced by this practice of having some money for "a rainy day." Dubois, knowing of it, seeing its operation all about him, began to adopt it as the ambitious aim of his life and work. But Chinese gambling houses do not provide pensions for old age. When one is no longer capable of accurate counting and rapid manipulation at the table, of keeping a cool head while all about are at fever heat; above all, if one is not able to restrain himself from gambling against the heavy

odds that all owners of gambling houses know exist against the mere occasional player, out he goes.

As long as one is capable and reliable, the Oriental employer will pay him—not much, but promptly. Charity or gratitude he seldom feels for his dependents. There were still some traces of the ambitious American in the nature of Dubois, and these, coupled with the assured program of the Western workers in the East, made him yearn for a gradually increasing pile of money, as represented by a swelling bank account.

He had thought of investing in fruit plantation shares. Some men had made money; but he knew of savings swept away by crop failures as rapidly as by the turn of a card in The Yellow Poppy. He was next tempted to buy part of a native sampan, but his old sailor nature was shaken by the crazy hulks and the ragged sails he observed along the water-fronts. He envied the owners of the little villas and bungalows that were situated away from the water on the cooler hills. But buying one of those, or even a plot of ground on which to build one later, with the heavy mortgage rate of interest he would have to pay, seemed like pledging himself to a life of toil with no certainty of owning anything at the end.

Then came the feeling inquiry of Hanson. Did Dubois know of the high prices paid for opium in the United States? Only vaguely. Did he know any of the producers or large dealers in the island? Could he get a steady but small quantity, not large enough to attract any wonder or arouse any suspicion, but just enough to keep some ten or a dozen men occupied in carrying it across the oceans in both directions and arranging for its safe delivery to distributors in the far-away United States?

By this time Dubois had lived long enough in the Federated Malay States to accept the drug trade as a natural thing. The last traces of American influence had vanished from his recollection. He had been submerged in a totally new life, a mode of living that a few years before he would have regarded with repulsion, if not with disgust.

Hanson was not over-generous in his offer of money returns. He would guarantee something when the drug was turned over to him, but the difficulties of landing the barred packages in the United States were so great that Dubois must share in their risks. But if their attempts at smuggling were successful, he would profit greatly. He had agreed to the plan. A few of the cases, sold to him as a favor by the manager of the packing department, who also owned a few shares of stock in The Yellow Poppy, were stolen or lost in shipment or were seized by the customs officials at American ports. But

several were adroitly shipped past the net that had been placed to catch them, and months later Dubois received his share of the profits. As years passed, and Hanson and his confederates improved their devices and varied their schemes, the moneys transferred to Dubois increased in frequency and amount. He came to think only of two operations in the transaction:—his own two of handing over the small boxes to Hanson or his agent and of later depositing his money in the bank. To what happened between those beginning and concluding actions he no longer gave any thought. Had any one accused him of engaging in an illegal trade he would have indignantly denied the charge. Had any one threatened to sever or interfere in his relations with Hanson, he would have struck back, as a man would against a pickpocket, in defense of what he regarded his rightful property.

It had taken years for the arrangements to be perfected. With the years Dubois had come to be considered the most important cog in the intricate machinery. Hanson did the crude thinking, the shrewd scheming of the man who plots with a single overmastering purpose. Others more agile and ingenious carried out the final steps. But the uninterrupted movement of the packages from Singapore eastward to the ports along the Pacific and westward to the ports along the Atlantic depended on that quiet little man who could supply the valuable product regularly at so low a price, that straightforward fellow who was so unpracticed in the devious ways of profitable business that he never thought of holding his customers up by forcing them to higher and higher prices. It was so silly that it was laughable.

About once a year Hanson, who might have remained in the United States, made a trip to Singapore. Sometimes he traveled in comfort as a paying passenger. But more frequently he went as a sailor, for this had two prime advantages;—he thus attracted less attention, and he had opportunities of studying and finding new methods for smuggling and picking up among crews new persons for carrying out those methods.

Size, weight, and form of the package were supremely important. It was to experiment with changes in these that Hanson had come this time to Singapore.

The metal biscuit box handed over by Dubois was air-tight and water-tight, not too heavy for easy carrying under the arm, as Thomas had observed. It must, however, be adroitly covered and disguised. The bulky boatswain, whom Thomas would never have accused of overcleanliness, was very fastidious about his bathroom in his Singapore hotel. He used it

much more often than ordinary visitors do in that country of heat and sunshine and light-colored clothes.

He tinkered a great deal with tools, too, of which he was so proud and careful that whenever he left his room he locked all of them in a small, stout trunk. He evidently did nothing constructive with them, for no one saw about his living quarters any objects he had made or repaired.

When he entered his room with a paper-wrapped bundle he turned on his bath immediately. He could not silence the bubbling of the running water. While the tub was filling, he would strip the brown paper from his parcel and carefully examine every edge, every corner, every joint of the metal to detect any possible leaks. If there was the slightest possible chance for water to seep in, he would draw from his strong box of tools a spirit lamp, solder, and an iron, and roughly but securely close the leak.

Then the box would be gently lowered into the water in the bathtub, to see if it would float. If it floated in this fresh water it would, of course, all the more surely float in salt water. Thin, flexible wrapping of cork would then be bound around the box until the proper degree of buoyancy was obtained. Next was added a thick wrapper of waterproof oilcloth, and finally the bundle was tightly wedged into a wooden box.

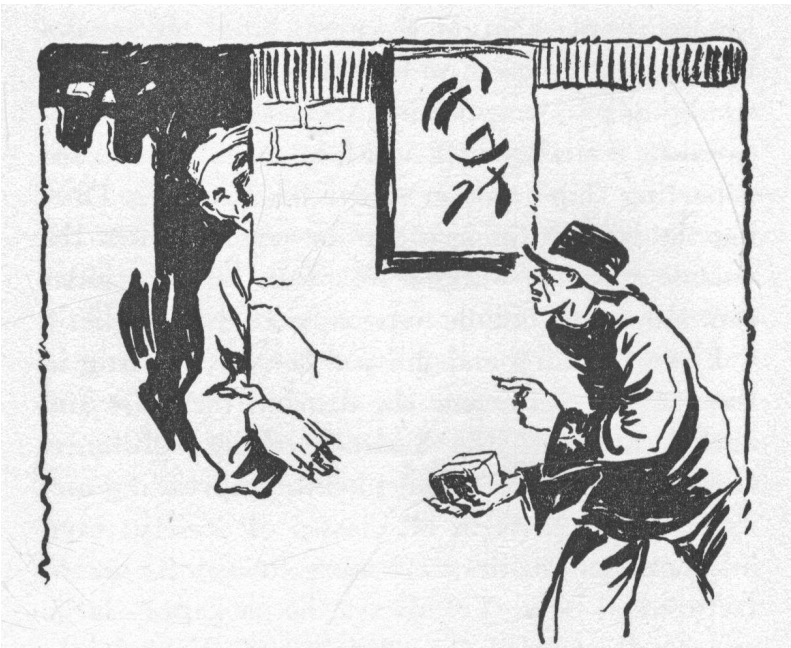
Hanson's care of his complete tool outfit would make one believe that this finished wooden package was a marvel of neat carpentry and clean, fresh wood. Not at all. There were bungling joints, broken boards—water-soaked, discolored, marred, and marked—rotten strips, sides that had been staved in; or, perhaps, an old box, fished up from the floating refuse of a cove, would cover the valuable contents.

Had you been rowing about, and had you passed one of these carefully prepared precious boxes floating on the waves, you would have ignored it or poked it with your oar to see if it would return to the surface to float again. And you might have added a disgusted remark about the way ships dirtied the harbor by flinging their waste boxes overboard.

Long-winded seamen, smoky machinists and greasy oilers from the engine room, shabby third-class passengers, Filipino galley helpers, and even petty officers on freighters, whose only uniform was a battered blue cap, would drop into Hanson's room for long yarns and repeated emptyings of the stout bottles. When they left they would, perhaps, be carrying under one elbow one of those battered cases, soon to start on its venturous voyage to the land of high prices.

Sometimes the visitor departed empty-handed. A day or so afterwards, about an hour before the man's ship sailed, the hearty Hanson would pay a farewell call to his friend. And exactly as the farewell delegations of friends of sailing passengers in the luxurious cabins of the great liners always delivered parting gifts, so bluff Hanson would carry a bulging roll, wrapped in a frayed sweater and secured by a stringy belt, which he would toss to the departing ship's worker as a remembrance. During the voyage the sweater—or whatever was the outside garment—might be worn, but the inner contents of the bundle never appeared in public.

From the alley and jail peddlers of the drug in the interior cities came the demand for more and always more of the health-wrecking substance. Government authorities deplored its spreading use, its terrible effects in all classes of society; even international treaties were made to curb its manufacture and sale. Yet always the packages—large and small—evaded the officials and trickled into the country. Cable messages reached Hanson reporting that a certain number of packages had failed of delivery. A few had been seized. Some others, when the risk of landing had been too great to take, were returned in the care of men who were often ignorant of the contents. Then he must work out some other scheme for starting them on their way again.



YET ALWAYS THE PACKAGES EVADED THE OFFICIALS.

Most of the coded messages announced successful delivery and urged that more and more be forwarded. If only one-tenth of the quantity dispatched could be sure of ultimate sale in small doses at fabulous prices, then every ship entering an American port should bear at least one package worth several thousand dollars.

That was the aim of Hanson and all his associates. Let some be seized, as it must be; but they would send so much that there would be dozens of chances for evasion.

Dubois could supply the best quality at the lowest price. He was no haggling Oriental, willing to "double cross" one for a mere hundred dollars in gold. One could depend on his word. He wanted security as much as any one. He was a good man to do business with, but he must be urged to get more—and more—and more.

Then Hanson would himself have to take his departure to split the profits with his partners. But if Dubois could guarantee a steady supply, other trusted employees could follow in enough guises and pretended occupations to make any detection difficult. And the beauty of the entire business was that only in its last stage—in the United States itself—could it be attacked. Every time he thought of that, Hanson felt like cheering.

CHAPTER XVI

DOWN THE DARK CORRIDOR

Thomas had often—in school and outside—regretted that he was not one of the brilliant, showy persons of life. Never envious of the triumphs which his mates won by their brilliance, he nevertheless always experienced a slight pang that he could not do the "show-off stuff," as he described it to Bill Johnson. Every triumph of some one he knew acted upon him in the same manner; it spurred him to do whatever he attempted as well as he could, even though there might be for him no flags flung to the breeze, no speeches from platforms, no certificates of merit, and no medals of award.

Several minor satisfactions had been his, however. In school he had nosed out a couple of swimmers who made brilliant flashes but who had no staying powers. In the water, from the time he had learned to swim as a tiny shaver, he had seen other boys do the fancy diving, the high jumping, the acrobatics in the air. He had listened to the delighted "Ah's" and "Oh's" of girls and women at a perfect swan dive by a gutter snipe who had all the makings of a corner loafer in him; and he had gone on, day after day, quietly forcing himself to stay longer under water or to swim distances which no one else in his water-front crowd would attempt.

Other fellows might insist on a summer job on the excursion boat, where they could collect tickets, see the crowds, and wear a cap that carried the steamer's name on it in yellow letters. Thomas was more attracted by the higher wages he made in his humdrum attendance on the candy and refreshment counter. He never thought heroically about what he was best able and most liked to do. He knew what he needed, saw the best way to get it, and then, day after day, did it.

He became aware, the first summer he worked in the drawing-room of a boat-building concern, that the department heads must have gone through all the monotonous tracing of plans that the beginners so often cursed. He discovered that the man who was in charge of the room could do better than any apprentice in it the kind of work the subordinate repeated day after day.

Being a "plugger" rather than a "plunger," being steady, industrious, and above all persistent, he ballasted his actions in the present instance. He knew he was not level-headed—he could have kicked himself all over Singapore for his outburst before his father—but he did know that he could "hang on."

The chance to talk with Mr. Wan had braced him up more than he could tell that quaint Oriental. What that tolerant listener had related to him in return almost made him gasp.

That Westernized Easterner had told him only scraps, at that. Had Thomas known all the intricacies, all the criminalities, all the desperateness of the plots of which he had learned only a little, he would probably have given up in despair at once and started for home.

His ignorance was the greatest factor of his strength, next to his intense yearning for his father. That yearning he felt must be satisfied. He had a blind faith that it could be, a faith that persevered in the face of all realities and disappointments, a faith that could arouse him from the depths of his despair to confront Mr. Wan and blurt out his purpose.

About an hour before closing time at The Yellow Poppy, Thomas, with his best coat smartly pressed and his shoes newly polished, walked past the door with the sliding panel in the company of three Chinese, two of whom were plainly garbed in dark colors, while the third, a person of some consequence, no doubt, was most luxuriously costumed. Once inside, the members of the quartette separated, for though they would not be conspicuous in the crowded rooms, there was no reason for attracting any attention if they could avoid it.

Beneath his swagger, Thomas was fitted for more than the mere killing of time. The three other men must have prepared themselves in a similar manner, for the next day their three beautiful outer garments were found, one bundled in a compact wad under a table, one stuffed behind a screen, and the third, soiled and ripped to shreds, along the base of the wall in a dark passage. They might have been the best of clews for the police, yet the police never saw them. The Oriental mind has an idea that its own business should remain its own business. “Take the white man’s money whenever you can, but reserve your quarrels and losses for your own settling.” Yet rumors reached the authorities, and Inspector Allmayer grinned a little as he thought how much he knew; but as the little affair was not brought to his attention “officially,” he did not “officially” do any investigating or “officially” make any report. He chuckled to himself and hoped that the end would be as auspicious as the beginning.

Thomas and his companions had considered every possible move that they might have to make, once they were inside The Yellow Poppy and the patrons were beginning to leave the rooms. He and all the others had observed all the spaces, the angles, the corners, the passages, the doors, the

entrances, and the exits. The chief difficulties were two:—remaining unnoticed after the place was emptied of its throngs and finding a place of safe concealment. This second—the more important—Thomas thought he had provided in the single door near the room in which his father worked. What was beyond it? He forced himself not to dwell on that.

There would be time for that later.

With all the careful planning, when the attempt to carry their scheme out began, he became so intent on his own part that he completely forgot the others.

As on the previous evening, when Thomas had pleaded unavailingly with his father, Dubois had waited for the collection of the moneys at his table, and then had leisurely stretched himself back in his chair and run his fingers through his hair. Satisfied with his night's work, he was idly relaxing both his body and his mind. With feet sprawled widely before him, and hands clasped behind his head, he sat gazing up at the ceiling, avoiding any sight of the paraphernalia that held him bound to the table for so many hours —hours that to him were only drudgery.

This was the moment. From the other rooms there came the sound of clattering tables and chairs; some chattering of voices reached this far; but no approach of any person was heard.

The silent Malay crept to within a yard of the seated man before the latter had any hint of his presence. Then the quickness of native skill was pitted against unreasoning self-preservation. One hand covered Dubois's mouth to reduce his cry to a gurgling swallow; the other pressed his head so far back that his neck seemed about to snap. When his hands went down close to his body, a thin cord bound them instantly to his sides. The silk handkerchief stuffed between his teeth silenced him. So adroitly were these moves made that Dubois had been lifted from his chair and was being borne towards the open door where Thomas waited before Wan Tu had fully entered the room to see if all was progressing as they had planned.

Wan Tu darted to the open door behind the Malay and the Chinese who were half carrying, half forcing the dazed Dubois down the few steps. As long as he dared, Wan held the door ajar that they might see by the light of the room. Thomas, waiting breathlessly at the bottom of the four shallow steps, saw the glint of two dull revolver barrels and the bright flash of a knife held by the Malay against his father's back. Then they stood still, as a couple of jabbering cleaners entered the room they had just left.

From the sounds they could visualize the movements of the cleaners. One picked up the overturned chair and placed it on its four legs. To their infinite relief its position occasioned no comment from him. He was used to overturned chairs and disordered furniture. The other was pottering along the passageway. His felt-covered feet approached the door behind which Wan Tu stood tense with uncertainty. On the other side the servant gave the door a thud with his fist. The four listeners drew a relieved breath. At any rate he was not going to open it! Then one of the four gasped;—it was Thomas. He heard the sharp click of the spring lock as it snapped into the socket.

That door was locked against them.

All five turned away from the door and faced the blackness of the passage. In the darkness a smile of relief passed over the features of Dubois, but it had vanished when a small flash light revealed to the company the long narrow corridor stretching before them.

Thomas knew that Orientals move silently. He had provided his own feet with soft-soled shoes, but as he moved slowly forward through the short flashes of light and the long periods of blackness he thought he and Dubois were making thunderous noises. Stretching out one hand in one of the lighted seconds, he felt the walls:—heavy-paneled planks, if he was any judge. Leading where? He would have to wait to learn that.

How long was this corridor? Would it never end? His toes refused to bear his weight any farther. He tried stepping naturally. To his delight he discovered that his regular footfalls made less noise. At least his cramped bones did not creak and crack every time he touched the flooring.

The gleam of light struck a wall across the passage and was turned off at once. They moved forward more slowly in a compact mass. Did that wall close the passage, bottling them up like rats in a drain pipe, or did the corridor turn sharply to one side? They covered the distance and found, by feeling, that it continued at a right angle to the left, following the wall of The Yellow Poppy building. Not until they had listened carefully, straining their ears to catch any sound from this new direction, did they risk the first beam of light. They saw nothing; so on they moved.

Wan Tu, who was leading with the light, gave a little grunt of satisfaction and took two rapid steps. But suddenly he controlled himself and moved on slowly and steadily as before. What he had noticed all of them soon became aware of, for he stopped them with outstretched arms at

the top of a short flight of steps leading down to a lower platform, where the corridor ended at a heavy door.

Thomas caught a glimpse of his father's face. What did that quiet smile mean? Was anything happening to his mind again?

The others stood at the top of the stairs, while Wan Tu tiptoed down and flashed the light about the surface of the ponderous door. There were two heavy crossbars and a modern lock. From their station they could see and hear him turn the handle of the lock. It moved. So did the catch that drew back the metal bolt of the lock.

WAN TU FLASHED THE LIGHT ABOUT.

Thomas's heart beat high. There was nothing more to do now but to slip back the large bolts and step out into the morning air; or, if there should be watchers beyond the entrance, to make a dash at them and fight their way past them. He could hear the bolts grating along their staples, little by little; so slowly did they move that the periods of silence were longer than the movements made by Wan Tu's gripping fingers.

The silly smile had returned to Dubois's face, but no one noticed him now. Every eye, in the few flashes of light, was riveted on the hands of the Chinese against the dark door. He dropped his arm to rest it. It had taken so long that his muscles were tired.

There was no light now, as he closed his fingers around the knob. In the darkness they could hear him pull towards him. The door did not even creak. Could it be possible that it opened outward? He pressed the knob. The door stuck. He added the strength of his elbow, with still no effect upon the door. He added his shoulder, but the door had likely not been used in a long time, so tight did it stick. They could hear it creak under the weight of Wan Tu's shoulder, but their ears were not gladdened by that sudden crack a sticking door gives when it releases its grip on the jamb and begins to open. Now they knew that Wan Tu had his knee against the solid mass. They could hear him strain. Then all sounds ceased and he came swiftly up the steps.

"Locked tight on the other side!" he announced, to confirm their fears.

No one answered. There was only a smothered chuckle from the bound and gagged Dubois, which was his way of saying to them:

"I could have told you so! What are you going to do now?"

CHAPTER XVII

TOM WATCHES A GAME

There was no light, but the four conspirators, caught in their own trap, turned their eyes about in the darkness, trying to find in one another some solution of this difficulty.

Mr. Wan, followed by the Malay and their Chinese companion, moved back a short distance along the corridor. There the three stopped to confer. A few syllables reached Thomas's ears, but the language was Malay or Chinese so he paid no attention to it, although he could feel in the darkness that every nerve of Dubois was strained towards the talking trio. As they returned, Thomas wondered whether their council had decided on some plan of strategy or upon open war to obtain their release. How long would they have to wait in this state of inactive suspense?

It was amazing that with only a few flashes of the light and a few short phrases these five men could communicate so easily with one another. A movement towards the descending steps was the first change, and Tom soon found himself comfortable, seated in the group surrounding Dubois, who also seemed perfectly at ease and only slightly concerned over what might happen to him. He blinked unsteadily as the light was played on his face; but as he became accustomed to it his eyes grew steady and his countenance unafraid. He peered keenly at all he could see of his captors, whose faces were mostly in shadow, without betraying any emotion, until he caught sight of Thomas. Then he started; but he instantly repressed his movement and tried to erase from his face the look of puzzled anger that had flushed it.

The men he could account for, but what was this boy doing here after having blurted out his fantastic story about being his son? He must surely be crazy.

Mr. Wan was speaking persuasively.

"Look here, Dubois. We're three—four, I mean—to your one. You may think we're trapped, but you know enough of how such matters are arranged to believe that I left word that I should get back by a certain time. Now, if I don't, The Yellow Poppy will hear of it."

He paused, and Dubois nodded understandingly.

"No harm is meant for you."

Dubois smiled tantalizingly.

“Only we need you for something,” Mr. Wan went on politely. “This passage is not hard to find if searchers get into The Yellow Poppy. And they can.”

References to The Yellow Poppy made the only impression on Dubois; and Wan knew that what Oriental owners of gambling houses hate and fear most is trouble with Occidental authorities and scandals of raids and shootings. Their whole aim is to operate quietly and peaceably, undisturbed by any notice from the police.

“No one there cares what becomes of you,” Wan declared.

Thomas could have cried out in protest at such a cold-blooded remark.

“The sooner you help us, and the sooner we get this little job done, the better for all of us, *and the sooner you get back to your work*.”

It was this thought that softened the defiant look in Dubois’s face. If he brought scandalous notice on The Yellow Poppy, and were discharged, where else could he get work? All the other establishments would know of his infraction of the Oriental code of “no interference, attention strictly to our own business.”

“So the quieter you are, the better.”

Dubois nodded.

“Just a few questions.”

Wan nodded to the Chinaman, who quickly slipped the gag from the fettered man’s mouth, though he remained so close that he could throttle at the first sound any call or loud speech.

Dubois passed his moist tongue over his dry lips.

All heads were inclined towards the questioner and the prisoner.

“We know we can’t make you answer,” Wan admitted, “but there’s no reason for your being uncomfortable all the time. We may have to sit here for hours.”

"WE MAY HAVE TO SIT HERE FOR HOURS."

That was pleasant news! Tom's left leg, drawn up under him, had gone to sleep some minutes earlier, but he became conscious of the numbness only when he heard this sentence. Hours of this! His other leg began to tingle in sympathy and his back ached. Let happen what would; if Dubois were to be made comfortable, Thomas was not going to suffer any longer. With noises that boomed like rumbling thunder in that silent darkness he shifted his position.

It was a general signal for rearranging themselves. Only the squatting Malay, doubled over like a bronze statue of some strange Eastern deity, remained motionless, his mild eyes alert for every movement of Dubois.

Thomas wanted to ask how long they were likely to stay there, but wisely he refrained. He comforted himself with the thought that if he were not needed he could crawl up to the top step, drop back on the level floor, and sleep the hours away. The next remark electrified him into wide-awake attention.

"We know this corridor is used."

Dubois raised his eyebrows in interrogation.

"It's so clean," Wan explained. "But why should I be telling you things you know perfectly well?" he went on, with a shade of rebuke in his voice at having been drawn into unnecessary talk.

The eyes of Dubois had a mocking glint of delight at having led so skilful a campaigner into a waste of words and breath.

Wan Tu began to have a higher regard for the wits of the inoffensive figure huddled on the steps among them. He might be much more Oriental in his actions and thoughts than they had assumed. One must be wary, always, and never take anything for granted. Thomas, who observed this delicate duel of wits and who should have been unreservedly on the side of Wan Tu, mentally scored "One" for Dubois.

The diplomat tactfully turned to another topic.

"When are the rooms aired for the next session?" he asked Dubois.

There was no reason for not answering this; besides, Dubois was sure that Wan knew already. So he replied slowly:

"At seven every evening, three hours before opening."

Were they going to stay hidden in that dark passage all day until then? Almost fifteen hours! Thomas's sigh was unnoticed.

"Of course," Wan explained easily, "we can wait until then." He watched Dubois narrowly for some sign by which he might betray the information that the heavy door below them would be opened before that time. Dubois might have been one of Wan's own uncommunicative race for all that his countenance showed, so the suave tones went on: "Break through the door into your room and fight our way out, if we have to fight."

Still Dubois made no answer.

"Or we might not have to fight. If we just return you, who will ask any questions?"

Thomas had to cover his mouth to keep himself from shouting, "No, no! Don't take him back there! You promised me!" He squirmed in torment at his helplessness.

Dubois curled his lip.

"Why return me? You just said The Yellow Poppy won't care."

"Score two!" said Thomas to himself, delighted, in spite of unforeseen consequences, at such coolness and clear-sightedness in the man he was anxious to keep in their possession.

Thomas was enjoying this game hugely. It reminded him of some football matches he had seen between teams who used more brain than brawn. Whenever one scheme of attack had been foiled the resourceful quarterback brought out another. Mr. Wan met every check to his plans with the perfectly even temper of a good sport.

“What a great boxer he would make,” Thomas said to himself, before he recalled that the Chinese think little of muscular prowess if it can be replaced by mental adroitness. No, Mr. Wan would not make a good boxer; he would hate to receive the pounding blows, and Thomas believed he would hate all the more the necessity of striking another man. Led away by his boyish reflections, he was recalled to the reality of the situation by Mr. Wan’s next observation, delivered with as little emphasis as would be a comment on the state of the weather.

“That door makes a short cut to the little herb and seed shop in the Street of the Jasmine, doesn’t it?”

Dubois caught himself, but too late. The glint that darted from his eyes, the momentary catch of his breath, the slight tremor that rippled under his muscles;—all these were plainly visible to the apparently unseeing glance of Wan Tu and to the fixed stare of the Malay, who had withdrawn farther and farther from the rays of the flashlight into the deeper darkness.

Thomas did not comprehend the full importance of this question and was still waiting for his father’s crushing reply, for which he had already awarded him another point, when he was astonished to discover that the game was over.

Wan Tu clicked off the light, and the puzzled youth felt cheated. For some reason, the last play had been too quick for his eyes. The field was confused by the surging spectators. Worst of all, he could not make out the score, but he had an uneasy fear that it was “four to two” against his father.

The silent wait began.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HERB DEALER GIVES DIRECTIONS

Hanson paced up and down the busy pavement, among the bustling business people and the strolling loiterers, opposite the largest hotel on the wide boulevard along the water-front. He felt out of place rubbing elbows with the wealth and fashion displayed in the puffing speed-boats, the slowly passing private house-boats, the luxurious steam yachts from all parts of the globe, and, on land, the long low purring European automobiles—the last word in high-priced swank and swagger.

He had tried to dress himself to look like a frequenter of such a gay scene, but his costume was not quite right and his manners exhibited an inferiority feeling that he would never have admitted to himself. The other men's striped, cream-colored flannels fitted them jauntily; their dazzling, white duck trousers, if they were not perfectly creased down the front and rear of the leg, had plainly been wrinkled by lolling about in boats. Their sunburn was the result of their deliberate willingness to be tanned. They were perfectly at ease with the gayly dressed and smiling young women and girls who arrived, chatted, and moved away.

But Hanson's white ducks looked soiled already. Their creases had been made by the lumbering motions of his fat legs. Their material looked cheap. His tightly buttoned blue coat was too pinched around the waist and too bulging in the sleeves. It had not been made to fit him. His cap was too new to look like a yachtsman's headgear. And his face was not fashionably browned; it was reddened to a broiled lobster's flaming color by long and careless exposure to all kinds of weather.

Other men knew how to kill time easily and gracefully. He was not comfortable unless he was doing something, and lounging up and down this stretch of the most frequented boulevard of Singapore was not Hanson's idea of doing something. The meeting here had been arranged by Dubois. Ever since "that boy" had spoken so threateningly, Dubois had insisted that they vary their meeting places, that they scatter them more widely about the city. When Hanson had objected to the crowds of passers-by, Dubois had reminded him that the place to be unnoticed is where many persons are about; moving pedestrians or loitering idlers do not consider unusual the chance conversations that are bound to make impressions in quiet neighborhoods, where a stranger is marked by every inhabitant. Packages

were continually being passed from hand to hand here—to the occupants of the boats, to departing travelers, to stewards of steamers, to motorists. And, as Hanson had to go out to a "round-the-world" liner to deliver the three packages, this was the place to start.

Well, then, he had done—against his own better judgment—what Dubois had proposed. Then what had become of that fellow? Five minutes past the time, and no sign of him! He took another turn across the street, to stand and sweep his eyes over the vehicles moving in both directions; but he saw no automobile, no jinricksha with the figure of the tardy Dubois. Could the fellow have deliberately disappointed him? He pushed that thought aside; their working arrangements had been going on for too many years and too smoothly for any hitch to occur in them to-day. Dubois might not be very active or energetic, but he *was* reliable. He never flew high or plunged deeply; he moved quietly and cautiously; but he finally "got there."

He could see the hull of the liner with whose engine-room mess steward he was to have a little "going-away palaver." He knew he could reach her side in twenty minutes, and he had been told at her agent's office that she would not sail until some four hours from then; but he was anxious to take himself away from this jabbering stream of preoccupied persons. He would feel more like himself in a small motor boat on the water, sizing up the lines of the steamer as he neared her. But hang it all! Dubois had said he would come, and he should be there with the goods!

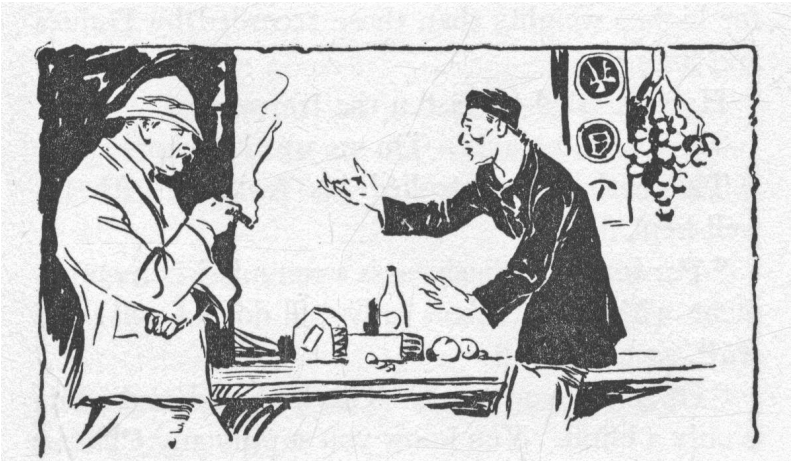
He set thirty minutes as the limit of his patience. Then he would begin to stir things up for himself. How could he get there most quickly? An automobile could cover the ground better in the central section of the city, but it could only crawl through the obstructing mass of native dwellers in the Chinese section. He would use a jinricksha there.

Hailing a taxi he bundled himself in, wrecking for all time the pretense of his fine clothes by drawing his fat legs back under him, thus producing scores of horizontal wrinkles across his stiff duck trousers, which he neglected to pull up to prevent bagging at the knees; and he rumpled the shoulders and front of his coat by hunching forward to urge the Filipino chauffeur to speed. He could not do more than prod him in the back with his hand, but he could reach the jinricksha runner with the toe of his shoe, so the chair bowled along at amazing rapidity, until it drew up at the dark little shop in Jasmine Street.

Hanson, the boatswain, a tyrant on a tramp steamer, might make men stand about by ranting and railing at them, but all his noise failed to impress

or to hurry the shriveled Chinese herb dealer who gazed serenely at his gestures, while still managing to keep careful watch of the wares displayed on his bench.

"Yes," he agreed, when Hanson had quieted somewhat. "Mr. Dubois is always dependable. He has never failed in years. What he promises, he does. As the cat follows the mouse, his actions follow his words."



"CUT OUT THE PROVERBS!"

"Cut out the proverbs!"

The venerable old man shrugged.

"Has the stuff arrived this morning?"

"No. That also is strange. Doubtless Mr. Dubois could not get the order to the warehouse early this morning. Never has it taken more than three hours for the runner to hand me the measure from which I prepare the smaller packages."

"Cutting out some for yourself, too, I'll bet."

"You weigh all that goes to you," the dealer reminded him truthfully. "There's nothing to say about worn-out scales."

This was a deep thrust, for once in such a discussion Hanson had admitted that he used scales with an old spring, from which he could make bills for higher weights than those recorded by Dubois and his agent.

Hanson tried to hasten the transaction.

"No more palaver. Do me up three boxes."

The herb seller stroked his features with his well-kept fingers.

“Pardon. My business is a commission arrangement with Mr. Dubois only. I do not sell—the stuff, as you call it.”

“Of course you sell it! This herb and seed affair is only a blind. You know you supply any Chinese who wants it. So come on, shell out!”

“Since you know my business so well, you should know that I do not sell.”

“Not to me, you mean.”

“What I should answer, I do not know. And what I know, I should not answer.”

“Curses on your fine speeches! There’s a ‘round-the-globe’ steamer out there sailing in four hours. Sell me the three cases; give me three hours to pack them in my room; and I’ll still get them on board an hour before she leaves. Four chances in the States:—Los Angeles, Colon, Panama, and New York. I can’t afford to miss this boat.”

“Interesting shipping news, but irrelevant.”

“I hope one of your big words chokes you!” stormed Hanson. “What I want to know is where I can find some of the stuff—or get hold of Dubois.”

The old man poured a rustling stream of dried watermelon seeds from a large sack into a tinted glass jar. Next he arranged a row of dried roots that looked disturbingly like little petrified monkeys.

Hanson—inwardly cursing the calm of the Chinese—cooled down. He lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper that could have been heard in the street had there been any one pausing at the open door to listen.

“If you won’t give me any of it, at least give me some information. Don’t try to look ignorant,” he advised as the protesting shopkeeper began to spread out his hands, palms up. “I know that when Dubois is going to meet me, he stays on in The Yellow Poppy after closing time before he comes here and then on to me. I know he sends the first order to the warehouse from there. I know—and here’s where you come in—that the only way to get into The Yellow Poppy is through that long corridor with the sharp turn in it that opens on a back street far away from the regular entrance. I know Dubois uses that corridor and has a key to it. I’ve been through it myself—in the dark. Now, all I want you to tell me is this:—just where is that entrance? I’ve got to find it quick! You don’t have to say anything now. I’ll do all the rest. All this I’m saying is right. You know that?”

"Quite right, as you yourself say."

"Where's the entrance to that corridor?"

The proprietor of the herb shop pointed.

"The fifth street over there parallel to this one. Walk along the left side, away from the water. Look for these four shops, side by side:—first, a narrow eating-place, open all night, not many customers in the daytime; next, a little pet store; third, a dealer in kites and fireworks; fourth, a carver's workshop, open to the street. Directly opposite this last is the door of the passage to The Yellow Poppy. It looks like the entrance to the large warehouse. But it isn't."

"Good for you! I remember the all-night eat shop, but not the other stores. You're a pretty good sort. May we do business together for a long time!"

"I repeat," the other began patiently, "that I deal only with Mr. Dubois on——"

"Aw, cut it!"

And Hanson was gone.

Thus, even if the shopkeeper had been disposed to impart any more information about the little-used entrance to The Yellow Poppy, Hanson's brusque departure prevented his adding anything definite. He emitted a noise which, translated from the Chinese, would be the chuckle of a man well pleased with himself, and resumed his work about the shop. For he had not told his burly visitor that when he had found the door immediately opposite the woodcarver's open shop he would be no closer to Dubois than that closed door. Above the woodcarver's shop a watcher would examine him as he stood there and knocked or turned the handle, and that watcher would make a sign to a man at an open window across the narrow way, an old man bent almost double above a low table at which he smeared flaming dragons on cheap paper lanterns. If the watcher approved of the visitor at the door below, the crooked old man would rise from his pots of brilliant colors and toddle off into the darkness beyond. He could move more swiftly than any one would believe; once out of sight he would scuttle along to an open court and there call down to a watchman of The Yellow Poppy to hurry along the corridor and take a look at the impatient man standing outside the entrance.

If the eye at the slit in the door decided that he should admit the caller, he could slip back the heavy bolts on the inside. Then, and then only, would

the key carried by the man outside be of any use to him. Unlocking the padlock, he might push the door open. If he had no key—only once in a blue moon did some person not employed by The Yellow Poppy or a privileged guest learn of this entrance and seek admittance there—the watchman inside might wiggle his thumb and forefinger through the barred slit at the woodcarver at his bench. Then that worthy would swiftly cross the narrow space and unlock the door.

It was the policy of The Yellow Poppy to have only one recognized and used entrance, but it was necessary, in order to preserve its calm appearance, that it have at least one other way in and out. There were more still and silent figures that passed out through this long corridor than there were living ones who passed in.

But Hanson, who, despite his long and frequent dealings with Dubois, was still an outsider, knew nothing of these precautions, nor could he have learned all of them from the owner of the herb and seed shop.

Some anger cools if it is restrained for a long time. Not so Hanson's rage. It simmered at first, then mounted in temperature, then boiled; and as he paced along the way it seemed that unless it could soon blow off steam it would produce a stroke of apoplexy. No raging bull could have been fiercer. Children scuttled from before him; old men gazed aghast and nodded in bewilderment at the Western nature which wastes upon its own reserve powers the energy which the quiet Oriental stores up to expend upon his foes.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE TOP OF THE STEPS

The silent men at the top of the few steps in the corridor knew that it was daylight outside. Below the bottom of the door was a horizontal line of yellow light turning to white; through the hairlike cracks in the thick timbers filtered a few rays that announced the sun.

Thomas felt that ages had rolled over his young head while he sat there trying not to squirm with discomfort or impatience. The others remained silent; being Orientals they remained speechless unless they had something worth saying. As for Dubois, he had lived among the Chinese so long and so intimately that he had absorbed and adopted most of their practices. Certainly he had nothing to say to these unmoved men whose motives he could not yet fathom. The crazy boy who had charged him with—he knew not what—may have hired them to attempt to kidnap him. He smiled to himself over the operation. They had not taken him very far away. Or there may have been some leak at the other end of Hanson's operations. This possibility, although it might inconvenience his plans, did not disturb Dubois at all. If this were the reason for their high-handed attack on him, they might just as well have spared themselves their trouble. Nothing could come of it.

Perhaps they thought they could draw Hanson into some kind of trap. Let them try it! Dubois did regret that he might be late at his meeting that morning on the quay, for this deal meant much to his savings, but he could judge the passage of time better than Thomas could. He knew the sun was not high. There remained ample time for going to the warehouse himself and finding Hanson.

But suppose they kept him here too long! He stirred uneasily at that thought, then lapsed into quietude again. Thomas had turned anxiously at the movement, then sank into his torturing wait again.

From beyond the heavy door came the occasional dull sound of passers-by, or the whirr of the primitive turning lathe of the woodcarver across the way, or the grinding of the wheels of a jinricksha. To occupy his mind, Thomas strained his ears to catch every faintest sound, and tried to picture the person who made it. In the cool of the morning, he knew that these sounds would be most frequent. As the sun rose, driving its concentrated rays down into these narrow ribbons of shadow between tall buildings, the

atmosphere would grow still and heavy with intense heat. Shops would close, their masters would retire to the cooler depths of their houses, riders and pedestrians would be fewer; the thin trickle of life would cease entirely, and the confirming silence of the brilliant midday would settle on everything.

Could he keep awake any longer? Did he dare drop asleep? Would he snore? In that midday quiet a snore, even a deep breath, would reëcho like rumbling thunder. Could he endure this much longer? How many hours might have to be passed in this manner? It was horribly stifling. It was much more painful than swimming under water, for then he was really doing something, moving his body. But here—nothing!

A couple of times Wan Tu put out his hand, touched Thomas, and motioned him to stretch his body, to stand up, to take one or two cautious steps to relieve the tension. When he did his muscles groaned, his bones creaked, his breath poured out like escaping steam, his footsteps boomed like sledge-hammer blows, but none of his movements attracted any attention from the others of the group.

Only Dubois took advantage of every movement any of the others made to change slightly his own position. As for the Malay and the brawny Chinese they seemed like idols in a stone temple.

Several noises outside occupied Thomas for a time; then they faded away in both directions. Next a jolting jinricksha passed. The woodworker pounded lustily at the handle of a chisel for a time, the blows sounding more solid as the edge of the tool sank into the hard wood. Somewhere a bird was singing a weird jungle song. Thomas had never realized before how interesting the ordinary noises of a street may be.

Then came the unmistakable sound of the heels and soles of thick leather shoes crunching on the stones.

“Some Westerner!” Thomas muttered, half aloud.

He saw Wan Tu shake his head from side to side, and he thought how wrong his guess might be. As always, Thomas reflected, Wan Tu was right. He passed quickly in review the kinds of Orientals he had seen sporting heavy leather shoes—“boots,” as the Britishers call them. A sampan steersman had found a cast-off pair in some rubbish and, having laced them with yellow rattan, stumbled about the frail after deck of his boat, to the envy of the other boatsmen. Filipino chauffeurs saved to buy them; Europeanized Chinese—especially the women who tottered over the

cobblestones at the risk of flattening their noses and bruising their bodies—creaked along in bright yellow shoes. Workmen would plod along the dusty roads barefoot; but they would unsling their shoes from across their shoulders and force them on for the sake of appearance when they came to town. Dutch planters from Java, half-breed overseers, slender Singhalese, high and low caste Hindus—in fact, any strangely dressed Easterner might add a stranger note to his costume by scraping along in thick-soled shoes.

This man was striding forcefully with a rapid, even gait. Louder and louder sounded the thuds of leather and nails on the stones and packed clay. Then they stopped altogether. He was, no doubt, turning his head this way and that to find some shop. He had it. He took a few steps more and stopped again. He must be opposite the door.

In the dim light of the entry, to which his eyes had become accustomed, Thomas could see the handle of the door turn slowly without making any noise. He could give a nod of approval to the care bestowed on every detail in The Yellow Poppy, but the next second his hair began to rise and his flesh to creep. In that silently turning handle, whose mover on the other side could not be guessed at; in the five pairs of staring eyes focused on that metal spot; in the danger that motion might foretell to them, or the struggle it might mean for the man outside—one against several; in the fear that this visitor might rouse the dwellers in The Yellow Poppy and draw a mob of attackers from the rear;—in all these there was an element so terrifying that Thomas quailed.

If they were rushed from behind, could they hold the men at bay? The space was narrow—an advantage for the small band—but they were at the top of the steps. Once pushed from that post they would go toppling head over heels to the bottom. That would end their resistance. Could they force their way through the door? Could they break it open? And what would they meet? A clear street, or a second mob of irate men?

Thomas glanced quickly at the others. Only Dubois seemed affected by the mysteriously turning handle. His eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets as he strained forward, but he made no sound. It might be Hanson, but the chances against that were as many as those for it. Dubois still believed that his captors would soon grow tired and would ask him to release them by escorting them back and out through the main entrance; and then he could rush off to perform his half of the morning's business transaction.

He hoped, if it were Hanson, that he would take himself off quietly. A row would spoil everything now and render risky all their deals in the future.

The caller had discovered that the door was locked. He pushed it. He pulled it. He rattled it. He knocked violently upon it. He was determined to get some kind of response to his demands for entrance. He wanted some news of Dubois. If the little Frenchman had tried to “double cross” him, he more than ever wanted to know where he was. Let him get his hands on him just once!

Wan Tu watched Dubois closely. When the latter, from the rough treatment the door was receiving, made up his mind it must be Hanson, the Chinese neatly placed the gag back into the captive’s mouth. Any cry that Dubois might have made, any order he might have given, any cry of warning he might have called was choked off in his throat.

Hanson paused at intervals in his pounding to listen for footsteps inside. But he heard nothing.

Across the street, the woodworker ceased tapping with his delicate carving chisel to observe the noisy man and then to remark to himself that he would not be asked to unlock the door for him. With the tail of his eye watching the broad back and bulging neck of the seaman, he resumed his intricate chipping.

Above him the watcher signaled across the way to the shriveled painter; the bent artist put down the gorgeous orange globe he was balancing on his knees, and waddled back into the shadows of the long narrow room. Leaning far out into the courtyard he called to the lounging watchman below, telling him especially of the noise the claimant for admittance was making. So skilfully planned and built was the rambling Yellow Poppy that no noise from the door had reached the main rooms.

Wan Tu, however, felt that some one must come along this corridor to silence the persistent pounder, if only to tell him he could not come in. There was just the slim chance that his noise would mark him as an undesirable and that the refusal would be called down from a window above his head. No campaigner would trust to so slender a possibility as that, and Wan Tu swiftly rearranged his small force.

A touch and gesture sufficed to draw the Malay away with him, while the burly Chinese followed. The first two, with catlike tread, vanished around the angle and moved on until they stood between it and the single door leading to the rooms of The Yellow Poppy. The Chinese posted himself

at the turn, where he could observe both outposts and hasten to the aid of either, as he might be needed.

About six feet from the door which they had closed behind them when they had entered the corridor, Wan Tu and the Malay took their stand, listening for any sound before them. The Malay gripped in his right hand the knife he had unsheathed at the beginning of their venture; now he stood with his left fist bulging inside the breast of his shirt, where, in a flat noose, a revolver hung. Wan Tu, who still felt that nothing they had done would necessarily produce violence—unless there were more confederates of Hanson inside The Yellow Poppy than he had been able to discover—did, however, grasp his own pistol tightly.

He might not yet be able to see how his little band was to make its way from the walls of the building to the open air, but he was counting on two things dear to the Oriental owners of this place and to the servants who carried their orders into effect. They wanted no noises, no brawls, no suicides, no murders, no visits by the police, no crimes to call the officers into their establishment. “Hush fights up” and “keep everybody quiet” but “get all the money we can from them” were the three principal rules of its operation—rules carried out at any cost.

While Dubois might be one of their best and trusted employees, he was, after all, an outsider, a foreigner. He was good at his work, to be sure. But if he became known as the center of a plot that attracted noisy disturbers; if his outside deals brought infamous notice upon his nightly routine of work; then his overseers and employers would cast him off as indifferently as they threw away their worn-out sandals.

There might be trouble—if Dubois insisted on making trouble—in getting him away; a plausible story told to the few occupants of the quarters in the daytime would insure easy and successful departure. What should that story be? So far Wan Tu, rack his brain as he would, had not hit upon one that satisfied him.

“Too improbable,” was his unspoken judgment, as he reviewed and dismissed the long series.

The one thought that kept his expectations at a hopeful pitch was that he was not a police officer, and therefore he would not be regarded with extra suspicion.

Accustomed as he and the Malay were to the exercise of patience in critical situations, both of them thought it was an eon before the noisy

rattling and knocking of Hanson produced any sound beyond the door they watched with so much expectancy.

Finally the sound of four pattering feet neared it. There was a pause; then the squeak of unlocking; and a flood of blinding electric light dazzled the eyes of the two waiting sentries. Two huge watchmen almost filled the doorway and peered into the corridor before entering to go to the outer door. Their bodies had swung past the door frame before they caught sight of the two men on guard. They paused and the four stood perfectly still.

Should Wan Tu and the Malay rush them, or should they fall back gradually until their Chinese companion at the turn could reënforce them? In either case, what of Thomas and Dubois?

The solitary sentry at the turn had divided his glances between Wan Tu and Dubois until the glare of the electric light had held his eyes upon the open door and the men from The Yellow Poppy about to step through it. With his attachment to Wan Tu, it was but natural that the boy and the man behind him should hold a secondary place in his attention. Nothing could reach them, anyhow, but before him were two attackers who might at any moment rush at his chief.

Hanson had grown quiet. He was leaning against the door, trying to catch the first sound inside that would let him know that some one was hurrying to open it for him.

Thomas had turned his eyes like a mechanical figure from his father's face to the door. It was, therefore, Dubois who saw the slight change of light at the corner of the corridor when the watchmen appeared.

Then the silence was broken again.

Before Thomas could rise from his post on the step below Dubois, the latter had sprung erect and had jumped back about six feet. To Thomas's horror, he saw that the wily captive had been able to free one hand. He tore the silk handkerchief from his mouth and began to call, first for help, then to reassure Hanson that he was still alive and well. From his left wrist he shook the last coils of the thin rope from which he had been able to twist his hands free.

"Hanson!" he yelled at the door. "Stay there! I'm all right now. I'll let you in. Don't go away."

In his desire to call for help from inside he kicked viciously against the wall. All the while he kept his eyes glued on the boy, who, left to guard him, was now on his feet, plainly wondering what to do next.

Thomas felt only one passionate desire. He must silence that kicking and pounding and stop those cries. Most terrible of all was the defiance expressed by the words to Hanson. Loyalty that might be, but what a frightful use of a worthy trait. All Thomas's instinct revolted at what he heard.

The space between the two men narrowed, and they sprang at each other at the same instant. Thomas tried to cover the other's mouth, or shut off his breath, while Dubois had seized Thomas's body in an endeavor to throw him down the steps. As they struggled, the boy could feel the other weakening. The man was no match in strength for the boy. He realized it himself, and began again to shout encouragement to the listening Hanson outside.

"Hanson! Hang on! There's a lot of time after I finish in here."

From the stretch beyond the turn came excited exclamations and cries, then the sound of running feet. The guards of The Yellow Poppy must be pouring into the corridor. The yelling Dubois must be silenced.

Across Thomas's mind there sped his early training in bringing in an exhausted swimmer. He had been warned that a drowning man would seize him in a death grip around the neck.

"Knock him unconscious," the sailor instructing him had directed.

"Where shall I hit him?" Thomas had asked, for he remembered having seen a woman in the water cling to a policeman with both arms locked so tightly around his neck that she was strangling him. The officer, by jerking his head back, had struck her sharply on the point of her chin. She had gone limp at once, and her rescuer was able to tow her safely to a wharf, where she was revived and seemed none the worse for either her wetting or his blow.

The sailor had admitted that the chin was a good place to aim for, but he had said that a better place was just behind the ear. Thomas had seen many men put out of fights by blows in that place; in fact, in the greatest adventure of his own early years, he had seen Bill Johnson overcome the bully, "Spider" Higgins, by placing a blow behind the ear.

The enraged Dubois knew nothing of how to protect himself. Thwarted in his first mad impulse to topple Thomas down the steps, he had expended his strength in twisting and turning and in calling to Hanson.

Spurred on by the two desires of appearing dependable to Wan Tu and of preventing Dubois from meeting Hanson, Thomas shook off the hands that clawed at him. Abandoning the attempt to close Dubois's mouth, he pushed

him back and drew his own body clear of him. Meeting the wall with a soft thud, Dubois raised one foot behind him and gave it a resounding kick that echoed like a hammer blow and, at the same time, propelled him forward toward the waiting Thomas.

The light was bad, and Thomas had hardly enough room behind him, but he grew perfectly calm in the short instant during which he awaited the onrushing body. His left fist made only a half swing, but it landed with terrific force squarely behind Dubois's right ear. The latter's head jerked sideways, then backwards. His open mouth uttered three syllables that sounded to Thomas like, "The Johnson——"

HIS LEFT FIST LANDED WITH TERRIFIC FORCE.

But he could never be certain that he heard them properly. They may just as well have been "The Hanson," for all that Thomas could swear.

Dubois swayed for a second on his unsteady legs, but before Thomas, who had drawn back to see if another blow would be needed, could catch him, he had dropped into a soft bundle at his feet, and then went rolling down the few steps until he brought up short with a sickening crack of his skull against the flooring near the door.

Petrified with terror, Thomas could do nothing but stand at the top of the steps staring at the still figure curved on the boards below him.

Hanson had listened with delight to the words of Dubois. They'd show them! He heard the scuffle; he could follow the blows; he knew when a

good one had landed. He heard the crack of a fist landing behind the ear, the thud of the collapsed body, the sliding and rolling down the steps, the smash of the skull at the bottom. He waited for a reassuring shout from Dubois.

In the silence that followed he moved hastily away.

CHAPTER XX

WHO IS WAN TU?

When the electric light streamed through the opened door down into the corridor, showing the peering watchmen of The Yellow Poppy and Wan Tu and the Malay, the Chinese guard at the corner of the passage thought that he had better move along to lend support to his chief. Just then the yells of Dubois and the noise of the scuffle with Thomas reached his ears. He stopped in his advance and called to Wan Tu a report, which, translated, would be:

"Man, boy fight."

He regained his post at the corner in time to see Thomas free himself from the grip of Dubois. Although he could not understand what Dubois was yelling, he realized that the noise must be silenced. But before he started to Thomas's assistance, he could make a second report to Wan Tu. This time he said:

"Bully for boy! He knock man down steps!"

He found Thomas crouched above Dubois at the bottom of the steps, listening to his heartbeats, feeling his temple, and chafing his hands. Thomas had no fear that his own blow had done any damage, but he was terrified when he thought of that terrific crack his father's head had received against the flooring. Making signs to the Chinese, Thomas had Dubois lifted, slung across the man's strong shoulders, and borne along the corridor.

Let any one in The Yellow Poppy try to stop him now, if any one should dare!

Before he and his companion appeared to the view of the expectant quartet, Wan Tu had told the employees that their croupier must have had an accident. He would have to be taken away.

"So much the better," one of them had replied.

"You tell the chief, then, that I'll be responsible that he makes no trouble for The Yellow Poppy," Wan Tu added.

"Sure thing! No trouble wanted here."

One of them added, "Get 'ricksha?" At Wan Tu's nod he ran through the rooms and down the entry to the street to hail one.

Thomas addressed the remaining watchman.

“Tell them to get another man in his place for to-night and all other nights,” he directed.

The native shrugged his shoulders to show that he did not understand.

Wan Tu translated Thomas’s remark.

That certainly would be done, the other explained, for “business must go on as usual.”

At the street, where two jinrickshas were waiting, Thomas expected to find a crowd of pushing neighbors, eager to learn what the excitement was. He was disappointed—though he was hardly aware of it—at the lack of curiosity displayed in the departure of the attacking party to which he belonged.

A few pedestrians glanced at the helpless man being stowed away in a chair by an elderly Chinese, hired, no doubt, to take him home whenever he got himself into such scrapes. When they heard Wan Tu’s hotel address given, they passed on their ways wagging their heads in puzzlement at the antics of these “foreign devils.” A few loitering men stared until the group got under way, but their remarks were few and low.

The chair bearing Wan Tu and Dubois, followed by the one in which Thomas sat, was trundled down the street. The bulky Chinaman and the Malay walked off together. Then from the opposite curb the bespectacled dealer in herbs, the dusty woodcarver, and the smeared old decorator of paper lanterns gave their pajama trousers a hitch, sputtered a few words to one another, and slowly sauntered back to their several occupations, relieved that at least there were no dead bodies carried out.

On Wan Tu’s bed Dubois lay like an enchanted figure, only the slightest heartbeat indicating that he was alive.

The young round-faced British doctor from the hospital—Horace Wilcox, his card read—dropped his long-worded professional manner when he talked to the suffering Thomas.

“Don’t look so worried, my boy,” he cried pleasantly. “This is a mere nothing. Many a man his age gets a crack on the head as severe as this. So buck up!”

“Yes, but I hit him,” said Thomas, accusing himself of cruelty.

“You had to. Only thing to do. He’ll never know who did it. And he’ll not hold it against you when you tell him—if you ever do.”

Then he resumed his professional air.

“Tell me again what he called out after you struck him.”

“I’m not sure, but I think it was going to be something about ‘Johnson.’ I can’t be certain, you see, because”—Thomas sought for a way of expressing himself without revealing anything about his father that he would rather have concealed—“because he might use another name that sounds like Johnson.”

“Exactly. You’re right. Only let me ask you to be careful of one thing.”

“Anything!”

“Your father may not remember much about these events here in Singapore—may not recall anything really. I’m told it was a blow of some kind that wiped out other years of his life.”

“Sounds like magnesia.” Thomas was glad to display his knowledge. “Wait a second—I have it. Amnesia!”

“Splendid!” Dr. Wilcox praised him. “Ever hear of an airplane ride being used to restore a person’s speech?”

“Of course I have.” Thomas had read in the newspapers of these astonishing cures. “They take a child who has lost its speech through some disease, high up in a plane; then they loop the loop, or drop a thousand feet, ending with a sudden upward swoop; and often his speech is brought back by the shock.”

“We use it out here quite often after fevers and accidents.”

“Does it work every time?”

“Not always. That’s why you mustn’t expect anything in your father’s case. Only don’t be surprised at anything that may happen.”

He delivered this last so seriously that all Thomas’s hopes, raised to the highest pitch by the remarks about the airplane cures, were dashed to the ground and shattered as terribly as is a plane itself when its pilot loses control and crashes to his death.

“You mean——” he faltered.

“He may not remember anything. Still, in that case, you can teach him to know you and his old surroundings. But I’m letting you know this only that

your hopes may not soar too high. I don't expect he'll be as bad as that. He has too much in his favor—excellent constitution, a long outdoor life, steady habits, and no worries during all his time here, so far as we know. But his mind, remember, may take longer to heal than his body."

"Shall I take him home?"

"Long sea voyage? Best thing he could have."

"But I hope——" began Thomas.

"So do all of us. Now get all the refreshing sleep you can yourself. No more night hours for you in gambling houses! And keep yourself in the best condition you can. You may have to supply strength for two. See you later. Cheerio!"

Thomas wondered how so manly a fellow could use such a silly expression instead of the sensible "so-long" when he took his departure, but he put Dr. Wilcox down as a "good sport, anyhow."

Late that day the patient went through a distressing period. He tossed and tumbled about the bed, struggling with both mental and physical anguish. In his mild delirium came shouts and exclamations, long rambling speeches and single words, sailors' yarns, names of ships and ports and mates, commands, curses, descriptions of storms, threats, snatches of foreign languages, and, at last, a struggle with the pillows that sent them flying about the room; then came utter exhaustion, broken

THE PATIENT WENT THROUGH A DISTRESSING PERIOD.

by twitchings of all parts of his body; then a deep sleep that Thomas at first thought was death.

Through it all Wan Tu had listened and noted everything, restraining Thomas from doing anything that might interrupt the succession of feelings sweeping over the weakened man. In the calm of the deep sleep, the first thing the experienced man of the world pointed out to the suffering boy was that no remark of his father in this spasm of delirium had come from his life in Singapore or from his work at The Yellow Poppy.

"You think he has forgotten all that?"

"At this present time, certainty. You've just seen for yourself."

"But after this?" Thomas expressed his appalling fear.

"We can't predict what may come after this. Dr. Wilcox told you that. But every sign so far is a good one, don't you think?"

"What do I know of such things?" wailed Thomas.

The two lapsed into silence, and Wan Tu picked up a French scientific magazine. Thomas tried to become absorbed in the pictures of the *Illustrated London News*, but he found himself lifting his eyes above the picture pages to gaze at the amazing man sitting on the other side of the table. Recovering himself with a jerk, he would turn a page and try to see the figures in a picture of the thousands at the Goodwood races, where the "Prince of Wales appeared in the regulation tall gray hat." It was no use; he might just as well put the paper aside, though he knew that he should not look so fixedly at his companion.

He noticed that Wan Tu still wore the crude dark clothes he had put on under his beautiful outer robe of the night before. He had prepared himself for any possible rough work that might have been forced upon him and his companions in taking Dubois from The Yellow Poppy. That costume should be worn by a laboring coolie rather than by the traveled Wan Tu.

Thomas flushed, for Wan Tu raised his eyes from his reading and met his direct gaze.

"Well," he asked pleasantly, "what are you thinking about me?"

His slight hesitation saved Thomas from answering, for a discreet knock at the outer door was followed by the appearance of the chief house-boy, who, proud of his English, whispered:

"Mr. Wan—telephone—down below."

“Good news!” announced Wan Tu when he returned five minutes later. “Hanson has left Singapore.”

Thomas jumped with joy.

“Where’s he gone?”

“Not sure, yet. We think to Shanghai or some port between here and there. Likely then on to the States.”

Thomas’s first reaction of delight at the man’s departure cooled somewhat. Wan Tu quickly noticed it.

“What’s the matter? You don’t look so pleased.”

“If I’m going to take my father home, it might be better if Hanson stayed in Asia. I never want to see him again!”

“Oh, yes you do!”

Thomas stared up unbelievingly at this contradiction.

“Haven’t you something to tell him?”

The boy still did not understand.

“Tell him something? I should say not.”

“Don’t you want the pleasure of telling him straight in the teeth that it was you who sent him sailing so gracefully into the river?”

Thomas broke into a broad grin.

“That would be a pleasure,” he admitted.

“Stranger things than that may happen. Anything’s possible.”

When he resumed his seat, Wan Tu did not take up at once the paper he had laid aside.

“Just before I left the room,” he began invitingly, “you looked as though you wanted to say something to me.”

He waited.

“There’s nothing sure about it,” Thomas began gropingly, “and it’s likely all rot. But I have a sneaking sensation that I’ve seen you somewhere before.”

“What makes you think so? You’ve seen me often enough here in Singapore.”

“But always in different clothes that didn’t remind me of some one. Now, to-day, in those rough-looking togs—it’s only an impression, of course, but it bothers me every once in a while.”

“Feel it any stronger?”

Thomas shook his head.

“It just floats before my eyes, then slips away. I’m bound I’ll get it some time, unless you say it’s impossible. Only just a second ago, you said yourself that anything’s possible.”

“Do you think I could help you?”

“I wish you could. I’d like to settle it.”

“Just a second.”

Wan Tu vanished behind the open door of his wardrobe closet and made a few swishing sounds, as if changing his coat. When he reappeared he wore a spotted, greasy jacket that had once been white, but that had seen too much hard usage to lay any claim to its original spotlessness. Its sides were rumpled up by his hands, plunged deep in his trouser pockets; its neck flapped open, displaying a darkened chest. The formerly immaculate, erect Chinese gentleman sidled across the floor with a slouching, rolling gait towards the waiting and wondering youth.

Thomas sprang to his feet and stood spellbound until the common-looking laboring man pretended to spit.

“Not Sing Ho!” he cried.

The shambling figure resumed its dignified aspect.

“The same, at your service—at times.”

“Not the silent old son-of-a-sea-cook on the *Portlander*?”

“Why not, if business demands it? And not a bad cook at that, if I do say it myself.”

“And I never guessed it!”

“You would have worked it out for yourself. You were uneasy about me. You seem to be much more comfortable with the cook than with the gentleman.”

“But why were you willing to help me get even with Hanson?”

“The fracas drew all the seamen out of the forecastle, and I needed just three minutes alone with Hanson’s effects.”

“Then I really was helping you.”

“Undoubtedly. I hope you know I’m grateful to you. Even if you do tell me that all Chinamen look alike to you.”

CHAPTER XXI

A BOATSWAIN TO WATCH

For Dubois the days passed in a long succession of quiet impressions, all of which were too strange for his comprehension. Most of all, it was difficult for him to understand who and what the young Thomas might be. With an unreasoning trust he accepted as quite natural the visits of the doctor, the presence of the Chinese Wan Tu about the room, the periodic appearances of the Malay jinricksha runner, and the native hotel attendants; but he would gaze anew at his unknown son and ask how he got there and what he was intending to do. Not for an instant could he believe that this strapping young man was the baby he remembered last as toddling about the Johnson boarding-house, far away in the States.

"If you say you're my son, Thomas," he had remarked, "I'll have to listen to you, I suppose. But I just can't believe it."

And with that sufferance, Thomas had to be—for the time—content.

The most hopeful indication of his father's mental change was afforded by his total lack of any clear recollection about his work at The Yellow Poppy. The few shreds of memory that he still retained brought back to him some of the experiences he had gone through at various times in widely separated places where, like all seamen, he had tempted fortune by staking his pay. Never for a second did he recall that for years he had been regularly working at a gambling table.

When he told his story to Wan Tu and the doctor, with Thomas overhearing from beyond the open door, he dwelt longest on the fight on the tramp steamer, the fight he thought had put him in the hospital for years and years, and from which he had only lately been discharged because he was cured, and because there had appeared from out of the distant States a young fellow who called himself his son and who was ready and seemed anxious to carry his weak old father back home with him.

"But he may turn out not to be my son, after all. I know seagoing folk are the victims of all kinds of bunco games. Only that youngster had better not try any little game on me."

"I'll answer for him," Wan Tu offered.

"So shall I," added the doctor.

“Who’ll answer for you two?” And Dubois squinted his eyes at them in an attempt to show that he might be weak for the time, but that he had all his wits about him.

The doctor had advised Thomas not to let his feelings get the better of him. He must not try to force matters.

“Just let your father get accustomed to having you about, and he’ll learn to accept you. Then, as his mind grasps the length of time that has elapsed, he’ll understand after a while why you’re not an infant in arms.”

“Won’t the long sea trip make him depend on me?”

“It surely will. So will his strangeness when you get him home.”

“How soon may we start?”

“Almost any day.”

“I think Mr. Wan Tu wants to get away. I’d hate to feel that I am keeping him.”

The doctor pondered for a time.

“He does want to be on the move. His work in other quarters, I suppose. If we don’t speak to him, he’ll be speaking to us.”

“Let’s do it first,” suggested Thomas.

They did.

Wan Tu did not hide from them the fact that he must be leaving soon. Thomas felt certain that some pursuit or shadowing of Hanson and his confederates was still Wan Tu’s main concern. It required an effort for Thomas to turn his attention to that part of his experiences, absorbed as he was in details of sailing home with his half-invalid father.

“You mean I go home as passenger?” asked Dubois incredulously, when a council around his bed discussed plans. “Three cheers for that! The wild ambition of every sailor—to travel first class on a swell liner. I won’t know how to behave, but oh, how I’ll enjoy it!”

“Think how you can help me learn about designing boats, with all your knowledge,” Thomas broke out enthusiastically.

The flame in Dubois’s eyes died out.

“You want to make me complete your education,” he began. Then he noticed the woebegone expression on the boy’s face, and he added half

humorously: “Father’s duty, I suppose. Oh, well, I’ll tell you all I know about boats in the first couple of days. Then you let me enjoy myself.”

“I’d like to see anybody stop a sailor from showing off his knowledge on a steamer,” said Wan Tu. “But before you make your arrangements, there is one business matter you must attend to here.”

Dubois grew serious and puzzled. Such things annoyed him. It was so much more pleasant just to let things drift their own way without trying to make them happen.

“What’s this?” he asked sharply.

“If you go away,” Wan Tu explained patiently, “you ought to have some one here to look after your affairs.”

“Let Thomas stay,” came quick as a flash; “he likes to do things for me.”

They never were sure whether these sharp retorts were meant seriously or whether they came from the invalid’s peculiar sense of humor. They had adopted a practice of laughing them aside, and they did that now—all except Thomas, who winced painfully.

“Thomas has to go back. He can’t loiter in what he calls ‘outlandish quarters of the globe,’ ” observed Dr. Wilcox. “No, you can’t escape him, Dubois. You’re going home with a male nurse, so lump it if you don’t like it.”

“There’s no need to hector me like a Dutch bo’s’n,” the sick man protested.

“Then you take your orders lying down,” the peppery physician advised him.

“What’s the business?” the beaten Dubois asked in sign of submission.

“You must give a couple of persons here power of attorney, to act for you in anything that may come up,” Wan Tu informed him.

“What can come up about me?” Dubois was defiant again. “Back pay? If I’ve been in the hospital long enough for that clipper,” nodding to Thomas, “to grow out of my little sloop, my back pay is all used up. Damages? How could I collect anything now? Outlawed by time, all of it.”

His brain was working better than usual to-day and everything he said was weighty.

"That's not all there is to think about," Wan Tu went about on another tack. "When it's known that you're—better, how about claims against you? Even doctors," he winked at Wilcox, "may try to look you up. Then, sea chests and clothes and papers have an odd way of turning up at inconvenient—or convenient—times, and you, 'way off there in the States, may be glad of somebody over here to speak up for you when the need comes."

"Cost anything?" Dubois had a thrifty thought.

"Not unless we have an unexpected fortune to settle," laughed Wilcox.

"It may be the sensible thing to do, after all."

They seized upon that grudging permission and had the papers drawn immediately. Like all sailors, having assented to doing it, Dubois wanted it made trebly secure; so, not content with one person to serve as his representative, he insisted on three. It was a strange sight—after his active resistance—to see him admonishing his three agents, seated respectfully beside his bed. To all his long list of cautions and suggestions, Manchester, the clerk at the Seaman's Rest, listened attentively because he was really impressed, and Inspector Allmayer because he wished to humor an ailing man; but Dr. Wilcox squirmed and fidgeted as long as he could stand it. Jumping to his feet he broke off the long rigmarole pouring like a ship yarn from the self-satisfied Dubois.

"I'll have to take charge of my patient," he announced. "This is enough excitement for one day. Off with you, gentlemen. I never heard a sick man rattle on so ceaselessly. Thomas, you have all my sympathy if on board ship your father once begins to tell you all he knows about boats. Whew!"

The doctor's device for ending the discussion was more a measure of self-protection than care for Dubois. The patient thrived on bustle and excitement. Although he was not aware of it, his mind's return to the active life of his earlier voyages had emphasized all the differences between physical effort and the monotonous calm of his long period of quiet work in Singapore. Had there been a war going on, he would have tried to enlist. Talk about the various ships going home, whether one ship all the way or several in short stages would be better, in which direction they should go (Thomas was anxious to sail eastward and thus make the circuit of the globe), how much clothing should be bought for Dubois, whether they should buy trunks or several small suitcases and valises, whether higher-priced staterooms were worth the more money, where they should have their deck chairs, where they should sit in the dining saloon—all these matters brought animation to him. The stimulation was not a bad thing, for the

energy he expended on these long conversations made him tired enough to sleep and eat well.

To Thomas the real thrills came from poring over the plans of the great ships in order to weigh the merits of the locations of the staterooms offered them by the agents. He found himself as much engrossed in structural features as in sleeping quarters. Where were the reënforcing beams of steel? Why was there no porthole there? There must be a joint in the plates. Why not a linen closet in that corner? Why so much empty space amidships? Finally Wan Tu urged him to carry all the plans with him for study on the trip.

"And you can argue about everything, not only with your father but with every member of the ship's crew. The engine-room staff especially will agree with all the faults you find in the boat's design. I've never found an engineer yet who was satisfied with a liner."

Then, after all their noisy talking, it was very likely Wan Tu—though Thomas came to believe this only a day before they actually sailed—who determined their choice of route and steamship. These two had a serious but short conversation, followed by a rambling walk about the sailors' section of the city, in which Wan Tu scrutinized closely several men, quietly pointing them out to Thomas and commenting on what they might be like, where they were shipping to next, and some facts about their latest voyages. It was not mere chance that let them be met by the Malay jinricksha runner as they emerged from this section of the town. Wan Tu hailed him and received a report as he climbed into the seat.

"The man we thought likely has signed on your boat," Wan Tu told Thomas. "We'll go aboard as soon as we can, so I'll be able to point him out to you before you sail. Keep your eyes open at all times, but especially as you enter the harbor at the end of the voyage. I may be able to get a word to the captain, but I'll give you the two slips of paper I promised you. Till tomorrow."

As Thomas sauntered back to his father's room, he could not help feeling a little "let down," a little saddened by the realization that it was all over. The adventure was finished, his trip had been successful, and with that successful conclusion came a sense of emptiness not yet filled by the bustle of the departure or the long delights of ship life.

Should he ever see Wan Tu again? For the first time he realized that he did not know what that much-traveled person intended to do. Was he likely to turn up in the States or likely to dive into the underworld of the Chinese

sea coast? Well, whatever might be the next stage of the trip around the world, Thomas could always draw boats, and so have a mass of sketches for his work later.

Both present and anticipated pleasure ran high in Thomas and his father on the next day when they rode out to join the liner that looked like a tiny yacht from the water-front and then, as they neared her, began to swell until she towered above their little craft like a skyscraper. Not for them the crowded public tender, bobbing slowly out with its confusion of baggage, passengers, and farewell friends. As soon as they could go aboard they rode out in the same purring launch that had found Thomas swimming on his back under the night mist. They were the first passengers to mount the ship's landing stairs.

The bustle of making ready for sea was still going on, a minor officer reminded them, lest they resent the ropes, the hoses, the moisture, and the seamen crawling about.

"Doesn't annoy us at all," replied Wan Tu. "Besides, I'm not going with you."

"We like it all the better," Thomas explained for his father and himself, drawing himself up proudly. "We're ship's people."

The liner was not very new, not very fast, and not at all luxurious, but to Thomas she seemed like the last word in comfort. To Dubois she appeared to have nothing except "dude quarters," but he said that he guessed he could sleep in them.

"Two hours before sailing," said Thomas. "You just tuck yourself in and sleep now. I'll call you half an hour before we go, so you'll have all the excitement of waving good-by to Singapore. You'll live on this boat for weeks, so you needn't see all of her in the first hour."

"You'll be sure to wake me?"

"Cross my heart."

Wan Tu and Thomas strolled until they found the watch fastening down the forward hatches. Thomas's eyes questioned the Chinese.

"The bo's'n," the latter said simply.

Thomas looked the man over carefully. He was slender, but quick and wiry. He spoke to his men quietly, and though the tone of voice might make them believe that they could approach him familiarly, there was a cold reserve about his manner that held them off. Thomas wondered if he ever

laughed heartily, and decided that he did not. It would be easy to mark what he did on board; there would be no chance of mistaking him at a distance or in a dim light.

"Especially when you're going up the harbor," Wan Tu repeated. "You may have to miss seeing the famous sky-line."

"I grew up with it," Thomas replied. "I can see it any day from a common ferry-boat."

"You'll have those two slips of paper where you can get at them quickly?"

"They'll be on me those last few days."

"Keep them on you always. Just remember, as we're looking him over, some one may be looking you over."

Thomas nodded.

"I'll not forget that," he promised.

He swept his eyes around over the busy roadway.

"By the way," he began, "are you staying on here?"

For answer, Wan Tu pointed to a steamer entering the narrow straits. At sight of her graceful lines, her jauntiness, her spotless luxuriousness, Thomas uttered a cry of delight. She was as beautiful as a private yacht.

"On that?" he exclaimed.

"She stays until midnight to let her through passengers have twelve hours ashore and stretch their legs to-night in dances at the boat clubs and hotels. Even at that I'll pass you before you have your breakfast to-morrow."

"She's going——?"

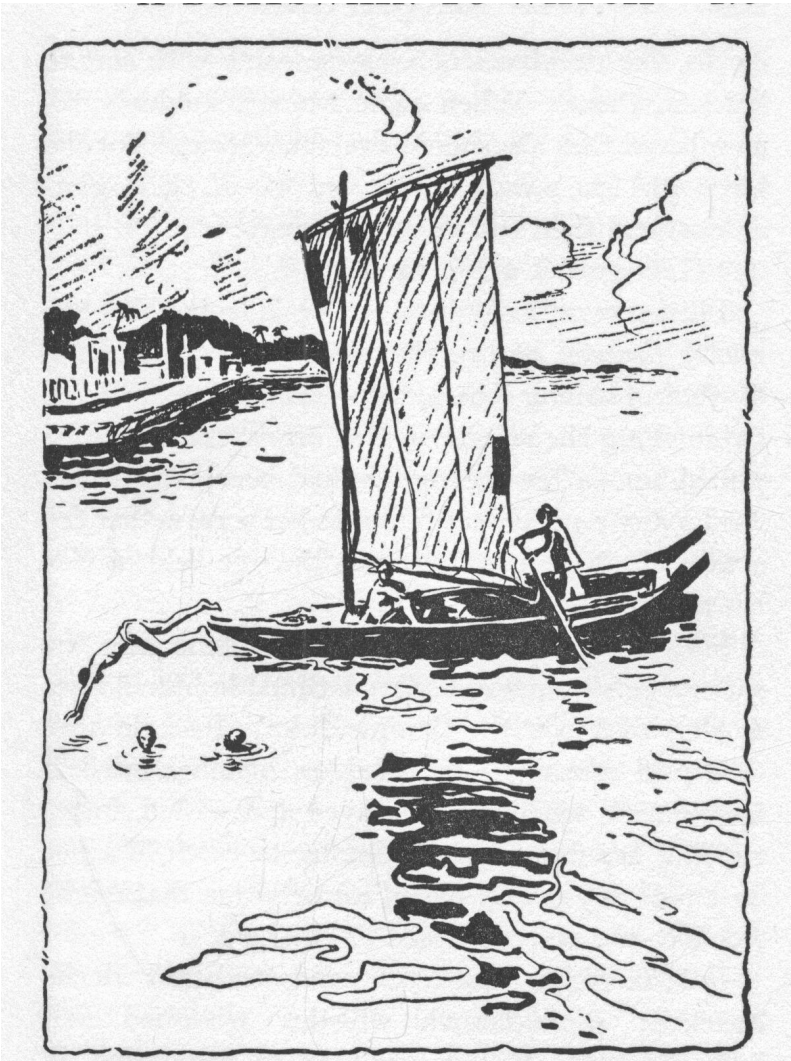
"I'm going to Kobe—Yokohama—on her."

The first packed tender bumped alongside, and for the next hour there was pandemonium, from which Wan Tu escaped in his smart launch as soon as he could.

It was impossible to tell which of the bustling crowd were to be ship's passengers and which were the enthusiastic friends who stay until just before the boat starts in an endeavor to get out of their systems all the last messages they should have delivered during the preceding twenty-four hours. As the boat became more shipshape, the real travelers became more

and more nervous lest their friends be left on board; the resounding gong and the polite request of the cabin-boys of different nationalities, “All visitors off the ship, please,” produced little effect. After most of the calling, waving crowds had been gently pushed to the railing, down the stairs, and into their boats, they still persisted in darting in close again to receive a last word or to shout up a last piece of advice.

Native souvenir dealers called their wares and held them up as final enticements. There were the imitation ivory and jade, the carved teakwood ornaments and toys, the “genuine” malacca canes, the brushes of brilliant plumage (which fade to drab chicken feathers in a few weeks), the imitation opium pipes, the little bone jinrickshas (which fall apart in damp weather), the brilliant batik-dyed



SLIM BROWN BOYS DIVED FOR COINS.

cloths, the necklaces of Chinese coins with square holes in them. When some woman suddenly remembered that she should have another gift for the hired girl she would decide on one of these gimcracks, and then call down piteously:

"How shall I get it up here?"

Then several lookers-on would show her that the crafty dealers, before they had been driven back to their bobbing boats, had left several coils of twine along the railing so that any article could be pulled up—after the

money had been sent down. And many a purchaser found to her sorrow that the article she bore away was not the one held up for her acceptance.

Slim brown boys dived for coins flung into the water, their beautiful bodies outlined in blue flashes as they overtook the shining disks. In a flatboat three old musicians twanged on whining musical instruments while a girl swayed and wailed, interrupting her dancing and singing to catch in a net on a pole any poorly aimed contribution that might fall into the water instead of the boat.

Pet monkeys chattered and tethered ducks quacked; steam-launch whistles screamed and bells clanged; British orders were answered in Malay protests; pidgin English explained American slang; trunks banged and suitcases slid along the decks; chains creaked over engine drums and ropes whined through pulleys; seamen heaved on hawsers as they chanted to time their pulls; the deep whistle shook the whole boat; and slowly and noisily the huge anchor chain clanked upwards. The liner swung lazily around in the channel. On the bridge the signals were set for the engine room; the propellers began to revolve slowly, churning the deep blue water into a white lather. Every boat with any noise-making device aboard worked it to its limit. Almost imperceptibly the great hulk began to slip through the water and the long voyage home was begun.

Thomas and Dubois, with no last-minute farewells, had been absorbed in every detail of the departure. As the boat gained its full speed—so powerful, yet so graceful—Thomas drew a deep breath of delight. Then, as he felt his father's eyes fixed upon him, he flushed at his display of pleasurable emotion.

"You love boats?" Dubois asked, and Thomas was conscious that the older man used the word "love" in a perfectly natural manner, though Thomas would have avoided so strong a term.

"I certainly do," he replied happily.

"Well, then," Dubois went on, "because of that, I adopt you as my son—for this voyage, at least!"

But the emotion which surged over Thomas was too great to make it safe for him to answer at all.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BOX GOES OVERBOARD

Thomas never learned the boatswain's name. The other one was called angrily or familiarly—as the seamen's moods changed—by a dozen disagreeable or friendly nicknames, but the small, quiet officer was always simply "The Bo's'n." He never opened himself to any of his companions; he never yarned with the engine-room workers when they came up for air from the heated quarters below; he never carried on chats with questioning passengers; all the curiosity and knowledge of Dubois and Thomas about boats never won from him anything more than the shortest exact answer to any of their questions. When they made statements to him, a mere shake of the head was all the reply they evoked.

On Dubois, wise in the peculiarities of men who follow the sea, this silent streak made no impression; but to Thomas—intent on the man because of Wan Tu's directions and, unlike Dubois, informed about him—this isolation was an indication of more than personal queerness. It showed to the inexperienced youth that the man needed watching.

There was still some awkwardness between father and son, but Dubois was really trying to accept the strange boy as the grown-up version of his helpless infant, and Thomas was expecting less demonstration from the shaken and wracked parent. By easy and natural stages they were being brought together in the close relationships that weeks of ship life necessitate. Calm weather and gusty weather, flat seas and heaving ones, thunderstorms and moonlight, torrents of rain and blankets of fog, passing ships to look at and long stretches of monotonous ocean, attractive new passengers and dull old bores, fascinating romantic ports and smelly marsh flats at low tide—all these succeeded one another through the weeks, until the stiff cooler breezes and the long powerful surges of the North Atlantic stirred all the ship's company into the animated bustle of preparing to land.

Dubois, now almost entirely well and normal except for long hours of dull relaxation, was the only person on board who was not eager to set foot on land once more. He recognized—and this was an excellent symptom—this reluctance in himself and could discuss it coolly and clearly with Thomas.

“It means I’ve got to adjust myself again to an entirely new life,” he summed it up.

All that Thomas could think of in reply was:

“It won’t be any harder than it used to be when you shipped on a new boat.”

His father always reduced that comfort by retorting:

“But there I always had to work hard with the men I was living with. Now, give me work to keep me busy and it won’t take long.”

To that Thomas had no satisfactory answer.

His own excitement as they neared New York was difficult to control. While he yearned in every nerve to be with the other passengers, chest pressed against the railing of the forward deck to catch the first glance of the lighthouses or the hazy line that might be land, he had to remind himself that his eyes should be open for every move of the boatswain.

In the dog-watches the sailors cleaned out their bundles of belongings in order that they might land lightly burdened. Overboard from the forward deck and the waist went old boots, shoes, shirts, overalls, hats, sweaters, broken pipes, cracked mugs, empty tobacco boxes, tools without handles or blades, old yellow newspapers, torn magazines, a punctured accordion, victrola records, and several smashed boxes.

“That’s the kind of thing I must watch,” Thomas told himself; and from then on he never came on deck without taking a turn about to scan the water for floating objects. He began to consult the tide-tables carefully and to estimate the ship’s daily run. He seemed so careless of the approaching end of the voyage that his father spoke to him.

“My boy, unless you do some packing, your valuable sketches will go overboard or be left behind.”

“You do them up for me. You’ll be glad of something to occupy your hands.”

His father’s absorption in these small details gave Thomas all the more time to prowl about the ship. He kept his eyes on the boatswain whenever he could, watching the port-holes and the companionway of the forecastle like a cat when the man’s watch was below.

The stream of cast-off belongings went circling through the air and slapping the water, yet never a thing did the boatswain discard.

“How can he keep all his junk,” Thomas asked himself, “when all the other men are cleaning out their stores and chucking overboard all they can do without?”

The boatswain carried himself as unconcernedly as he had during all the voyage, not for a moment allowing himself to be affected or influenced by the actions of others. The strain on Thomas was almost more than he could bear, for he was anxious to take his eyes from the boatswain and join the other passengers in the search for land.

There was no mistaking the sight of land this morning, when a little before eight o’clock a few early risers dotted the rail and assured one another that they could see Long Island, and spoke of the probability of landing late that afternoon. So many persons wanted to talk about the end of the long voyage that Thomas had a difficult time in maintaining a post where he could look down at the forward deck and forecastle. Eight bells sounded. The fresh watch stumbled up the narrow forecastle steps and into the brilliant sunshine. The watch whose turn had just ended clattered across the high sill of the doorway and down the steps to a bolted breakfast and a four-hour sleep. For two full minutes the forward end of the ship was clear of all men.

Then from the companionway stepped the boatswain, his arms laden with cast-off clothing and odds and ends of worthless junk. Slowly he gave a last shake to his little pile before he tossed the pieces over on that side of the vessel from which the coast of Long Island could be seen rapidly rising into the sky-line of the city of Brooklyn.

Thomas held his breath as he watched the disarming openness of the boatswain’s actions. True, he seemed to have chosen marvelously well. His own watch was stuffing its coarse breakfast below decks. The other watch had been drawn off to its jobs about the ship. Not one seaman was working forward. Officers high on the bridge above him would not give him a second glance or a single thought. Passengers might be idly curious, but all during the day before they had seen individuals getting rid of surplus loads, and the evening before, between four and six o’clock, there had been a regular disgorging. Why should a passenger watch a seaman toss overboard tin cups, broken rules, key rings, a shaving mug, two corkscrews, a pair of suspenders, a tropical helmet, three socks, three shirts, part of a blanket, and a mouth organ?

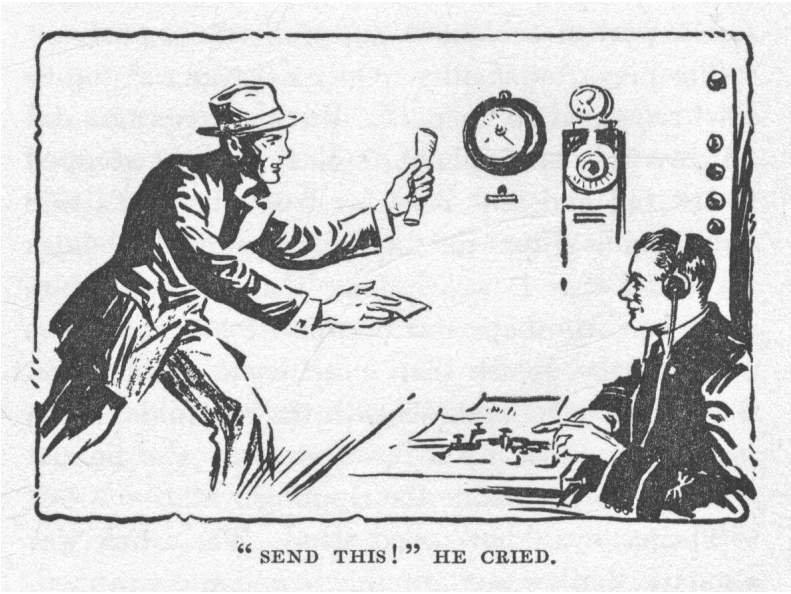
The pile grew smaller. Only a frayed red undershirt remained on the deck. But the boatswain did not toss this carelessly through the air; he

stepped to the rail and sent it as far from the ship's side as he could. From the way he propelled it Thomas suspected that it was heavier than an undershirt could be. Its shape was peculiar, too. There was a more solid splash than cloth itself could make. Something solid sank beneath the red folds; in an instant it bobbed up a few feet away and floated with one corner above the rippling water.

Thomas could have cried aloud. The article was a square, shallow box, roughly bound and wrapped, such as he had seen transferred to Hanson in Singapore!

He had warned his father not to be disturbed at any strange events that might occur at landing time. But it was fortunate that Dubois was not on deck at that time. Even the news of land in sight could not get him out of his luxurious bunk earlier than just a few minutes before the dining-room closed for breakfast. Had he beheld his son he might have considered him out of his wits—no doubt unsettled by getting near home.

Like a young sprinter Thomas dashed to the wireless room, where he scratched a few words on a blank.



"SEND THIS!" HE CRIED.

"Send this," he cried to the young operator, "before anything else you have."

"Chase yourself," the other replied cheerily, pointing to a stack of forms on his sharp file.

“No joking.”

Thomas pulled from his wallet a small card that Wan Tu had handed him.

“This means my message goes now.”

The wireless operator’s eyes and mouth went round as he took Thomas’s message. Not a syllable of comment did he make as he began to send, while Thomas waited until his marconigram got through.

“Now for the bridge,” he reminded himself. “I hope the Captain’s there.”

This worthy in tousled hair and soft slippers had stepped out to see how soon he might expect to receive the pilot.

“Hello!” he greeted Thomas. “Now I hope you don’t want to make sketches up here this morning. You know we’re getting close in and——”

“Nothing of that sort now,” interrupted Thomas, adding an over-respectful “Sir” to make his speech sound like ship talk. “All I want is to be put off on the quarantine tug when the doctors come out——”

“On the quarantine tug!” repeated the astonished Captain. “You don’t want much! Not sick, I hope? Then why?”

“I’ve got to get on a launch that will come down to meet that tug when she pulls away from your ship,” Thomas explained.

“You tell me plainly enough what you want,” said the Captain, feeling that he must put an end to the bantering, “but you don’t tell me why I should let you do anything so irregular.”

“This is why,” was all Thomas said as he handed over the slip of paper given to him in Singapore by Wan Tu.

The Captain examined it slowly, then gave a low whistle.

“Wait,” was all he said.

A minute later he returned with a neatly uniformed youth not much older than Thomas.

“Here’s my Fourth Officer. I can spare him until the tugs warp us into the pier. He will be able to take care of you. Give him any order you wish.”

The two youths acknowledged the introduction by an exchange of glances.

“I’ve got to tell my father that I am going off on the tug,” Thomas said. “Will you get your most powerful glasses and keep that floating thing—it’s a wooden box—in sight? When the tug comes alongside I’ll meet you on the steps.”

The Fourth Officer ducked into his cabin and reappeared with his glasses dangling around his neck. In another second he had focused them on the bobbing black spot.

“I’ll keep that in sight easily,” he assured Thomas. “It’s moving in with the tide and with our stops for pilot and doctor it will move almost as fast as we do.”

“As a kid I grew up over there on the water-front of that city,” said Thomas, pointing. “Don’t I know how the old tide can rush in through these narrows! You will have to go to the stern as it drops behind.”

“It won’t get away from me. But won’t the tide sweep it in towards shore?”

“We’re counting on that,” was all that Thomas answered.

Half an hour later a deck steward handed Thomas a marconigram. Although he had no knowledge of the person who signed it, he learned from it the name of the launch he should board from the quarantine tug.

Thomas had listened to the complaints of the seasoned travelers in advance at the visit of the quarantine doctors to the ship, forcing them to pass like herded cattle through the dining saloon or the library and be pronounced well enough to set foot again in their native land; but he was thankful for the disagreeable practice, because all he had to do was to meet the doctors at the head of the stairs, show himself and Wan Tu’s magic slip of paper, and turn anxiously to the waiting Fourth Officer.

“It’s just about a quarter of a mile astern,” was the report, “and moving this way fast. If you cruise back and forth a few times here you’re sure to spot it.”

“Good,” said Thomas, his foot on the third step. “Many thanks to you.”

“What about glasses?” the other asked, detaining him.

“Some on the launch I’m to board. There she comes now!”

Thomas sped down the steps and across the squat tug to see if the launch could come alongside to take him off at once. She was going to attempt it.

Her wide circle brought her up to pass the tug slowly at a distance of about a yard. It would be foolhardy to come any closer, for an unexpected pitch or roll of the heavy tug would crush the thin timbers of the speed-boat. Thomas was crouching on the outside runway of the tug, holding to a deck worker's strong fist.

Two voices—the tug man's and the helmsman's on the launch—gave him the command at the same time.

"Jump!"

He flopped in a bundle on the bottom of the launch. When he straightened himself and looked back, there was a quarter of a mile of choppy water between him and the liner.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOM AND HANSON MEET

Half an hour of zigzag cruising was enough to intercept the slow drifting of the roughly wrapped box. In that time Thomas had exchanged only a few words with the three men in the boat, who had accepted him without any questioning and who paid to his slightest remark more respect than he had ever obtained from any associates, though he tried to believe that the boys with whom he had swum along this same body of water had respected his opinions and remarks.

Watching that bobbing box was tiresome work for Thomas. He regretted this interference with his expected experiences at the pier when the liner should dock. Not for him were there to be any discussions over baggage with customs inspectors; not for him the joy of pulling together into one pile the bags of his father and himself; not for him the joy of showing his father how much he was at home in the confusion and bustle of the great metropolis. In his disappointment he totally overlooked the fact that Dubois had not only known most of the large ports of the world before Thomas could spell out their names on his school maps, but also that he had knocked about this same great harbor long before his infant son could wash his own face and ears.

"Now, where's that confounded box?" demanded Thomas, whose thoughts had been far away from his present task.

A nod from the nearest government agent showed him the spot among the ripples of the water.

At times, to keep abreast of their marker, they had to pretend that they had engine trouble and shut off the propeller completely. At other times a current would race the box in towards shore and up the narrows with the speed of a homeward bound tugboat. Then, at last, it set in steadily towards the corner of Brooklyn.

They were now threading their way in and out among craft of all kinds, from humble garbage scows to the swagger private yachts of Long Island residents. The chief of the Federal officers was all eyes now, because dumpy rowboats with roughly dressed amateur fishermen and family parties out for an hour's row were edging along the shore.

“Take this,” he remarked to Thomas.

Thomas hesitated, but the other insistently held out to him the small revolver.

“We all have them in our pockets,” the officer went on. “You should have one, too.”

Thomas held the weapon awkwardly.

“Ever use one?” the man asked.

“Never,” Thomas replied. “Haven’t the slightest idea——”

“Just press that button and pull on the trigger and she’ll keep on shooting as long as she has any pills,” the other explained. “Put it in your right side pocket—your coat—where you can get it quickly.”

“Then there’s danger?”

“We never know. We can’t afford to take the chance. Some of these birds are cold eggs, if you know what I mean. Yet, at times the hardest-boiled are the easiest to gobble up. Understand?”

“I think so,” ventured Thomas.

“Slow down,” called the helmsman. “I think we’re going to get a bite. Let’s keep farther away.”

Many of the occupants of the small boats had cast casual glances at the box Thomas and his mates were watching, but only such glances as they cast on floating soda-pop bottles or watermelon rinds. Now, however, an ordinary rowboat appeared to be slowly drawing up alongside the box with some intentions upon it, yet the actions of the two men and the one woman in the boat might be perfectly natural and innocent.

A young man in shirt-sleeves was rowing towards no place in particular. In the bow sat a woman in a thin dress, protecting her face from the sun by an open umbrella.

“Look at the handle on that umbrella,” the man near Thomas said, motioning him to bend over to conceal the glasses behind the wind shield.

He gazed as directed.

“It has a curved hook for a handle,” he reported.

“Keep your eyes glued on her, while I cover the fat fellow in the stern.”

Whether by design or accident, the rowboat had drawn closer and closer to the wooden box, until they were not more than a foot apart. The woman with the umbrella turned quickly from one side of the boat to the other. In her rapid movement she lost her grip on the umbrella. Over it went; but, as Thomas plainly saw, it completely covered the box. The rower stopped. He yelled some criticism at her, and some direction to the huge figure lolling in the stern, who suddenly awoke to action. He leaned far over to the side while the oarsman balanced the boat by leaning in the other direction. The floating umbrella was captured and held to drip beside the boat for a few minutes. Then it was lifted aboard and was passed from the man in the stern to the oarsman, and by him to the woman in the bow.

"Slickest trick I've ever seen!" broke out the man at the wheel in the launch.

The box from Singapore was no longer floating on the ingoing tide.

"It didn't sink, did it?" cried Thomas.

"Sink? Nothing like it. It's on the bottom of that rowboat."

SHE LOST HER GRIP ON THE UMBRELLA.

"I can't believe it," protested Thomas.

"Just watch that fellow row now. Oh, yes, we believe you! The lady's row is spoiled because her umbrella got all wet. So you have to take her back home. We're glad you do, for we're going to be there when you arrive!"

When the three pleasure-seekers clambered from their hired boat at the slip, the four occupants in the launch drew up at another landing a few piers distant. When Thomas stood erect and, in spite of directions not to watch the carriers of the box on the other slip, turned to look at them, they had already disappeared from view.

"You may be known to them," the chief said to Thomas. "Give us about three minutes' start. Watch the cross-street up there to see whether we come back to the left. Give no sign that you see us, but follow. In this neighborhood, and with the trick we've just seen, I'll bet they lead us to a rented flat. Come right in. By the time you get there, all the shooting will be over."

It was easy for Thomas to keep the tallest of the Federal agents in sight as he hurried along the street parallel to the water-front, and as he increased his speed along a cross-street into which the three occupants of the rowboat had turned. When Thomas hurried around this corner the woman and her two companions had disappeared from the almost bare sidewalks bordered by modest small shops, a few warehouses, and long rows of brick houses.

Thomas was farther behind than he had believed. There was a long stretch of pavement before he could turn into the narrow entrance into which he had just seen the tall agent step. Remembering the directions given him at the landing, he quaked a little and really did hope that he would get there after all the shooting was over.

He drew near to the door on which his eyes had been fastened.

"How shall I know which flat they're in?" he asked himself. He did not relish the possibility of getting into the wrong one and stirring up another row over himself.

But he was spared this embarrassment. As he gingerly stepped into the little square entrance that reeked of stale food and hot rubberoid stair-covering, he saw, through an open door on the first landing, a cheaply furnished living-room, where the tall agent was watching for him.

"Come on up," invited the agent.

Thomas stepped hesitatingly into the room.

"Easier than we ever expected. They didn't have a chance to reach for their irons. We've just started a little nosing around, but haven't uncovered much yet. Maybe later. Come into the dining-room and look them over."

With shiny handcuffs on their wrists the three prisoners sat on stiff chairs against the blank wall, while the two agents, with backs to the windows, sat facing them with their right hands in their coat pockets. Thomas knew they were covering the three smugglers with their revolvers.

"Here's mine," said Thomas, handing over the gun loaned to him, glad to be relieved of its weight.

The woman was not nearly so coarse or villainous as Thomas would have expected, had he thought about it at all. She gazed past the guards in unnoticing contempt for them. The man who had rowed the boat looked—except for his shirt-sleeves—like a young bank clerk. He fidgeted.

Then Thomas took a step.

"Hanson!" he exclaimed.

The three agents stirred.

"Know this man?" asked the chief.

"Never saw him before," growled Hanson before Thomas could reply.

Thomas could have slapped the brute's face. He pushed against the small dining table and leaned over it to stare straight into Hanson's eyes.

"Never saw me?" he stormed as he shook a fist at the burly hulk on the small chair. "Never saw me? What a lie!" Then he lowered his voice to express all the anger and contempt he felt for the creature sitting before him. "Well, you should have seen me. Let me tell you a few things. Who knocked you over into the river below Calcutta after you spoiled Sven's good hat? Who? I did. Who saw my sick father deliver opium in cases to you in Singapore? I did! And who was able to get my father away from all that and bring him back here to decent surroundings where he may have some things to tell about your doings? I did."

He paused for a second, aware that he had gone too far in that statement. As far as he could tell, his father might never remember any of his dealings with Hanson and his gang. But he was not going to let the handcuffed man off so easily.

"When you came pounding that morning in Singapore on the rear entrance to The Yellow Poppy, do you know that just inside was Dubois, who hoped to meet you?"

For the first time the expression on Hanson's face showed that he realized whom Thomas was talking about. The youth's reference to his

father had meant nothing to him.

"Do you know who prevented him from keeping his appointment with you that morning? I did! And when he knew you were outside that door, and he tried to call to you, do you know who shut him up? I did. Do you remember the scuffle inside and the crash of some one falling down the steps? Who kept him from getting to you even then, though it meant knocking him insensible? Who did that? I did. Never saw me before, indeed! Well, I've seen you and enough of you. Bah!" He swept one hand across another as if to brush off a spot of dirt. "I hope I never have to look at your disgusting face again."

The strength of his emotions made him feel sick at his stomach. He held to the edge of the table and turned his head towards the sentries.

"You don't need me, do you? May I go?"

"Certainly."

They had enough sense not to ask, "Do you feel all right?"

At the bottom of the few steps, Thomas stopped and steadied himself against the wall, while he rubbed his forehead and took several deep breaths.

It was sickening! The marvelous experiences of the Atlantic Ocean, the beauty of the Mediterranean, the fantastic cities of India, the brown races of the Malay states, the thrill of finding his father, the excitement (almost unbelievable now) of his visits to The Yellow Poppy, the talks with Inspector Allmayer, the association with Sing Ho or Wan Tu, the delights of the long voyage home, the ride in the launch with the Federal detectives—all these amazing exploits had to end with a burst of anger in a squalid flat in a run-down section of his own unromantic home city.

He could have cried with vexation.

"What's the use?" he wailed to himself.

Then he reproved himself.

"I'd better get to the Johnsons' as soon as I can. Even after all this I may arrive before my father does, if he's been delayed by the customs inspectors over his baggage—our baggage, I mean."

And off he hurried to find a wandering taxicab.

CHAPTER XXIV

SECRET SERVICE

"And so," concluded Wan Tu, looking around at the small group gathered about his desk in a small office in the Federal Building in New York, and bringing his eyes back to Thomas, "there's the money waiting for you to take it."

"But I never thought of getting money for it when I was doing it," protested Thomas.

"That has nothing to do with it," resumed Wan Tu. "That's the best part about it. You didn't do anything for money, but you get a reward just the same."

"Suppose I don't take it?" The boy was puzzled. It did not seem quite right that all the time he was working to find and bring home his father, he should have been doing something to bring a monetary reward to himself.

"No one else can have it. It just lies idly in the Treasury Department until years outlaw any claim that can be made upon it. Then it goes back to the nation's funds."

"You say it's the law?" asked Thomas.

Wan Tu smiled patiently.

"You were much quicker at grasping new ideas out in Singapore when I told them to you," he reminded him. "And you weren't much surprised when you found that I was here long before you arrived."

"That's because I know about fast liners across the Pacific from Shanghai and fast trains across the United States," answered Thomas in self-defense. "But this money matter is all new to me."

"Thus says the law." Wan Tu turned over an opened pamphlet. "A person giving information to the government leading to the recovery, and I'm reading from the law itself now, 'of any duties withheld, or any fine, penalty, or forfeiture incurred' is entitled to twenty-five per cent of the amount recovered."

"It works in some mighty peculiar ways," broke in the chief of the launch that had followed the case of opium. "Some are funny. An American woman in Paris buys a lot of jewelry and asks the jeweler to hide it in the

lining of her leather traveling-bag. She never tells a soul on the steamer. But lo behold! On the dock the customs examiner looks at her baggage, rips open the lining, and finds the jewels, and she pays two thousand dollars in duties and penalties. How did he know they were there? The jeweler in Paris who put them there sent the information, and while the woman tells a hundred people of the amazing cunning of the customs men the quiet fellow over in Paris gets five hundred dollars. No wonder they can sell jewelry cheap over there!"

"It seems so much money," Thomas commented on his own case.

Wan Tu drew from a drawer a small batch of clippings from newspapers neatly fastened together.

"Here are a few sums of money that the public has heard about because the cases got into the papers." He selected a few. "A trunk seized on the Pacific Coast; opium valued at about sixty thousand dollars. Too bad you didn't detect that one, Thomas. No; here's a better story. Seven trunks in the baggage of a whole family from China. Estimated value, five hundred thousand dollars. Here's the seizure of a private yacht. Owner had to pay twenty-four thousand dollars to get it back again. Some poor sailor will get six thousand dollars—if he has the courage to claim it."

"I'm not *afraid* to claim it," Thomas broke out.

"Good!" declared Wan Tu. "Just sign these two forms, then."

Thomas did.

"Have these delivered at once," Wan Tu directed the dignified elderly messenger who appeared in answer to his ring.

There was a pause, during which the launch chief nodded as a sign to Wan Tu.

"You've enjoyed all these experiences, haven't you?" the polished Chinese opened upon Thomas.

"Yes, indeed," the youth glowed.

"Like to do more of this kind of work?"

"No," said Thomas decidedly. Then to soften the edge of his curt refusal, he added, "You know I have my work pretty well planned, and my father's here now."

"One minute," broke in the chief. "You're young enough to change your work. I was twenty-five when I began this. And came from the inland

mountains, too. Your father's a seafaring man. Will he always stay here? I ask you, Mr. Dubois."

"I can't say what I'll do," Dubois replied slowly and anxiously. "I mustn't stand in my boy's way."

"Right, I say," agreed the chief. "We always need good recruits for the service. I'm on the lookout all the time. Your boy's been around the world already. He's worked under Mr. Wan Tu here, known all over as a top-notcher in his field. What more could you ask?"

"It's not what I ask," replied Dubois. "Thomas must make his own decisions." He swept his eyes around challengingly. "He's able to, isn't he?"

At that speech Thomas could have jumped for joy. He knew now that his father and he were one in emotion and sentiment.

Wan Tu brought the discussion back to its central thread.

"Why not?" he asked Thomas directly.

"Because I'm going to be a marine architect."

"Going to build boats?"

"I want to."

Thomas stopped with his lips apart. Those two words; what did they sound like? "I want to" and "Wan Tu." They were almost the same! Could there be any relation between "want to" and the name of the shrewd man at the desk before him? Thomas knew that this person—trained, cultured, powerful, capable—must be one of the influential internationalists of the world, whose abilities and work pass beyond the narrow boundaries of countries and stretch over all the barriers and prejudices of nationalities and races. "Want to" and "Wan Tu"!

He stared at his friend's face and saw a twinkle light up the eyes and a smile break about the mouth.

"Your name!" he exploded.

"Yes, since you've discovered it. Sing Ho or Wan Tu, as you please."

"But who are you?"

His low tone expressed his awed admiration for this amazing man, who proceeded to pass him a small white card. The youth looked at its French entries without understanding them fully.

“What do these mean?” Thomas persisted.

“That is where you can always learn where I may be. As for my real name, what does that signify? We may meet there some time—at Geneva, in Switzerland. Just think of me as an agent in the investigation of the drug traffic for the League of Nations.”

“And to think I never guessed your name!” stuttered Thomas.

“By the way.” The internationalist rose. “You may be able to use that name. As one word, it looks Oriental. W-A-N-T-U, Wantu. You may be able to have it painted on a boat.”

“I will,” promised Thomas.

And he did.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *In Singapore: The Story of a Strange Search* by Clarence Stratton]