

# UNDER THE DRAGON THRONE

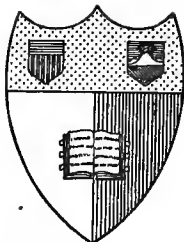
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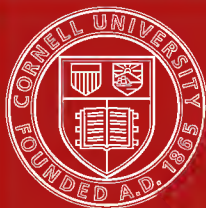
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**UNDER THE DRAGON THRONE**



# Under the Dragon Throne

BY

L. T. MEADE

*and*

ROBERT K. DOUGLAS

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*"You can't open a book without learning something."*—CHINESE PROVERB.

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# CONTENTS

## RICHARD MAITLAND, CONSUL.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. CONTRARY TO PRECEDENT	3
II. THE BETROTHAL FEAST	15
III. IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE ENEMY	30
IV. A TUG-OF-WAR	42

## A VICTIM OF THE KOLAO-HWUY.

I. THE CITY OF WILLOWS	57
II. "TO DISOBEY IS DEATH"	72
III. BAD NEWS	- 85
IV. THE TAOTAI -	97

## MRS. WYNDHAM'S SEASON OF TERROR.

I. THE ADVANCE OF THE JAPS	111
II. THE TAKING OF PORT ARTHUR	129
III. A FALSE FRIEND	144
IV. THE RESCUE-	158

## TRAPPED BY A CHINAMAN.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE FEAST OF LANTERNS -	179
II.	THE ENGLISH GIRL - - -	198
III.	HYACINTH -	214
IV.	THE TRIAL -	232

## A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT.

I.	THE SACRIFICE	255
II.	THE AWAKENING	264
III.	A CHINESE MOTHER-IN-LAW	276
IV.	THE WAY OUT	287

RICHARD MAITLAND, CONSUL.





## RICHARD MAITLAND, CONSUL.

### CHAPTER I.

#### *CONTRARY TO PRECEDENT.*



WHEN Richard Maitland undertook the duties of Her Britannic Majesty's Consul at the inland port of Ch'anyang, in China, he little guessed the strange adventures which would befall him, and the numerous perils to which he would be exposed. He was a man of nearly fifty years of age, a thick-set Englishman from the Midland Counties. In manner he was intensely reserved; but he had a humorous twinkle in his eyes, and, when thoroughly pleased and interested in anyone, a hearty and kindly manner. He was also largely endowed with tact, an essential quality for a man in his position. In consequence, he was popular with the Chinese dignitaries, and was freely admitted to their various entertainments. But this popularity was destined to come to an abrupt end, and the peace-loving Consul was soon to see the reverse side of the Chinese character.

On a certain sultry morning, when Maitland entered one of his private apartments in the large, roomy Con-

sulate, his valet, George Bryce, who had accompanied his master from England, approached him. He told Maitland that a young Englishman had called to see him on urgent business.

“The gentleman brought this letter of introduction,” continued Bryce, “and begged me to give it to you, sir, the moment you were at leisure to look at it. This is his visiting-card.”

Maitland took both letter and card in his hand. When he read the name on the card, he gave a perceptible start: “Mr. James Pennant. Surely not Lady Margaret’s son,” he exclaimed half aloud. He eagerly tore open the letter. It ran as follows :

“MY DEAR MR. MAITLAND,

“If my son goes to Ch’anyang (that unpronounceable corner of the earth where you are now buried), I am sure you will do him all the kindness in your power. He has taken it into his head to visit China, in search, I suppose, of those adventures which fascinate young people in our day. For the sake of our old friendship, I am sure you will give him fatherly counsel if he comes in your way. You know that he is a somewhat important person, at least in his mother’s eyes, being an only son.

“With kindest regards,

“Yours most truly,

“MARGARET PENNANT.”

When Maitland’s quick eyes had devoured this letter, he looked at Bryce. “The young Englishman turns out to be the son of an old friend,” he remarked. “Lady Margaret Coningsby is his mother. You remember Lady Margaret as a young lady—eh, Bryce?”

‘Yes, sir, perfectly. Also her marriage to Captain Pennant, and the Captain’s death soon afterwards. I told Mr. Pennant that you would most likely be able to see him after tiffin, sir. He said he would call without fail.’

‘I hope he will do so. I shall be delighted to see his mother’s son. Be sure you let me know the moment he arrives.’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the servant.

A Chinese “boy” entered the room at this moment to announce that tiffin was served, and Maitland strode into his dining-hall and sat down to lunch. He was hungry, for he had gone through a hard morning’s work, and while he ate, his thoughts ran on the letter he had received and the many memories it had evoked.

Maitland was unmarried. As far as he could tell, he had never wished to marry; but he knew that, could he have been tempted to forego the charms of liberty for the silken cords of married life, Lady Margaret would have been the girl on whom his choice would have fallen. In the old days, she had always been in his dreams. But fate had ordained her for another, and Maitland did not even know if he regretted it. He had never lost his interest in her, however, and now he looked forward with keen anticipation to seeing her son. He had scarcely finished lunch before Bryce entered the room to say that Pennant had called.

‘Tell him that I will see him immediately,’ said the Consul. He started up in haste, and, hurrying into his large reception-room, held out a hearty hand of greeting to the son of his old friend. ‘My dear boy, how delightful this is!’ he exclaimed. ‘I am more than pleased at this meeting. I need not say that I will do all in my power to make your visit pleasant while you stay here. Of

course, it goes without saying that you will put up at my house. I will send immediately for your traps, if you will tell me where they are."

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir," answered Pennant. The colour mounted to his temples as he spoke. He was a slightly-built, tall young man, with keen gray eyes and a well-set-up figure. But there was a look of anxiety about his face which Maitland perceived the moment he looked at him. "I am greatly obliged," he continued; "but I am afraid that I cannot—I mean, that I ought to tell you what my business is, before we say anything more about my coming here. It is a great relief to see you. I meant to have called before; but matters of a peculiar nature have occupied me. I kept my mother's letter by me, and always looked forward to knowing you. Now I am ashamed to say I come to make your acquaintance because I am in dire distress."

"Then, you have not just arrived at Ch'anyang?"

"No; I have been here for several weeks. The fact is, I have called to-day to ask you, Mr. Maitland, to give me your assistance. As British Consul here, you may be able to afford me some invaluable help. I have been unfortunate enough to get myself into a horrible mess. But can I speak to you alone? Do any of your servants understand English?"

"Only my valet, Bryce. He knew your mother when she was a girl. Come into my private office, Pennant. If you have anything special to say, we shall be safe there."

Maitland led the way to his private room. He motioned his guest to a seat, and sat down opposite him. "Now," he said, "how can I serve you? You can command me not only in my official capacity, but also as an old friend of your mother's."



"I have known your name all my life," replied Pennant. "My mother has spoken of you often—in fact, your name is a household word at home."

"I am delighted to hear it. Your mother and I were great friends long ago. But now as to your trouble."

Maitland remained seated; but Pennant sprang up and stood near one of the large windows. The anxiety on his face became more marked. He spoke with a sort of reckless defiance. "There is nothing for it," he said, "but to state the facts of the case as briefly as possible. I have engaged myself secretly to a young Chinese lady who is on the point of marriage with a countryman of her own. Her betrothal takes place to-morrow morning, and as the bridegroom is to leave immediately for Peking, the marriage is to come off in the evening. This I am resolved to prevent at any cost, and I want you to help me."

To say that Maitland turned a fiery red is to express but slightly the emotions which overpowered him at this startling communication. "I wish, with all my heart, that you had come to see me before," he said. "It is a far more serious matter than you have any idea of for an Englishman to attempt to interfere in Chinese matrimonial affairs."

"Does that mean that you won't help me?" said Pennant in agitation.

"I did not say so. Won't you take a chair? We must talk this matter over quietly. It is impossible for me not to feel some astonishment at your most unexpected communication. Marriages between Chinese and English people are almost unknown, and you will forgive my mentioning, my dear lad, that with your expectations and——"

Pennant interrupted hastily. "There is no use in

arguing the matter now," he said. "The thing is done. I am desperately in love with the girl, and have engaged myself with my eyes open."

"I can only repeat that you are undertaking a most risky business," answered Maitland, "and that the matter may become one of life and death. But before we go any further, pray tell me the name of the girl. Who is her father, and how, in the name of fortune, did you get to know her? Chinese girls are never allowed to be seen out of doors, or in society."

"I am well aware of that," said Pennant, with a faint smile. "Nevertheless, contrary to all precedent, I have met this girl; and the position of affairs at the present moment is as I have stated it. I will tell you my story in as few words as possible. I have always been interested in the Chinese. There has been a sort of mystery about them to me—their lives have been so much a sealed book to us Europeans, that one of my great wishes from my early youth has been to travel in China and to study the ways and customs of this queer people. I know the language, and can speak it with tolerable fluency. When, therefore, I came to Ch'anyang, instead of putting up at the 'foreign settlement,' I secured rooms in the 'native city.' I was lucky enough to make several friends—amongst them was a Chinese scholar of considerable learning, of the name of Le Ming. He often invited me to visit him in the gardens at the back of his father's house. I was sitting there one evening, when I caught sight of a charming girl passing through the shrubberies; she glided quickly into a grove of trees, and Le Ming, who noticed that I had observed her, told me that she was his sister, Amethyst."

Here Maitland rose to his feet.

"Merciful heavens!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me that the girl you intend to marry is Amethyst, the daughter of Le the Prefect? My dear Pennant, if this is so, it is my unfortunate duty to tell you that you must banish the idea immediately. Le is one of the most important personages in Ch'anyang. If your preposterous idea were even suspected, we should have the whole place about our ears immediately. Besides, this girl is on the eve of marriage to no less a person than Wang, son of a President of the Board of War at Peking."

"Precisely," said Pennant; "and because of all these things, I am in my present terrible trouble. But may I finish my story?"

"Certainly." Maitland sank again into his chair. He looked hard at Pennant under his shaggy eyebrows.

"I must return to that evening," said the young man. "I talked a little longer with Le Ming, and presently went back to my rooms. I was just thinking of going to bed, when a servant entered and told me that a messenger had arrived who wished to see me at once on a matter of urgent business. Wondering what could possibly be the matter, I desired the person to be admitted. The man withdrew, and a moment later opened the door to admit a female figure, carefully veiled from head to foot. The servant went away and left us alone. The moment this happened, my visitor threw back her veil, and I saw, to my astonishment, that she was a young and very lovely girl. She could not have been more than sixteen years of age. I was utterly thrown off my guard. Even in England, I have never seen such beauty. The fair complexion, the brightness of the eyes, the wonderful pearly whiteness of the teeth, it would be impossible to surpass. But what upset me more than all else was the sad and despair-

ing expression in the face. 'What can I possibly do for you?' I said. 'Why have you come to me?' I approached her side as I spoke.

"'Your Excellency can help me if you will,' she said. Tears sprang into her eyes. She suddenly went on her knees. 'Oh, forgive my intruding,' she said. 'You would, if you knew my misery. Your slave's name is Amethyst. I am the unfortunate and only daughter of Prefect Le. I am so overwhelmed with misery that I can neither eat nor sleep. Will your Excellency deign to glance down at your slave and help her?'

"'A thousand times, yes,' I answered. 'I will do anything that man can do for you.' I was completely carried away by her words and her beauty. 'How can I help you?' I said.

"'Your Excellency can save my life,' she replied. 'Let me tell you what my grief is. In an evil moment, my revered elders exchanged my natal characters with those of a man named Wang, who is the son of a President of the Board of War at Peking. I have never seen him; but, oh! if report speaks true, he is cruel, bad, and ugly. On all sides I hear how wicked he is; and, then, he is old. I loathe the thought of being his wife. I would rather fifty times end my days at once than go through the misery of being united to him; but as our horoscopes have already been cast with favourable results, I am powerless to prevent the marriage, unless your Excellency will come to my aid. Some evenings ago I heard my brother Ming speak of you. He praised you, and spoke of your learning and your goodness. I determined to see for myself what you were like. I have watched you several times, unseen by you, and have recognised that your face is like that of a god from the palace of the Queen-mother of the West. I

long to serve you, and only ask to be allowed to attend to your wants. Will you help me?"

"'I will do anything in my power for you—only tell me how,' I replied.

"'Let me enter your palace, and so escape from Wang. I know that you are good, and that your heart is as clear as crystal. You are still in the spring-time of life, and although you are a stranger from an outside kingdom, I long to be your wife.' She suddenly clasped both my hands in hers, whilst tears streamed from her eyes."

"Well," said Maitland, "and what did you do? What did you say finally to the poor girl?"

"I told her that I would help her. In short, I— Yes, it is true, I fell in love with her at first sight. The idea of such a marriage may seem strange and preposterous to you; but it did not appear so to me when I looked at her speaking face and listened to her miserable words. Perhaps you do not believe in love at first sight. I am a proof of the fact. I promised Amethyst to do all that she desired. I told her that I would marry her and take her to England. She left me after a time, and returned to her father's Yamun in the company of her nurse, who had brought her to see me. That happened ten days ago," continued Pennant. "We have met two or three times since then, and all the preliminary arrangements for our elopement were completed, when this morning the nurse brought me news of to-morrow's terrible programme. I have written to Amethyst, telling her that I will rescue her from Wang at any cost. Now you know the whole story, and what I ask at your hands."

"It is a most unfortunate story," said Maitland. "I cannot possibly express to you how much it distresses me. As your mother's son, I would do anything in reason to render

you assistance; but I am afraid in this matter you expect impossibilities. Besides, even if I could help you, would your mother thank me for assisting you to bring her back a Chinese daughter-in-law?"

"I cannot say," replied Pennant. "There is little use in going into that matter now. I am past argument. I love Amethyst. She loves me. My honour is at stake. I have promised not to leave a stone unturned to help her. She trusts to me to free her from a fate worse than death. If you cannot do anything for me, I must go elsewhere."

Maitland looked deeply annoyed. "This is a very bad business," he said. "You place me in a most unpleasant position. If I refuse to render you assistance, you will probably do something rash, and find yourself in a Chinese prison before you know where you are. On the other hand, I can only consent to help you at the risk of the peace of the whole English community. I beg of you, Pennant, to think the matter over carefully before you take any further steps."

"Good heavens, sir!" replied Pennant, "have I not thought of it day and night, night and day, since the moment I first saw that unhappy girl? There is nothing left to reconsider. I am quite prepared to risk my life, if it comes to that, in the cause of this girl. It occurred to me, in coming to you now, that you might be willing to do a small thing for me—one which can scarcely get you into serious trouble."

"My personal trouble is nothing; but I have others to consider. Pray, tell me what you mean."

"You know Le the Prefect?"

"Yes."

"You are in all probability going to the betrothal feast to-morrow?"

“I am.”

“Then, take me with you, Mr. Maitland—that is the favour I ask at your hands. Get me an invitation. If I go in your company, no one will suspect me of any underhand design.”

“The thought is sheer madness, Pennant.”

“Is it? Well, perhaps I am mad just now. If you will not take me, I can easily get an invitation from Le’s son, Ming. But I have a fear, which I trust has no foundation, that Ming suspects something. If he saw me in your company, his suspicions would be lulled to rest at once. May I come with you? Say ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

“I ask you, Pennant,” said Maitland, going up to the young man and laying his hand on his shoulders—“I ask you how is it possible for me to say ‘Yes’ after the communication you have just made me? You want to go in the company of the English Consul to Le’s house. You want to share in the festivities of Wang’s betrothal, and yet your real object is to steal his bride from under his nose. How can I possibly say anything but ‘No’? It is my first duty, my only duty, to refuse your request.”

A sudden oath escaped Pennant’s white lips. “Perhaps you are right,” he said, “from your point of view. Nevertheless, I had hoped you would see matters in a different light. I ask for nothing at your hands but the protection of your company at a critical moment. You profess to be my mother’s old friend. She told me if I were in any trouble to appeal to you. I find myself in one of the most horrible scrapes that an Englishman ever got into, and yet you are unwilling to put out your little finger to help me. If that is friendship, preserve me from it.”

“You are upset, my dear fellow, or you would not speak so,” said Maitland—his tone changed to one of

sudden emotion. "Believe me," he said, "that for the sake of old times I would give this right hand to help you ; but, to speak plainly, I am without choice in the matter. As Consul here, I am in duty bound to look after the interests of the English residents, and that duty must come even before my regard for your mother and my earnest wish to serve you. As English Consul, I cannot lend my services to anything underhand. Have I made myself plain?"

"Quite," said Pennant—"quite plain. I can trust to your not betraying my confidence?" he added.

"I will say nothing about it, of course ; but my anxiety on your account is very great. Believe me, Pennant, that with or without my help you cannot win this girl—you cannot rescue her from the inevitable fate which she shares in common with most of her countrywomen. You have no idea what invisible chains and bars surround her."

"My honour is at stake ; I have promised at any risk to do all I can for her. I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Maitland. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Pennant. Come to me if I can assist you in any other way."

"There is no other way just now."

"I cannot induce you to stay with me here?"

"No ; it is safer not. My visit may compromise you. Good-bye."







## CHAPTER II.

### *THE BETROTHAL FEAST.*

**T**HE following morning broke warm and bright ; and before noon Maitland was conveyed to Le's Yamun, or official residence, in the Consular sedan-chair. Hitherto his duties as Consul had been smooth and harmonious. He was on friendly terms with the native population, and was much liked by all the English residents. But now his interview with Pennant filled him with uneasiness, and it was with a heavy heart that he set out for this important festival. Memories of Lady Margaret as she used to be when a girl mingled with his uneasiness with regard to her son's infatuation. In short, Maitland had spent a sleepless night—his anxiety to help Pennant, and his utter inability to be of the least service to him, being the most serious causes of his trouble.

“Thank Heaven the mother knows nothing of this !” he said to himself ; “and the unhappy boy will soon be forced to see, by the strength of circumstances, how futile and vain this unfortunate and ridiculous love-affair really is.”

Maitland arrived at his destination in good time. The streets were crowded with spectators, and his bearers had some difficulty in forcing their way through the throngs

of people who had collected to watch the arrival of the guests and the presents. At the front-door, the English Consul was, according to custom, met by the Prefect, who conducted him, with many bows, into the reception-hall. According to custom, also, the bride herself did not appear; but the presents which had arrived from the bridegroom were all exhibited in the most conspicuous manner; and the Prefect took Maitland round to see them, and expatiated on their merits in true Oriental style and metaphor.

Each moment the scene became more gay and bustling. Not only were Le's own friends invited to the betrothal feast, but also his son's fellow-students and literary acquaintances. These individuals had all donned their most brilliant robes, and the bright colouring added to the bizarre and striking effect. The furniture of the many reception-rooms was covered for the occasion with rich hangings, and the walls were hung with scrolls bearing sayings of the sages of antiquity.

In addition to the crowds of bridal gifts, priceless curiosities of all kinds were arranged about the rooms; and numerous servants were seen gliding here and there bearing fresh nuptial presents and attending to the wants of the guests.

At the appointed hour, the bridegroom, Wang, was announced, and Le hurried to the front-door to receive him. With much ceremony, this important personage was led into the reception-hall, where he bowed low to the other guests, and placed the necessary letter of betrothal in the hands of the Prefect. Wang's manner was full of a certain exaggerated punctiliousness, which was anything but pleasing. After greeting the native guests, the Prefect brought him up to introduce him to Maitland; but being

a Confucian of the Confucianists, he showed his anti-foreign proclivities by the coldness of his salutation to the Englishman.

The Prefect then invited the bridegroom to enter the dining-hall. According to etiquette, this invitation was twice refused, and only accepted after a third and pressing request had been made. The Prefect then led Wang to the scene of festivities, and the other guests hurried to follow so good an example.

The tables in this spacious apartment groaned with every sort of delicacy. Birds' nests from the Polynesian Islands, venison from Mongolia, and preserves from Canton, were amongst the luxuries present. Every imaginable delicacy was provided to satisfy the most capricious appetites; and the artistic arrangements of everything, the brilliancy of the colouring, the great width and height of the magnificent rooms, had an effect even upon the most fastidious eyes.

Maitland, who was accustomed to being present at many of the most costly and splendid of the Chinese festivities, could not help owning to himself that the lavish preparations for the betrothal of Le's daughter exceeded anything he had yet witnessed in China. As English Consul, he was at once led to the upper end of the dining-hall and provided with a seat of honour. Maitland was remarkable for his tact. He had by this time acquired the manner which is esteemed the perfection of politeness in the Celestial Country. He bowed low to the Prefect, therefore, and expressed his astonishment at the magnificence of the scene on which his eyes rested. The Prefect deprecated the compliment in the humblest way, and returned Maitland's salute with effusion.

Wang was magnificently dressed in robes of the finest silk, and wore the insignia of scholarship, which is so dear to the hearts of his countrymen. But no fine robes could cover his personal defects. In appearance he was both old and ugly; and the mean and sensual expression of his face showed all too plainly, to Maitland's observant eyes, that Pennant had not exaggerated the situation when he spoke of the terrible fate which awaited poor Amethyst as this man's bride.

The preliminary ceremonies had just begun, and the band had struck up the merry strains of the Dragon and the Phoenix, when Maitland's eyes were attracted to two men who were coming up the dining-hall side by side. One of them was a Chinaman in gaily-coloured silk robes, further adorned with the insignia of scholarship. The other was an Englishman in the quiet morning attire of his country. He was of course Pennant. His sober dress and dignified manner immediately attracted all eyes to him; and Maitland, as he observed him, had to own to himself that he was as attractive-looking a young fellow as he had ever seen.

"Confound it!" muttered the Consul under his breath. "How in the world has the luckless lad got in here? That Chinaman who is with him must, I suppose, be the brother of the bride, the Le Ming of whom he has spoken to me. What a reckless fellow Pennant is; but what a gentleman he looks! He is the image of his mother. God help her! She little knows the danger into which her young hopeful is putting himself. He has evidently managed to throw dust into Le Ming's eyes; but I see by the lad's expression that he is up to mischief. Ah, he is looking this way. I must recognise him, although, upon my word, I'd rather not. Poor boy! I can see by

the build of his chin that he is as obstinate as a mule. I cannot help admiring his pluck. But what a state of things! Does a fellow like that imagine that he can upset a state ceremonial of this sort, and carry off a Chinaman's bride from under his very nose?"

Maitland's uneasiness was not at all perceptible in his manner, which was as collected and cool as the occasion demanded. He soon saw that Pennant had no idea of obtruding himself upon his notice. The young man seated himself far down at the same table, and entered into animated conversation with Le Ming and one or two of his friends.

As the feast proceeded and the wine circulated, the fun became fast and furious. After the most serious of the courses had been disposed of, the host proposed the old-fashioned game of Forfeits. A word was given, and each guest had to write a couplet in accordance with the strict rules of Chinese poetry-making. Those who failed—and many did—were compelled to drink off their glasses of wine as a punishment. Presently this was voted slow, and the more popular game of *Chai mei* (the Italian *Mora*, and the Roman *Micare digitis*) was substituted for it. Pennant entered with heart and soul into these amusements; and no one, to judge from his face, would imagine that he had a care in the world. Even Maitland ceased to watch him, and gave himself up to the pleasure of the hour.

Betrothal feasts in China generally last until late in the evening; and Maitland had already risen from the table, when Pennant felt his coat pulled from behind. Already, in his brief wooing, he had had some experience of signals. He put his hand back, therefore, in a hurry, and was rewarded by feeling a note slipped into it. He managed

to read the few words which it contained unobserved. "Meet me in the garden when the sun touches the horizon," ran the missive. It was not signed; but the young man knew only too well whose was the writing. His heart leaped in his breast, and his eyes grew bright with emotion. He was by no means blind to the enormous risk that he was running; but one glance at Wang, who was already considerably the worse for wine, steadied his resolve.

"I would far rather die than leave the girl I love to such a fate," he muttered under his breath, and taking his opportunity, he presently slipped away from the banquet-hall. Several of the guests had gone away to sleep off the effects of the feast on the neighbouring divans; and Le Ming and Wang wandered off into the veranda. It was easy for Pennant, therefore, to make his way unobserved to the garden at the back of the house. He entered it as the last rays of the sun struck the pinnacles of the roof. There is no twilight in the Celestial country, but the darkness did not prevent Pennant from being able to discover the place where Amethyst waited for him. She was standing leaning against the summer-house. She had thrown back her veil—he could scarcely see her face in the gathering gloom, but he felt the tremulous pressure of the hands which he held in his.

"Your Excellency," she exclaimed, "I have not courage for this. I dare not go."

"Nonsense!" said Pennant, in a firm voice. "Think what awaits you if you hesitate now. You have nothing to fear," he added. "I would fight a dozen of your countrymen to rescue you. I have ordered a cart to be in readiness at the side-door. We shall not take long in reaching the wharf, where a boat will meet us. There is

a ship waiting to sail for England at the anchorage in the river. We have only to go through a bad half-hour—then we are safe. Come, Amethyst; don't let your courage fail you at the last moment."

The poor girl was scarcely capable of replying; but when Pennant put his arm round her waist and hurried her forward, she no longer resisted.

On this auspicious night, the Prefect's Yamun was gay with lights of every imaginable shade of colour. These lights shed a partial glow on the garden, but not sufficient for anyone to notice the flight of the young people, if a sudden accident had not occurred. The Chinese girl was not accustomed to walking quickly; her pinched and stunted feet forbade the free exercise of her limbs. In struggling to reach the gate, she knocked down a pot of flowers which stood on a marble column. It fell on some large stones with a crash and a clatter.

"Let me go back," said Amethyst. "They have heard us. I know we are lost."

"No," said Pennant; "come on. Lean on me, Amethyst; I will carry you; fear nothing."

"I know we are lost," she repeated. She hid her trembling face against her lover's shoulder. They had nearly reached the gate, and Pennant was beginning to hope that the worst was over, when a noise in the balcony of the pavilion was distinctly heard, and the face of Le Ming appeared staring out into the dim light. "Haiyah?" he shouted, "who goes there?"

One of the Chinese lanterns suddenly flared up brightly—it was caught by a gust of wind, and had taken fire—the light fell full on Pennant.

Le Ming uttered a smothered oath. "By the tombs of my ancestors," he shouted, "that dog of an English-

man is running off with Amethyst! Stop, stop! Come back, come back!" he screamed as he hurried down the steps.

"Don't look behind you," whispered Pennant; "we are almost at the gate. He cannot follow us far in the darkness. Keep up your courage; we are nearly safe."

Breathlessly, the pair passed the gate, banging it behind them. They had just time to jump into the cart and tell the coachman to drive with all speed to the river, when Le Ming, with flushed face and bloodshot eyes, reached the portal. He opened the gate in a hurry, and looked down the lane in a state of hopeless bewilderment. Unfortunately for him, however, the quantities of wine he had imbibed confused his brain; and by the time he had collected his thoughts sufficiently to take any decisive step, Pennant and Wang's bride had reached the end of the lane.

Being a scholar, Le Ming was not used to running, and he therefore made no attempt to follow the pair. "Tsei! tsei" (Thieves!), he shouted at the top of his voice. Several servants came hurrying up at the sound. Le Ming pointed with distraction to the rapidly vanishing cart. "Follow them—chase them—bring them back!" he screamed. "The foreign barbarian has carried off my sister. Catch them up: bring them back, and you shall each receive a tael of silver."

It was unnecessary after this to tell the servants to set off in hot pursuit. A Chinaman will do anything for spoil, and this most unexpected situation lent wings to their feet. But run as fast as they would they could not overtake the cart, and all the trouble which was immediately to follow might have been averted, had not two or three tingchais (messengers) been coming up the



lane. Seeing the commotion at the Prefect's gate, they also eagerly turned in pursuit. On their way they were joined by four or five more of their comrades, and, after a long chase, came up with the cart in one of the most crowded thoroughfares.

The terrible excitement through which Pennant had lived for the last twenty-four hours reached a culminating point at this moment. The unfortunate girl for whose life and safety he was willing to risk so much lay back in the cart as if she were dead. Nothing in all her previous life of seclusion had prepared her for such a supreme moment as the present; she had not nerve to meet it, and gave up all for lost.

"Don't cry, Amethyst," said her lover. "I'll fight those brutes and save you yet." He jumped off the cart as he spoke, and, with a blow of his fist, knocked down the man who had seized the mule's bridle. Several others soon licked the dust in a similar manner, and for a moment there seemed a ray of hope that Pennant might gain the victory over his pursuers; but courage, however great, cannot stand up against numbers, and while the young Englishman was still laying vigorously about him, he was dealt such a deadly blow by a labourer who was standing near, that he suddenly fell senseless to the ground. Amethyst thought he was killed. She leaped from the cart, and tried to get to his side. But the Chinamen immediately took her prisoner, and, turning the mule's head, they carried her back to the Yamun. Pennant, meanwhile, was lifted on to some of the men's shoulders, and in this condition followed his intended bride to her father's house.

It would be impossible by any words to describe the furious excitement which the news of Pennant's daring and

extraordinary conduct caused at the Yamun. Wang was nearly beside himself. His bride had been snatched away almost out of his arms. It is true that his rage was caused by no sensation of disappointed love, for he had never even seen the girl he intended to marry ; but when a Chinaman supposes his marital honour to have been impugned, he is indeed then as a raving madman.

All preparations for the wedding ceremony had, of course, to be stopped, and the guests who had not already taken their departure were requested to do so by hints more significant than polite.

An event of such appalling daring—a crime so black—had not taken place within the memory of any living Chinaman. The unfortunate Wang was commiserated on all sides ; Le Ming was eagerly questioned ; while as to Le himself, he was so purple with rage that words failed him when he tried to express his emotion.

It was a slight relief to the feelings of the enraged family when poor Pennant, in a senseless condition, was brought into their midst. Rage and spite had so completely changed the Prefect's features, that in a moment he had altered from the calm and mild Confucianist into a furious madman. When the bearers laid Pennant on the ground, he rushed at him and kicked him with all his might. In short, he was only saved from murdering his quondam guest by Le Ming's intercessions.

Wang was equally beside himself ; but he vented his rage in abuse and threats. "Take the thievish barbarian to the prison," shouted the Prefect. "Put him into the prison immediately, and bring him back to life, that I may see his agonies and watch him die."

The servants obeyed this order with grim pleasure. Pennant was quickly lifted from the ground and borne

into the prefectural prison, which stood on the right hand within the front-gates of the Yamun. Over the portals of this dreadful abode, a tiger's head, with huge staring eyes and widely-open jaws, was painted. The gates of the place were dreary enough, but it would be impossible for any words to describe the horrors of the cells within. The prisoner was carried into one which contained five or six felons of the worst type, men on whose features murderous and fierce passions were plainly written. Two of these, who were reckoned the most dangerous, were chained to benches, with a second chain connecting the circlets of iron which they wore round their necks with beams of wood in the roof. The rest of the prisoners were allowed such liberty as heavy gyves would permit.

Pennant was immediately carried to an empty bench, and, being considered a violent character, was chained in the same way as the worst prisoners. But as he was still unconscious his chain was not drawn so tight as was usual. Having laid him flat on a bench, the gaoler, in obedience to the command of the Prefect, filled a tin pot with water from a jar which stood in a corner of the dungeon. A fetid stench arose as he disturbed the surface of this water, which became still worse when he emptied the contents of the pannikin over the face and head of the barbarian. The shock of the cold water, with the help, possibly, of the abhorrent odour which accompanied it, aroused Pennant, who opened his eyes and stared with dull amazement at the scene before him.

"Get up!" shouted the gaoler. He gave him a savage push as he spoke. "Get up!" he repeated. "I want to fasten you up tighter."

Pennant, in a semi-conscious way, tried to comply; but he was not quick enough to satisfy the ruffian, who kicked

at him furiously, forced him to a sitting position, and then shortened the chain which connected the circlet of iron round his neck with the beam of wood in the roof until the poor fellow was nearly choked.

The pain did more than the water to arouse Pennant. He tried to raise his hand to deal such a blow at his tormentor as had already knocked down half a dozen of his captors an hour back. But his handcuffs stopped him, and he then for the first time realized his position. He remained quiet for a moment or two, endeavouring to collect his scattered thoughts. Soon the events of the evening rushed back upon his recollection, and his one absorbing anxiety was a desire to know what had become of Amethyst.

“Where am I? What has happened?” he asked of the gaoler.

“You are in prison,” replied the man with a brutal grin, “where you are likely to remain, you dog of a barbarian! until you are carried to the execution-ground.”

Poor Pennant gave a groan. “Now I remember,” he said—“yes, I remember. Maitland was right; it was folly.” He looked up and asked a question eagerly: “Where is the Prefect’s young lady?”

“What does a foreign dog like you want to know about our young lady?” answered the fellow. “If you mention her name again, you shall be bamboosed.”

“I don’t mind a trifle of that sort, if you can assure me that she is safe.”

“Listen to the barbarian!” exclaimed the gaoler with a coarse laugh. “He says he doesn’t mind being bamboosed. He’ll sing a different song after we have tried it on.”

The other prisoners all laughed. Pennant glanced from one face to another in a hopeless and dazed manner.

“Get me some water; I am faint,” he gasped; but the brutal gaoler turned on his heel without listening to his request.

The severe blow on his head had made him sick and giddy. He tried to lie down, but was chained up so tightly that it was impossible; handcuffs prevented his using his hands—in short, he was completely powerless. Beyond a dumb sense of anguish, he was almost incapable of consecutive thought. His head was racked with aches and pains from the severe blow he had received, and his terrible thirst caused his tongue to cleave to the roof of his mouth. Maitland was right. He had failed to rescue Amethyst, and he himself was in that horror of all horrors, a Chinese prison. In all probability, the gaoler’s words would come true, and he would only leave this grim abode for the execution-ground.

But dreadful as these reflections were, the overwhelming sense of thirst was the most present torture. Pennant repeated his request for water, and one of the prisoners, better-natured than the rest, refilled his can for him. A draught of water was held to his fevered lips, but the pestilential smell made it impossible for him to drink it. He turned away in disgust.

The other prisoners had now flocked round the Englishman, and were gazing at him curiously. Finding that he could speak Chinese, they plied him with questions.

“Is there no other water?” he asked, as soon as their first curiosity was satisfied.

“Have you got any money?” was the enigmatical reply.

“Yes—some.”

“Give me a tael of silver, and I will get you some fresh water, or, better still, some tea,” said a man who wore gyves, but who was not otherwise fettered.

Pennant was powerless to get to his pockets, but the man did so for him, and when he produced a packet of sycee silver, a pleased expression crept over his low-caste face. Without a word, he crept stealthily away, carrying his booty carefully concealed about his person. He was absent nearly half an hour, during which Pennant's terrible thirst rose to fever-height; but when at last he returned, he brought a pot of tea in his hands.

"See! this is what money will effect," he whispered to the prisoner. "If you have money, you won't have such a bad time here. Now let me try if I can lengthen your chain so that you may lie down."

"Must I spend the night in this awful place?"

"Yes. Oh, you'll be used to it after a bit. They all feel it at first. I have no doubt that you dogs from a foreign country are more squeamish than we are; but custom reconciles one to anything. Now lie down, and be thankful that money has lengthened your chain."

Hard as the wooden bench was, Pennant's head ached so badly that he was glad to comply; and the prisoner who had constituted himself his friend for the time being, sat down at a little distance and watched him with interest.

The night had now arrived, and the other inmates of the prison crowded one by one into poor Pennant's cell. Much as he longed for sleep, no sleep would visit him in that dreadful atmosphere. His bodily sufferings would alone have kept him awake; but the tortures of his mind with regard to Amethyst nearly drove him mad.

"What a fool I have been!" he kept muttering to himself. "I thought to save that unfortunate, innocent child, and to what a fate have I subjected her! There is no mercy in the Chinese mind. For aught I can tell, her life may be the penalty of her rashness. Maitland was right when

I spoke to him yesterday. His unwillingness to help me nearly maddened me at the time; but now I see with what justice he spoke. I wish to goodness that he knew of my present condition. My only chance is in giving him a hint. I wonder if that fellow who brought me the tea would help me? I don't exactly know how far an English Consul's power extends, nor how much these Chinese are likely to regard it; but my only chance is to put him in possession of the present dreadful facts."

Pennant sat up again as these thoughts occurred to him; he stretched out his foot and managed to touch the prisoner who had brought him the tea.

In a moment the man was up and bending over him. "Can this little one serve you?" he asked.

"It is possible," replied Pennant. "Can I trust you?"

"If you have money—yes."

"I have plenty of money."

"Good—very good. Your wishes are mine. I obey. What can I do for you?"

"Can you contrive to take a note from me to the English Consul?"





### CHAPTER III.

#### *IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE ENEMY.*

**M**EANWHILE, Maitland was spending an uneasy night. At the betrothal feast he had given Pennant more than one anxious glance; but the young Englishman's cool and sensible behaviour had induced him to hope that he had got the better of his mad infatuation, and that he had made up his mind not to proceed to extremities. On leaving the banqueting-hall, however, Maitland observed that Pennant's seat was empty. The Consul went hastily into the outside court of the Yamun to look for him. He could not see him anywhere, and, not being able to feign any excuse to prolong his own visit, went home.

During the night Maitland's latent uneasiness took the form of strange dreams. In these dreams Pennant himself no longer existed. The Consul found himself back again in the old days, long before the birth of this young man. He was walking with Lady Margaret, who became once again the tall, slim, and fair maiden of his dreams. He awoke presently with her name on his lips. Surely it was a queer dream; he almost laughed to himself as he recalled it.



At this moment Bryce entered the Consul's room and presented him with a note. "A messenger from the Prefect's Yamun has brought this," he exclaimed. "The man comes direct from the prison, and I fear there is bad news."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Maitland; "it has nothing to do with that foolhardy boy, I hope?"

Bryce was silent.

Maitland tore open the note, which was a hasty scrawl in poor Pennant's writing. "Your prophecies have come true," he wrote. "I was imprisoned last night in my attempt to rescue Amethyst. I am certain to go to the execution-ground unless you can devise some means of rescuing me. For my mother's sake I beg of you to do what you can. I know that, after your warnings, I deserve nothing at your hands; still, if it is in your power to rescue me from a horrible fate, I am sure I shall not plead in vain."

The letter was without signature.

"Bryce," said Maitland, in a choking voice, "leave me for a few minutes. I must get up immediately. Wait in the anteroom until I come to you; and—hark you, Bryce—tell that fellow from the prison to wait."

Bryce nodded, and left the room.

Maitland dressed himself in double-quick time and joined his servant in the anteroom.

"The poor lad is in the clutches of those brutes," he said. "My worst fears are realized. At any cost he must be rescued. I won't write to him, Bryce, for the letter might get into the wrong hands, and only do mischief; but tell the fellow who brought it that he may assure Mr. Pennant that I won't leave a stone unturned to save him. Send the man back with this message immediately, and then come to me."

“Yes, sir,” said Bryce.

He saw the man from the prison, delivered the Consul’s message, and further added from himself that the young Englishman was regarded as a god in his own land, and that he had money to any extent. Bryce then went back to the Consul.

“Order my sedan-chair,” said Maitland. “I must go without a moment’s loss of time to the Prefect’s Yamun. No, I cannot wait for breakfast. There is no rest for me until I get the lad out of that infernal prison-house.”

On his way to the Prefecture, Maitland thought again of his dream of the previous night. “I wondered why it was sent to me,” he said to himself; “but now I clearly understand. If I had needed an incentive to help that poor lad, the dream of his mother, as she was in the old days, would give it. The fact is, I could never hold up my head again if her boy met with a violent end in this place.”

Maitland reached the Yamun, and sent in an immediate message to request the Prefect to grant him an interview.

He was asked to wait in one of the anterooms while the messenger carried his request to Le.

Meanwhile, Le, aided by Wang’s spiteful words and bitter insinuations, was hard at work. Early as it still was in the morning, he had already written and despatched a hasty letter to the Viceroy of the Province. In this mendacious epistle he reported that a violent riot, instigated by a foreign rowdy, had broken out the evening before in the city; that after his men had performed prodigies of valour, the rioters had been dispersed and the leader made prisoner. As this man was a dangerous character, the Prefect begged leave of the Viceroy to send him to instant execution. This document, the moment it

was written, was despatched to the provincial capital, and the Prefect sank back in his chair with a sigh of relief. He even laughed aloud in his fiendish glee. "That document will settle the fate of the foreign barbarian," he said, turning to Wang.

Wang bowed, and expressed his satisfaction at hearing the Prefect's opinion; and Ming, who at this moment entered the room, was further informed of the hopeful position of affairs.

"There is nothing for us now but revenge," exclaimed the Prefect; "and revenge we are likely to have."

The three men were busy talking over these matters, when a servant entered the study with the message of the English Consul.

"Leave the room, and return when I call," said Le.

The man made a low bow, and retired.

Le looked at Wang, who, in his turn, gave a glance of quick interrogation, first at Ming, and then at the Prefect.

"It is evident," said Wang, "that the English Consul has got wind of the Englishman's imprisonment. If he interferes, we may yet lose all."

"Not we. I'll undertake to manage him," said the Prefect. "I'll decline to see him."

"Lai!" (Come!) he shouted. When the servant appeared, he gave him an obsequious message. "Tell the English Consul," he said, "that I much regret being obliged to decline the honour of an interview with him; but sudden and severe illness makes it impossible for me to see him to-day."

The man immediately retired, and repeated this message to Maitland, who received it with outward quietness. He immediately left the Yamun, entered his sedan-chair, and told the bearers to take him back to the Consulate.

When he reached home, he desired Bryce to follow him at once to his private study.

"It's just as I feared, Bryce," he said; "the Prefect is evidently bent on revenge. Whispers have reached me that he is furiously angry, and I have not the least doubt that he has already asked for an order from the Viceroy for that poor lad's execution. If we don't take immediate and serious steps, Mr. Pennant's life will be the forfeit. The Prefect has refused to grant me an interview on a trivial pretext, and I can see that it is war to the knife."

"What do you think of doing, sir?" asked Bryce.

"It is war to the knife," repeated Maitland—"war to the knife; and whoever is first in the field wins. Leave me for a few minutes, Bryce. I must write a letter to the Prefect, which you will take to him immediately."

Bryce withdrew; and Maitland sat before his desk. He was always a determined-looking man. As he wrote, the expression of his face grew hard and firm. His letter ran as follows:

(After compliments.) "I have been made acquainted with the fact that you have committed an Englishman of the name of James Pennant to prison in your Yamun. I claim his release immediately, and will undertake to be responsible for his custody. May every prosperity be yours.

"RICHARD MAITLAND."

This letter was addressed to the Prefect, and despatched immediately.

In the course of the afternoon, Maitland received the following reply:

"Respectfully I beg to thank your Excellency for your communication. James Pennant is a prisoner in the

prison-house of my Yamun. I have, in accordance with usage, referred his case to the Viceroy of the Province, and am therefore unable to act in the matter of the prisoner's release without his instructions. May ten thousand happinesses be in store for you.

“L.E.”

When Maitland read this unsatisfactory letter, his face turned very white. He motioned to the messenger to await his reply, and went back to his study. He summoned Bryce, who appeared immediately.

“You know the English frigate lying off the port, don't you?” he asked.

“Yes, sir—the *Rattler*.”

“I shall require you to take a message to the Captain directly. In the meantime, wait here while I write a reply to the Prefect's letter.”

Maitland then hastily wrote as follows :

(After compliments.) “As English Consul, I insist upon the release of the Englishman, James Pennant. If he has not been committed to my custody within twelve hours from now, I shall enforce my claim with the assistance of the Captain of Her Majesty's ship *Rattler*, at present lying off the port. May your happiness continue and increase.

“RICHARD MAITLAND.”

This letter was despatched immediately ; but Maitland waited in vain for any reply, the fact being that Le only wanted time to carry out his own fiendish schemes. He thought the Viceroy's answer would, in all probability, reach him that evening. If so, Pennant could be executed in the morning. When Pennant was no more, it would be easy to dare the English Consul to do his worst.

When the sun went down, the letter so eagerly expected arrived. It consisted of eulogies on the Prefect's conduct in having preserved the peace of the city, and gave full consent to the execution of the ringleader.

"It is as I hoped," exclaimed Le. "The disgrace on my house shall be fully avenged, and that foreign devil shall go to his doom in the morning."

"I should wish to be present at the execution," said Wang, over whose sallow face a glow of satisfaction was now visible.

"Yes, you shall come," said Le. "You also, Ming, shall accompany us to witness the barbarian's last agonies."

Le Ming, however, was silent. He was too cowardly to dare to express his real sentiments, but in reality he did not wish his quondam friend to die. He had seen Amethyst in the course of the day, and the poor girl's agonies of distress, and piteous entreaties to him to save Pennant, had disturbed him disagreeably. It was distasteful to him to see suffering of any sort; and as it was inevitable that poor Pennant must pay the price of his rashness with his life, Le Ming trusted that Wang would quickly marry the miserable little Amethyst, and so take her out of his sight. He was hurrying to his own apartments, intending to soothe his fears with a pipe of opium, when he was startled by feeling a light hand laid on his arm, and, looking round, he saw his sister.

"I managed to evade my gaolers, and I am here," she exclaimed. "I know the worst. The Viceroy has ordered the Englishman to be executed in the morning."

"You know nothing of the kind," replied Ming.

Amethyst looked at him fixedly. "What is the use of telling lies at a moment like this?" she answered. "Don't I know my nation and its ways? You must help me."

"I cannot, Amethyst. It is as much as my life is worth even to be seen talking with you."

"No one sees us," replied Amethyst. "But if you don't promise to help me, I'll scream as loud as ever I can until someone comes."

"Come into my room," said Ming, drawing his sister roughly forward as he spoke.

"Now," he said, "what do you want me to do?"

"I have written a note to the English Consul; here it is. I want you to take it to him immediately."

"You must be mad!"

"I am not mad. This note must reach the Consul to-night."

"You have lost all sense of decency and honour," said Ming in disgust. "You are infatuated—beside yourself. I cannot listen to your wild and wicked words another moment."

Amethyst covered her face with her hands. "I am in despair," she moaned—"in such dreadful despair that I cannot even cry! Your cruel words do not hurt me—nothing hurts me but the death of the man I love! Surely, Ming, even you, hard as you are, cannot wish him to die?"

"That is true enough," replied Ming. "I have no personal dislike to the Englishman. He committed the blackest of crimes when he aspired to your hand. Before that incident, I liked him."

"Then prove your liking. Take this note to the Consul. You need not see him. Deliver the note to one of his servants, and come away."

"If I do this for you, Amethyst, will you do something in return for me?"

"Yes, if I can."

“ Will you marry Wang quietly to-morrow evening, and go away ?”

“ If Wang insists upon it, I will.” Amethyst’s face looked pale and resolved.

Le Ming took the note without another word, and she glided back to her own apartments.

Late that evening, poor Amethyst’s badly-written and distracted note was slipped softly into Bryce’s hand by a Chinese messenger who crept up to him under cover of the dusk. Bryce took the letter at once to his master. It only contained these words : “ The Englishman’s doom is sealed—unless you save him, he will be executed in the morning.”

Maitland read the note, and handed it to his servant. “ We have not made our preparations a moment too soon,” he said with a grim smile.

The following morning dawned with a thick yellow fog. Pennant, after going through twenty-four hours of every conceivable agony both of mind and body, had fallen into a light sleep. The prisoner whom he had bribed to carry his note to Maitland sat at a little distance watching the young man’s pale face as it was reflected by the light of a greasy lamp. It is not in the nature of the ordinary Chinaman to yield to painful emotion, and although Sing knew that the foreigner must die, his sole regret now consisted in the thought that those bribes which he hoped to wring from him would cease.

A gaoler came in, kicking Sing aside as he did so. He went up to the Englishman and shook him roughly. “ You are ordered to instant execution—get up,” he said.

Pennant started, and looked round him for a moment in a state of bewilderment. When so cruelly awakened, he had been indulging in pleasant dreams : he was once



more back in England—he was with his mother—Amethyst was by his side—all was well. The appalling reality caused his brave spirit to quail for an instant.

“What are you lingering for?” said the gaoler. “Come at once. His Excellency, Le, is waiting outside. It will be all the worse for you if you keep him.”

“I am ready,” answered Pennant. With a strong effort, he pulled himself together. Whatever happened, he must meet his fate like a man. “My real sorrow is for Amethyst,” he murmured; “she will be left to the tender mercies of that brute Wang.”

The gaoler loosened his chain, and he followed the man out of the prison with a steady step. A little crowd of people had already formed just outside the gates of the prison. Le and Wang were there in sedan-chairs.

The moment Pennant appeared, he was seized with brutal roughness by two or three coolies, who flung him into a basket which was slung on a pole. The pole was lifted at either end by a couple of men, who immediately started forward at a quick trot. They were followed by a number of lictors; and the rear of the procession was brought up by the Prefect and Wang in their state chairs. This gloomy procession had almost reached the dismal execution-ground, when a sudden shout arose on the foggy morning air. It pierced the thick gloom like a knife, and aroused poor Pennant from a sort of semi-delirium into which he had sunk. He seemed to himself to be far away from his present horrible surroundings. The thought even of Amethyst had faded from his mind: he imagined that he was talking to his mother, and he felt a thrill of comfort as he listened to her soft tones in reply.

Suddenly the hearty cry of English voices awoke him

to full and vigorous consciousness. He sat up, looked eagerly round him, and made frantic efforts to get out of the basket. His chains prevented this; but his quick eyes had already seen the welcome face of Maitland. The Consul was accompanied by a couple of naval officers and some twenty to thirty blue-jackets. When Maitland saw the gloomy little procession he stopped, and spoke eagerly to the Captain of the frigate who walked by his side.

"Merciful heavens, Rice!" he exclaimed, "we are only barely in time. That poor girl spoke the truth in her note. The Prefect wanted to steal a march on us. The unfortunate wretch in that basket on his way to execution is no other than poor Pennant."

"Is it indeed?" exclaimed the Captain. "Well, we'll soon set him free." He turned to his men. "The prisoner in that basket is the Englishman whom you want to release," he said; "now is your time."

With a truly British cheer the sailors rushed at the guards. They made a slight resistance, but quickly took to flight, leaving their prisoner on the ground.

Wang shrank back in terror in his sedan-chair; but the Prefect, supported by the rage which consumed him, would not let his prey go so easily. He struggled out of his chair, and, with most unwonted activity, rushed at Maitland, who was bending over Pennant and trying to loosen his chains. The angry Prefect began to use fists and feet with wonderful zeal, and Maitland might have had some trouble in defending himself if a sailor, seeing the position of affairs, had not suddenly rushed to the rescue. He caught hold of the Prefect's tail, wound it round his hand, and gave that lofty mandarin so vigorous a pull that it laid him prostrate.

Several sailors now came up, and, with some difficulty,

succeeded in removing Pennant's heavy chains. They then seized hold of the Prefect's sedan-chair, and carefully lifted the young man into it. An imperative order was given to the red-tasselled and official-coated bearers, who, afraid to disobey, carried the young man to the Consulate.





## CHAPTER IV.

### *A TUG-OF-WAR.*

**N**OTHING could exceed the excitement and rage which consumed the Prefect when he saw his prisoner thus carried off before his very eyes; he burst into a volley of imprecations, and his few remaining retainers followed his example. An instant of quick thought showed Maitland that this position of affairs would undoubtedly lead to an open riot, which might endanger the lives of the English in the "foreign settlement," if he did not immediately carry matters with a high hand. He whispered a word to Captain Rice, who nodded in reply. The Prefect was hastily lifted from the ground by some of the sailors, and, in the company of Wang, carried back to his Yamun. Here Maitland instantly declared him prisoner; and to ensure his safe custody, the Captain of the *Rattler* placed a guard of twenty men on the Yamun.

While these exciting affairs were going on, poor Amethyst was enduring all the tortures of suspense. She fully believed that Ming had delivered her note, and this hope sustained her a little; but as her flight from her rooms on the night before had been discovered, she was now more strictly guarded than ever, and two of the most ill-favoured and

hardest of the female servants of the Yamun were appointed her gaolers. Her agony of mind would have aroused the pity of most; but these women were impervious to her tears and groans. As the morning advanced, and she felt that the hour of her lover's execution was at hand, her restless grief gave place to a stony despair. She sat on a divan with her hands folded on her lap, and an expression in her eyes which showed plainly that she saw nothing of what was going on around her. One of the women came to her, and announced, with a bitter laugh, that Pennant had just been taken to the execution-ground. Although the poor girl expected this blow, it fell with the weight of a thunder-clap.

"It is a lie!" she exclaimed.

"It is no lie," replied the woman. "We have just seen him carried out of the gates in a basket, with the executioner behind him."

Amethyst did not faint, but her face turned whiter than ever, and the cold perspiration stood out on her forehead. The tramp of many feet, and the sound of foreign voices in the outer courtyard, aroused her suddenly from her state of stupor. One of the women rushed off, burning with curiosity, to learn the news. She quickly returned with a look of consternation, and briefly announced the fact that Pennant had been rescued by the English Consul and a body of sailors, and that Le was now a prisoner in his own Yamun.

A smile of delight broke over Amethyst's pale little face. "Oh, how I thank thee, Kwanyin Buddha!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands with fervour.

"You are a heartless daughter," said the woman. "You think of nothing but that foreign barbarian. What about your father, cruel girl?"

"My father does not care for me," replied Amethyst with spirit. "He never cared for me. I am but a girl; and girls are like dirt in his eyes. He has always treated me badly, and now he forces upon me a marriage which I detest. Yes, the day is bright again; the sun shines, and hope has returned. I will offer up a prayer to Omito Fuh for the restoration of the Englishman. Perhaps he may yet be restored to me."

The women were too angry to say anything more to Amethyst, and, securely locking her into her room, they left her to her fate.

Maitland, on his return to the Consulate, was met by Pennant, who clasped the Consul's hand in almost speechless gratitude as he came hastily out to greet him. "How can I thank you?" he exclaimed. "You have taken me out of the jaws of death."

"Foolish boy!" said Maitland, who felt nearer tears than he had ever done in his life before, "you have been rescued by the skin of your teeth. Didn't I tell you what would happen if you persisted in that mad folly?"

"But the folly is not over," exclaimed Pennant. "I mean," he added, "what *you* term the folly is not over. You don't suppose that I am going to leave poor Amethyst to her doom?"

"Heavens! listen to the lad," cried Maitland, turning to Captain Rice as he spoke. "I wonder what you mean to do now?" he added.

"This," said Pennant stoutly. "I have been told by one of your servants of what occurred after I was carried away. I intend to go immediately to the Yamun and help the sailors to keep guard until you can bring a sufficient force to enable me to carry Amethyst off."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Maitland in some justifiable

anger. "You are the cause of the entire quarrel. It is not safe for you to remain another hour in this place; and, in fact, I shall now take matters with a high hand, and prevent your carrying out your wild scheme. If possible, that poor girl shall be saved; but you do no good by pressing your services into the affair. A passenger steamer called the *Lightning* has just come into port, and I propose that you go there immediately with some of Captain Rice's sailors."

Maitland spoke with such authority that Pennant was forced to give an unwilling assent. He presently walked out of the room and stood in the compound.

"Bryce," said Maitland, "keep guard on that young fellow. I shall not have an easy moment until he is safe on board the *Lightning*."

Bryce nodded, and stood by Pennant's side in the compound. "It would be unfair of you, sir," he said, touching Pennant on his shoulder, "to get my master into any further trouble. God alone knows if he'll ever get out of the terrible fix you have put him in already."

"If that is so, I submit," said Pennant.

"Thank you, sir, for that," replied the man. "I know, of course, if you give your word that it's all right."

"It is, Bryce—it is. But surely no one was ever in such a predicament before. The thought of the young lady at the Yamun drives me almost mad."

"She'll be right enough while the English sailors are there," replied Bryce; but though he said these words stoutly, in his heart of hearts he felt very uncertain with regard to poor Amethyst's safety. The Chinese are remarkable for their cunning and duplicity. As a mere matter of revenge, the unfortunate girl might be executed at any moment.

That evening, Pennant was safely conveyed to the *Lightning*, and then began that celebrated diplomatic battle which, as Maitland afterwards said, had added in a single week "many years to his life." He felt that he had taken a very decisive step in making the Prefect prisoner—a step which only ultimate success would justify in the eyes of the Foreign Office. He wrote immediately to the Viceroy, giving him a full account of what had taken place, and justifying his action on the plea of necessity. This letter was sent by special messenger, and was replied to by the Viceroy in very strong language. He said that Maitland's action amounted to a declaration of war, and that, for his part, he would find it impossible to hold any communication with him until he received a reply to his memorial to the Emperor. This letter showed Maitland that he must not expect any favour from the native authorities. He knew that it would take some time before the Emperor's ultimatum would be received; he must therefore remain for many days in suspense.

Meanwhile, a blow was being prepared of which he had little expectation. In the Yamun of every mandarin there are always some hangers-on who are accustomed to do the secret work of the office. One such man in the Viceroy's Yamun was a tingchai, named Ling, a clever and wily Chinaman. After sending his letter to the English Consul, the Viceroy thought deeply for a time; he then summoned Ling to his presence. As he entered the great man's hall, Ling fell on his knees.

"I have got some work for you to do," said the Viceroy.

"Your Excellency has but to command, and I obey," said the man.

"The work before you is this: you are to start imme-



diately for Ch'anyang, to carry a message to the Prefect. At present he is in the hands of the 'foreign devils,' and you will have to find some means of gaining admittance to his presence. Having succeeded in this, tell him that I am preparing a force to rescue him, and that on the 15th of this month, two days from now, we shall attack the barbarian guard and release him from captivity."

Ling immediately started on his mission, which he carried out faithfully, and with his usual wily success. The message from the Viceroy was delivered to Le with all due secrecy. Ling then, feeling much relieved, proceeded to enjoy himself. When engaged in business, he was a total abstainer from opium; but in moments of relaxation, he found his chief delight in the pipe—he felt now, therefore, that he might indulge in his favourite solace. As he entered the opium saloon which he was accustomed to frequent at Ch'anyang, he was greeted by two or three of the habitués.

"Haiyah, his Honour Ling has come. What wind has blown you here?" said a man who had more energy than the rest.

"I have come on a matter of business," said Ling with an air of some importance, as he stretched himself upon the divan and took the pipe which the landlord offered him.

"What business can you have here, when the Prefect is a prisoner?"

"It is about that that I have come."

As he became more and more under the influence of the drug, his self-control weakened, and in reply to the leading questions of his companion, he had, before the evening ended, told him of the preparations which the Viceroy was making for an attack on the English sailors

who were guarding the Yamun. This man—Te by name—started off at once in high delight to the English Consulate. He was not unknown to Bryce, having been employed as a coolie on several occasions, so that when he came and asked to be allowed to see his Excellency the Consul, Bryce admitted him into the presence of his master.

“This little one,” began the man, “has some important news which your Excellency will be glad to know.”

“What is it?” asked Maitland sharply.

“Your Excellency,” said Te, “knows that this little one is poor. He has now something to sell. Will your Excellency deign to buy it?”

“I can’t attend to you now; you must come some other time.”

“But, your Excellency, some other time will be too late. I want to tell you of news from the provincial capital.”

At this Maitland at once pricked up his ears. “If you have anything of importance to tell me,” he said, “I will give you its full value. But you must mention at once what it is, for I have no time to waste.”

“The news is this, your Excellency: The Viceroy is sending General Pêng with a force of five hundred men to take the Prefect out of the custody of your sailors, and to deliver over the young lady Amethyst to her bridegroom Wang. The General starts immediately.”

As Te proceeded with his story, Maitland eagerly scanned his features. His scrutiny of Te seemed to satisfy him. He sat for a moment lost in anxious thought, asked a few more pertinent questions, then said: “I will give you twenty taels of silver for what you have now told me; and if your news proves to be correct, you shall have twenty more.”

"This little one humbly thanks your Excellency," replied Te.

Maitland immediately went to an iron chest which stood in the corner of the room; he opened it, took the silver out, and gave it to Te. The man received it with a profound obeisance, and then took his departure. Maitland rang his bell at once for Bryce.

"You must take a note from me to Captain Rice without a moment's delay," he said. "Or stay; I won't even wait to write. Ask him to come to me to the Consulate immediately, on a matter of importance."

"Yes, sir," said Bryce. He withdrew, and Maitland began to pace up and down his study in deep and perturbed thought.

In less than an hour Captain Rice arrived. "What's up now, Maitland?" he asked as he entered unannounced.

"Why, this," said Maitland: "A Chinaman has just brought me news that a Chinese force of five hundred men is leaving the provincial capital to-morrow for the purpose of releasing the Prefect."

"The deuce it is!" said Captain Rice.

"Yes," said Maitland; "and we must defeat it. We have gone already too far to allow us in any shape or way to beat a retreat. We must stand to our guns, and I have asked you to come here to draw up a plan of campaign. What force have you at your disposal?"

"Apart from the guard at the Yamun," said Captain Rice, "I could, at a stretch, spare a hundred men from the ship."

"That would be quite enough for the work," said the Consul. "But we must make assurance doubly sure, if we are to escape censure from the Foreign Office. Nothing succeeds like success. Before you came in, I was thinking

that I would requisition all the spare men from the *Lightning*. I have no doubt, too, that my troublesome young friend, Pennant, would like to have a share in the fray; he has absolutely taken leave of his senses on the subject of this Chinese girl."

"A pretty mess he has got us all into!" exclaimed Captain Rice. "Well, I have no objection. I know the skipper of the *Lightning* well. He is a good fellow, and has the right stuff in him. So I suggest that we ask him to meet us here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, to talk matters over."

This suggestion was carried into effect; and at an early hour on the following morning Captain Little, the skipper of the *Lightning*, met Maitland and Captain Rice at the Consulate. He listened attentively to the entire story, and then said: "I can supply a force of twenty-five men, including Lascars, from the *Lightning*. These men will of course be under the command of Captain Rice."

"That will do splendidly," exclaimed the Captain. "Of course, I need not say that absolute secrecy is indispensable. I for my part will have everything in readiness on board the *Rattler*, and you will probably take the same precautions on the *Lightning*."

"Yes," replied Captain Little, "my men will be fully prepared. I know one gentleman on board," he continued with a grim smile, "who will be only too eager to be foremost in the fight."

"Ah, that young scamp!" cried Maitland. "He little guessed, when he fell in love with a Chinese girl, what trouble he was going to get us all into!"

"He's a plucky lad," remarked Captain Little. "I believe, if he had his will, he'd submit to any torture rather than allow a hair of that girl's head to be hurt."

I'm only able to keep him on board my vessel, sir, because he feels that his honour is pledged to you."

"Ah well, he comes of a good stock," said Maitland, who was visibly affected by these words.

Captain Little immediately afterwards took his leave, and the day passed slowly and without any special event.

The evening turned out close and sultry. Peals of thunder were heard reverberating in the distance, and flashes of summer lightning illumined the horizon. Maitland did not think the attack would be made until the morrow, but he was far too excited to sleep. He went out and paced up and down his veranda, buried in deep and anxious thought. Suddenly, after one of those strange lulls which precede a storm, a crash of tom-toms broke upon his weary ears. In an instant he was all alive, and, turning towards the native city, he distinctly saw flashes as of muskets, and heard the shouts, which he knew well, of Chinese soldiers entering on a fray. He at once took in the position. Without the loss of an instant, he ran downstairs and sent the fleetest of his messengers to bear the news to Captains Rice and Little. The next half-hour was one of terrible anxiety. Maitland knew that the lives of the guards of the Yamun were in imminent danger. Having girded on his sword and armed himself with a revolver, he went out in the direction of the ships. He had not gone far, when Captain Rice's cheery shout assured him that help was at hand. At the same time Captain Little with his contingent, which included Pennant, came up, and together the relieving force marched to the scene of the attack.

They were not a moment too soon. The guard at the Yamun had stood manfully to their posts. The young midshipman in charge, though a boy in years, had a square

head on his shoulders, and did not understand what fear meant. At the first alarm he closed the outer gates, and leaving a portion of his guard to defend the entrance, he stationed the remainder at the weak places in the outer walls. For some time the front gates resisted the attack; but a gun which the Viceroy's troops had brought with them shattered the massive doors. With a shout, the Chinese rushed to the attack, but the sailors were equal to the occasion, and a volley from twelve rifles checked the onslaught.

The Chinamen hesitated, and then ran for shelter into doorways and behind the walls of the houses. Their General, however, was made of sterner stuff, and riding ahead of a fresh detachment, he charged in at the doorway. Matters now became serious; and the brave sailors must have been inevitably overborne, had not the sound of a British cheer suddenly aroused them to fresh action. Captain Rice and his men came up quickly. They soon forced their way to the gates; and when once inside, the victory was assured, for the Chinamen were practically powerless before the discipline and weapons of the sailors.

It need hardly be said that Pennant was foremost in the fray. No one fought with such desperate fury as he did. The courage of despair seemed to animate him. As soon as ever the sailors got inside the Yamun, he desired a couple of likely-looking Jack Tars to follow him immediately, and rushed off in the direction of the women's quarters. Amethyst, who had listened to the fighting in a state of indescribable terror, had at last fallen on her knees. She became (in the passion of her own feelings) almost impervious to the terrible sounds which surrounded her. Her guardians, nearly as excited as she was, relieved their minds with uttering imprecations

on the "foreign devils," and by calling down every species of shame and indignity on the tombs of their ancestors. A sudden lull in the fighting added wonder to suspense; and while the women were deliberating on the meaning of this, and Amethyst knelt on, uttering feeble little prayers to the goddess who looks down on the miseries of mankind, the door of her room was flung open, and Pennant with the sailors burst in. In a moment he had her in his arms.

"Saved!" he gasped—"you are saved, after all! Come; let me wrap this shawl round you. You must submit to be carried—I can get you out by a side-door. No fear of our pursuers reaching us this time, Amethyst."

Pennant was right. In less than an hour's time Amethyst was safe on board the *Lightning*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten days later this rash and headstrong pair were married in the Cathedral at Hong-kong, when a large crowd of eager spectators, attracted by the novelty of the scene, assembled to witness the ceremony, and when for the first time an Englishman vowed before a Christian altar to love, honour, and cherish a daughter of China.







A VICTIM OF THE KOLAO-HWUY.





## A VICTIM OF THE KOLAO-HWUY

### CHAPTER I.

#### *THE CITY OF WILLOWS.*

**A**FTER the exciting adventures related in the last story, the Foreign Office thought it well, for more than one reason, to remove Richard Maitland from the Consulate at Ch'anyang to the larger treaty port of Tingchiang. Here he was in the centre of a large English community; and as time passed, the strange events which had so seriously destroyed his peace, and almost cost him his life, began to fade from his mind. He commenced once again to look upon life from a humorous and kindly standpoint. He was soon an immense favourite with the English residents, and began also to be popular with those Chinamen who came in his way.

On the day when this story opens, Maitland was in his most genial frame of mind. An entertainment on a very magnificent scale was to take place that evening at the Consulate. To this festivity nearly all the English residents of the place were invited. Amongst the expected guests was a young man of the name of Wilfrid Sterling.

He had been a resident at Tingchiang for some years, and was one of the most popular of the English inhabitants. On this occasion his name was in every one's mouth, for he had just returned from England bringing his bride with him. Mrs. Sterling happened to belong to a family whom Maitland knew well in the old country, and it was primarily in her honour that the ball was given.

In due course the company began to assemble. The splendid rooms of the Consulate were brightly lighted. The gardens and verandas were rendered gay with Chinese lanterns and various other illuminations. A spirited band kept up a constant and gay strain of music. It would have been difficult anywhere to find a more brilliant or more animated scene. The hour was close on eleven; but the special guests of the evening—Sterling and his wife—had not arrived. As the moments flew by without their putting in an appearance, the feeling of expectation which all shared gradually reached that of disappointment. A bride was not to be found every day at Tingchiang; and this bride, report said, was both beautiful and young.

Maitland had seen Mrs. Sterling that morning. She and her husband had promised to arrive in good time; the Consul was therefore beginning to feel a slight sense of uneasiness at their prolonged absence, when a commotion near one of the principal entrances caused him to hurry forward. One of the Chinese servants called the names of Mr. and Mrs. Sterling in a shrill, high, penetrating voice, and a slender girl in white, accompanied by a tall, square-shouldered young man, came eagerly forward.

"Better late than never," exclaimed Maitland, as he extended a hearty hand of welcome to each.

"We were unexpectedly delayed. We are ever so sorry," explained Mrs. Sterling.

Maitland offered her his arm, and they entered the ball-room.

All eyes were immediately fixed on the young bride's pretty face. The brightness of her complexion, her fresh and rounded cheeks, the delicate lines of her soft mouth, all proclaimed to those habitués of an Oriental climate the fact of her late arrival from England.

"She will soon lose those roses," whispered a sallow-faced lady to a young naval officer with whom she was dancing.

"What a beautiful girl she is!" he replied. "I hope I may get introduced to her. Her husband is a remarkably good-looking fellow too."

"Oh, Wilfrid Sterling has been the pet of all the English residents for a long time," replied Mrs. Anstruther. "He is one of the best-natured, jolliest fellows I have ever come across. We were all astonished when he suddenly got leave of absence and rushed off to England, and still more amazed when the news reached us that he was coming back with an English wife. He was not quite well when he left—I only hope the change has done him good."

Here Mrs. Anstruther looked eagerly across the room at Sterling, as he stood in the recess of a window. He was not speaking, and some lines of worry were plainly discernible on his brow.

"Now that I look at him, he does not seem much better for the change," she continued. "What a pity! One would have thought that England and matrimony would have set up any man."

"Sterling's complexion is as sallow as his wife's is the reverse," replied Captain Jeffrey. "I should say—though perhaps it is treason to think such a thing—that your good friend indulges in opium-smoking on the quiet."

"I am certain he does not," replied Mrs. Anstruther,

with indignation; "he is as steady a fellow as any in the settlement. But come this way; I must speak to him, and get him to introduce me to Mrs. Sterling."

Sterling had moved farther into the window. No one was speaking to him for a moment, and the look of anxiety seemed to deepen and grow more marked on his dark, handsome face. His young wife was standing not ten feet away from him. Her girlish and silvery laughter floated to him where he stood. He clenched his teeth.

"For Evelyn's sake, I will cut this Gordian knot," he said to himself.

Just at this moment Mrs. Anstruther came up to him. "How do you do?" she said. "Allow me to introduce my friend, Captain Jeffrey. I am delighted to welcome you back, Mr. Sterling. Pray, introduce me without any delay to your wife. How sweet and fresh and charming she looks—and so young, almost a child."

"Evelyn is nineteen," replied Sterling. "She will be only too glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Anstruther; and if you can help her in any way, you will secure my abundant gratitude. She knows nothing of the life here, and I am very much afraid may suffer from loneliness while I am busy at the office."

"She won't suffer from that long," Mrs. Anstruther said. "There isn't a lady in the settlement who won't be good to your bride. Oh, how provoking! Mr. Maitland has taken her away to a distant part of the room. Most inconsiderate of our good Consul. I see that my introduction must wait. Well, I will come back to you presently. In the meantime, I should like you and my friend Captain Jeffrey to know each other."

Sterling bowed, and Mrs. Anstruther, seeing a new

acquaintance, hurried off to exchange greetings. The two young men were left standing side by side in the veranda.

"Why don't you join the dancers?" said Captain Jeffrey.

Before Sterling could reply, someone touched his coat from behind. He turned abruptly; a Chinese servant who had come up slipped a small piece of paper into his hand. His fingers closed over it tremulously; he could not quite conceal his emotion.

"You will excuse me for a moment, Captain Jeffrey, while I attend to this," he said.

He went and stood under the light of a Chinese lantern. His eyes quickly devoured the following words: "Meet me under the willow-tree by the bridge which crosses the Mien stream, at twelve to-night. If you dare to disobey, or if you breathe a word to the authorities, an order will at once be issued for the murder of yourself and of your wife; so obey and tremble."

Having read this ominous epistle twice, the young man crushed it tightly in the palm of his right hand, and, turning to Captain Jeffrey, who had been watching him with undisguised interest and some slight alarm, began to speak in a husky voice.

"This letter is of importance," he said; "I must attend to it immediately."

"You cannot intend to leave us!" exclaimed Jeffrey. "Why, you and your wife have only just arrived, and I know our good friend Maitland has been expecting you the whole evening."

"I know it, worse luck," muttered Sterling. "The business which now calls me away also delayed my coming here in time. I must hurry off. I wonder if you

would be good-natured enough to take a message from me to Mrs. Sterling?"

"I will, with all the pleasure in the world."

"A thousand thanks. Pray, do not stand on ceremony with her. Tell her I asked you to speak to her. Say that I have been obliged to leave here unexpectedly, but I expect to be home early to-morrow morning. Ask Maitland to see that she has a sedan-chair home to our *hong* [house]. I shall be eternally grateful if you can do this for me."

A grave expression came over Captain Jeffrey's good-humoured face when Sterling left him.

"That lad looks as if he had got into some sort of trouble," he muttered. "Yes, of course, I will take his message to his pretty wife; but I will also interfere sufficiently in the matter to consult Maitland. I confess I do not like the look of things. That letter, which evidently gave Sterling such a shock, was not written by an Englishman."

As these thoughts passed quickly through his mind, Captain Jeffrey re-entered the heated ballroom.

Meanwhile, Sterling, having reached the outer air, stood still for a moment to breathe and consider how best to act. His head was burning, and his pulses were beating fast. He knew too well the purport of the paper which had been put into his hands in Maitland's drawing-room. Its contents, short and stern as they were, were not any shorter or sterner than the fate which would be his if he dared to disobey them.

"Obey and tremble," said the writer of the note. Sterling was as plucky a young Englishman as could be found anywhere, but at the present moment he undoubtedly felt a strong sense of fear.



The circumstances under which he now found himself were as follows: He was entrapped by one of the most terrible of the many secret societies which abound in China. The document which he still held in his hand was stamped with the seal of this society; and though the paper was unsigned, the unfortunate young man was able to make a shrewd guess as to the personality of the writer.

Wilfrid Sterling was the junior partner in a large firm of tea-merchants. He had come from England when little more than a lad, and for a long time all had gone well with him; but in an evil hour he had been tempted into an opium saloon by a Chinese acquaintance. He had gone there principally from curiosity, and did not even intend to indulge in the pipe. This scruple, however, was quickly overcome; and although at first he had found some difficulty in inhaling the drug, and had wondered what gratification its votaries could possibly find in the opium pipe, by degrees he learned to breathe it in, and then the delight of its fumes fairly intoxicated him. His first evening at the opium saloon was followed by many others. Soon, evening after evening found him there, until at last the one dream of his life was to repair to the den, and there rejoice in visions of joy, beauty, and happiness until the small hours of the morning. In the daytime he made desperate struggles to overcome the vice which was undermining his manhood, but evening after evening found him again the victim of this terrible temptation.

Bad as this state of things was, however, there was worse to follow. More often than not, when indulging in the opium pipe, he was associated on the same divan with a Chinaman of the name of Lin. Close neighbourhood and a certain affinity of tastes brought about an alliance; and as time went on, Lin confessed himself to be a member

of the Kolao-hwuy, one of the largest and most famous of the secret societies which abounded in all parts of the empire. Even to mention the name of the Kolao-hwuy was to strike terror in many a breast. But Sterling, under the influence of the drug, listened to his companion's speech with complaisance, and gradually became himself indoctrinated with Lin's views of the iniquities of the present dynasty, and the past glories of the dynasty of Ming. One marked effect of opium-smoking is that it weakens the will and demoralizes the sense of right and wrong. Under the influence of the fumes, Sterling listened to his companion with deep sympathy, and eventually authorized Lin to enter his name as a candidate for election to the society.

He had no sooner done this than the reaction came, and he hurried back to his lodgings in the English settlement in a state of terror.

The next morning, however, unexpected relief came. It was necessary to send a member of the firm to England without delay, and Sterling, as the youngest partner, was the man appointed to undertake the business. Within two days he found himself far from Tingchiang, and hoped that he had also put away for ever the vice which had so nearly ruined him. The bracing climate of his native land, and the society of those whom he loved best, helped further to restore him. The evils of the habits he had contracted were borne in strongly upon him, and he vowed a fierce vow that never again would he take an opium pipe within his lips. During his stay in England, he met the daughter of an old friend of Richard Maitland's.

Evelyn Stanhope was a beautiful girl, with sparkling eyes and a vivacious temperament. Sterling fell in love with her almost at first sight; his passion was returned,

and when he set sail again for China, Evelyn accompanied him as his wife. During their short engagement, he had often felt inclined to tell the girl whom he loved the story of his brief fall from the paths of virtue; but he had not sufficient courage to undertake this task. He could not bear to see the reproach which he was quite certain would fill Evelyn's dark eyes; and as he now considered the whole thing at an end, he hoped that his bride might never learn how nearly his life had been wrecked.

In the excitement of his hurried visit to England, his brief wooing, and hasty marriage, the young man had absolutely forgotten the promise he had given to Lin. Lin, however, was the sort of person who never forgets. It was one of the objects of his life to gain recruits for the society, and he hoped great things from the young Englishman.

Sterling and his wife spent two or three weeks of perfect happiness at Tingchiang before the blow fell. On the evening, however, of Maitland's ball, as he was preparing to accompany Evelyn to the scene of festivities, he was met by an emissary of Lin's who whispered to him that he would presently receive a substantial token of Lin's identity. The news came as a terrible shock to the unfortunate young man. He returned to the room where his pretty wife stood in her white dress, looked at her with passionate trouble in his eyes, and wondered if even now he might dare to tell her the truth.

"We are late already, Wilfrid," exclaimed Mrs. Sterling in an eager tone. "Had we not better go?"

Sterling sat somewhat in shadow, and she did not notice how pale and haggard his face had grown.

"Yes, yes; we'll go at once," he exclaimed.

He roused himself. A sedan-chair was sent for, and

the young couple were carried quickly to the Consulate.

The fatal note, therefore, which was so soon slipped into Sterling's hand, came by no means as a surprise.

As he stood now, in the open air, just outside the Consulate, the thought of all this note involved made him feel for a few moments as if his reason would be upset. To fly was hopeless; to struggle was absolutely vain. The old habits, the old horrors, would once more surround him.

"Nay," he said half aloud, "if it were only the old habits—the old demoralizing vice! They are worse, far worse, the things which I have now to fear. What madness seized me when I promised to become a member of such a terrible and dangerous society as the Kolao-hwuy? Well, I dare not hesitate; there is no turning back. I must meet Lin under the willow-tree by the bridge which crosses the Mien. Yes, and it only wants half an hour to twelve o'clock. I can't risk Evelyn's life. Yes, I must obey. What a frightful position to be in! How little I guessed what a noose I was slipping round my neck when I became friends with an unscrupulous fellow like Lin."

The night was warm, the sky cloudless; but Sterling shivered as he stood alone and allowed these thoughts to rush through his brain. Then, making a great effort, he pulled himself together. "Whatever happens, I must play the man," he exclaimed. "I must be wary, cautious, cunning. There may be a loophole of escape; but at present there is nothing for me but to obey. Well, at least I will not tremble. Outwardly I'll show these Chinese beggars that I have got the grit of an Englishman in me."

He hurried forward, hastening his steps as he knew that the time of the appointment was close at hand. He soon left the town behind him, and the soft night air, fanning his heated forehead, brought back some degree of courage to his heart. As he walked faster and faster, houses occurred at rare intervals, until by-and-by he found himself in the neighbourhood of the rice-fields and beyond the reach of human dwellings. A walk of a mile and a half farther along the narrow path which bordered the rice-fields brought him to the spot where the appointment had been made. As he approached the willow-tree he trembled again with anxiety and horror. The place, however, was perfectly quiet, not a soul within sight. The solitude and the peace had a strange power of relieving Sterling from his worst terrors. He looked around him, to right and left. No one was waiting for him at the willow-tree. This fact brought immense comfort to his overstrained nerves, and he said to himself, with a sigh of gladness, that doubtless he was after all but the victim of a hoax. He was about to turn back again, when suddenly, from behind a bush, Lin, and another man who was an absolute stranger to Sterling, appeared.

"Your Excellency has done well to come," said Lin, "and it is high time we started."

The revulsion of feeling from hope once again to despair had made the poor young Englishman almost incapable of speech.

"Are you in a dream?" said Lin roughly. "I said it was high time we started."

Sterling made an effort to find speech.

"It is many months since we talked of these matters," he said. "I have married since then; and though ap-

proving of the principles of your society, I do not now feel inclined to join its ranks."

A grim smile passed like a flash over Lin's austere face.

"The order has gone forth at the Willow Lodge for your initiation," he said. "And the punishment for non-compliance stated in the summons is no idle threat, I can assure you."

As he spoke, his companion planted himself on the narrow causeway along which Sterling had come, and the manner of both men showed that at all events in this matter they were fully in earnest.

For a moment he scarcely knew how to act. Whether he obeyed or disobeyed the summons, he felt that ruin was awaiting him. If he became a member of the society there was no knowing what terrible mission he might be called upon to accomplish. If he refused to take the initiatory vows, he and his young wife would certainly both fall victims to the secret and awful power which never failed to strike those who had once put themselves in its grasp. Scarcely a moment was given him for deliberation, and in the confused and hurried rush of thought which passed through his brain he tried to consider which course entailed the least fearful consequences to Evelyn. After brief and rapid thought, he made up his mind that the only thing now to do was to follow the men. For the present, at least, his life and his wife's were safe, and he must leave consequences to the future.

"I will go with you," he said to Lin. "How far is it to the place?"

"Not far," said Lin. "We will take you there straight, and you will be able to get home in good time in the morning."

"Then, let us get it over quickly," said Sterling.

In sober silence the three men set forth in Indian file, Lin taking the lead, Sterling following, and the other man bringing up the rear. By many secret and diverse paths they crossed a rough and mountainous country, until at last they came to a narrow opening in the rocks which went by the name of the "Sun Moon Pass." Here a stern-looking custodian awaited them, motionless; when the three men approached him, he turned and exchanged a secret sign with Lin, and immediately afterwards demanded a small fee in money from Sterling.

"Give him a trifle and come on," said Lin, in his harshest tone.

The Englishman obeyed mechanically. The three walked on quickly once again until, having crossed a stone bridge over a rapidly-flowing river, they reached a small building, which went by the name of the "Hall of Fidelity and Loyalty." Here Lin and his friend were obliged to produce their diplomas. They did so quickly, and hurried Sterling on at a greater speed than ever. After a further walk of some distance, they reached the Lodge known as the "City of Willows." This ominous-looking place was surrounded by a wall which resembled the approach to a camp. Here a number of men stood waiting, and Sterling was informed by Lin that they were neophytes, who, like himself, were to be initiated into the society that evening. The neophytes were all attended, as Sterling was himself, by well-accredited brethren. So soon as the party met outside the "City of Willows," they were led within the first gate of the camp, where they found themselves face to face with an official whom Lin described to Sterling as the Vanguard. The candidates were paraded one by one before this individual, who asked them their names and

ages. Sterling's English face and figure formed a striking contrast to those of the other neophytes, and as he passed before the Vanguard, the man favoured him with a piercing and suspicious glance.

"What is the name of this neophyte?" he said, turning quickly round to Lin.

"Sterling, the Englishman, your Excellency, whose services we have been so anxious to secure for our society," replied Lin, in a somewhat pompous tone.

"Is he likely to be loyal and faithful?" asked the Vanguard.

To this question Lin replied in too low a tone for Sterling to catch his words, but the ominous look on his face was the reverse of reassuring.

The Vanguard now once again asked Sterling's name. This proved a severe puzzle to his unaccustomed lips, nor did he feel equal to cope with the spelling of such an unwonted word; he finally ended by writing it down as follows—Ssu-Ta-ling.

When all the names had been duly registered, the Vanguard gave the word of command.

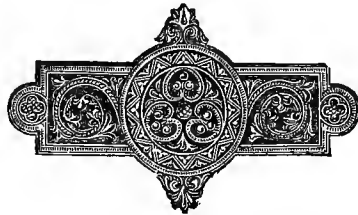
"Form the Bridge of Swords," he shouted in a sonorous voice.

In compliance with this startling order, the brethren immediately formed themselves into two ranks, which were distinguished by the materials of their swords; the swords held by the right rank being made of steel, and those by the left of copper. Having raised the swords so as to meet in the air in the form of a bridge, the neophytes, conducted by their introducers, were obliged to pass beneath them, and were then immediately led forward into the presence of two generals, who were guarding the Hung Gate.



“Name the ‘New Horses,’” commanded these officers.

The Vanguard immediately replied by reading out the list of candidates ; and Sterling found himself, with the other neophytes, introduced into the Hall, where the task of instructing the new members in the objects and rules of the society began.





## CHAPTER II.

### "TO DISOBEY IS DEATH."

**I**T took some time to prime the candidates in their new duties; but at last the weary task came to an end, and Sterling and the other neophytes were led to the "Lodge of Universal Peace," where the whole council was assembled.

"May my lords live myriads of years," said the Vanguard, as he entered the assembly.

"Who is there before me, on the ground?" demanded the President.

"It is *T'ien-yu-hung*" (the Introducer).

The Introducer took his place by the side of the candidates. A long examination immediately followed, which to poor Sterling's fevered brain appeared meaningless and wearisome in the extreme.

At the conclusion of this so-called examination, the following question was put to the new members: "Do you still desire to become one of the brethren?"

Sterling raised his eyes with a momentary gleam of hope. The word "No" had almost passed his lips; but he fortunately paused before he uttered it, for a wretched neophyte, who stood near, was bold enough to decline to become a member of the Kolao-hwuy.

"I do not wish to become a brother," he said. The words had scarcely passed his lips before the miserable man was dragged outside the west gate of the camp, and instantly beheaded.

After this ghastly experience, there were no more dissentient voices on the part of the neophytes. Sterling felt his heart beat hard and fast; but true to his resolve to act up to the traditions of his country, he held himself erect, and looked boldly into the face of the President.

"We will now go into the Red Flower Pavilion," said that personage. He led the way, and the new members with the council immediately followed him. Here the neophytes were obliged to confirm by a bloody oath their desire to join the society. The whole of this ceremony was ghastly in the extreme. The place, the hour, the expressions on the faces of those men who already belonged to the Kolao-hwuy, added to the horrors which already filled poor Sterling's mind. He thought of Evelyn waiting for him at home, and of the terrible chains which, through his own rash act, were now being riveted round his neck.

As a preliminary to this final ceremony, the faces of the new members were washed in cold water, and long white robes were put upon them. After a tedious prayer to the gods, in which the brethren declared their intention of destroying the present dynasty, and remaining faithful to the Kolao-hwuy Society through all changes and chances of life, the oath, which consisted of thirty-six articles, was read to the neophytes on their bended knees. A bowl of wine was next introduced, over which each candidate pricked his middle finger with a silver needle, and let some drops of blood mix with the wine. This was done as a token of membership. After which each individual

drank in turn out of the bowl, and thus confirmed by blood his loyalty to the society.

This formality ended the initiation ceremony, immediately after which the President distributed to each member a diploma inscribed on linen.

When he received his, Sterling asked if he might now be allowed to return home. His request was gruffly refused. He had once again to accompany his brethren through the Lodge, and was called upon to listen to many and weary explanations of all the numerous insignia pertaining to the society. The lecture was finally followed by a feast; and it was not until the first streaks of dawn lit up the eastern sky that the new member of the Kolao-hwuy was allowed to make his way back to the settlement.

When he found himself once more in the open air, he could not help giving a sigh of relief. "The ghastly thing is over," he muttered under his breath, "and I must now hope for the best. I must hide all knowledge of what has occurred from Evelyn, and must as soon as possible take steps to ensure our return to England. It is impossible for me to be a member of anything so iniquitous except in name, and I have a shrewd suspicion, from the look on Lin's face when he introduced me to the Vanguard, that these people mean me to be by no means an idle member. It is to be hoped, though, that they will give me a few days' grace. And now my first care is to reassure Evelyn, and satisfy her as to my strange absence from home to-night."

The sun was shining brightly when Sterling entered his *hong*. He was startled to see that his wife had not been to bed. She hurried out of one of their reception rooms, threw her arms round his neck, and burst into tears. "I have gone through a terrible night," she said. "I cannot

tell you what fears and horrors have come to me. Where have you been, Wilfrid? What has happened? Oh, the joy of seeing you back again! Do tell me where you have been."

"I was called away on unexpected business, dearest," replied the young man. "We won't say anything about it now—it doesn't concern you, and it is over, Evelyn;" and so he silenced her inquiries for the time being.

During the day that followed, Sterling found it extremely difficult to keep up his spirits. In the first place, he felt tired; and in the next, the more he thought about the dilemma into which his own rash acts had brought him, the more difficult it appeared to be to find any way out of it. It was all very well for him to say that he might escape the machinations of the Kolao-hwuy by leaving the country; but what possible excuse could he give to the other partners of the firm for asking for leave of absence just after he had been for a holiday? He thought and thought; the more he thought, the less he liked the position of affairs. In the evening he returned to his *hong*, where Evelyn was waiting for him. She was dressed in one of those simple dresses which she used to wear at home. She looked so young and fair, so guileless, so almost childlike, that the young man's whole heart went out to her with a great yearning. He felt a choking sensation in his throat as he looked at her.

"She is such a child," he muttered to himself. "How can I ever forgive myself for dragging her into a mess of this sort?"

Evelyn, however, was not quite so childlike as she looked. She was a woman, and a brave one; she had also considerable sense and penetration. She could also read the faces of those she loved as an open book. Ster-

ling had assured her when he came back in the morning that there was nothing wrong; but Evelyn looked into his eyes and suspected otherwise. It was impossible for her to have the least suspicion as to the sort of trouble that hung over him, but to know that he was in trouble was quite enough for her. She thought of him all day long, and when he came downstairs dressed for dinner, she determined to win his confidence before the evening passed.

During dinner Sterling's spirits somewhat revived. It was some hours now since his initiation into the society. Not a word, not a token, had been vouchsafed to him during the day, and he greatly hoped that Lin and his emissaries would leave him alone for at least a time.

"I shall surely be given breathing-space, and during that time something must be done," he thought.

After dinner he asked Evelyn to sing to him.

Glad to see him cheerful once more, she ran out of the room to fetch her music. She was some little time absent, and when she came back her face wore a startled expression.

"See what an extraordinary thing I found in your study," she said. "It was pinned to the tablecloth with an arrow. What in the world is it? I cannot understand this curious message."

"Give it to me at once, Evelyn," said her husband.

He snatched the piece of blue paper from her hand, tore it open, and read the contents. His face turned ghastly.

"What is the matter? You look as if you are going to faint," said the wife.

"Nothing, nothing," he replied. He walked across the

room, took some brandy out of a sideboard, mixed it with water, and drank it off. The strong stimulant brought back his failing courage.

"You must tell me what is wrong," said Evelyn, following him. "There," she added, using a sudden new note of authority, "I insist upon knowing. Sit down on that chair and tell me at once. Do you think I can't share your troubles? What is a wife for, except to share her husband's troubles?" Here she knelt by his side and put her arms round his neck.

The unfortunate young man clasped her tightly to his heart. "Oh, my darling!" he exclaimed, "I ought never to have married you. I have done wrong, and I am punished. I ought not to have married you, Evelyn."

"Why so?" she answered. "You love me, and I love you."

"God knows I love you, dearest."

"Then nothing else is of any consequence," she replied in a cheerful tone. "I didn't expect everything to be smooth when I became your wife, Wilfrid. Now tell me the trouble. Where were you last night? And what does that dreadful bit of paper and this horrid arrow mean?"

"They mean, Evelyn," said Sterling, "that I am in the hands of an enemy who never relents, and who never slackens his hold. Believe me, my dear wife, you had best not know any more."

"I insist on knowing. Who is the enemy, Wilfrid?"

"I will whisper the name to you."

"Yes, do. What is it?"

"The Kolao-hwuy. I am a member of the Kolao-hwuy."

Evelyn's face looked blank. She had never heard of the

Kolao-hwuy, and thought that her husband must be slightly off his head.

“I have no time to explain,” he said, springing to his feet. “I am a member of a very terrible secret society called the Kolao-hwuy. I was initiated into that society last night. I didn’t mean you to know, but I cannot keep the knowledge from your ears. If I disobey the mandates of the society, I am a dead man. The letter which you saw pinned with an arrow to the tablecloth in my study is a summons to be present at one of their important meetings. I must go, Evelyn. As long as I obey them, I am all right.”

Evelyn’s face had grown as white as death. “But what do they want you to do?” she exclaimed.

“God knows; I don’t.”

“But suppose it is anything wrong—anything awful?”

“I must go to them to-night, Evelyn. They are scarcely likely to give an important mission to so new a member. My dear, you must not keep me any longer. This summons requires immediate attention. We will try and get back to England by-and-by. In England we shall be safe.” Sterling rose as he spoke. A moment later he had left the room and the house.

Evelyn stood quite still after he had left her. The suddenness of the calamity which had overtaken her husband, and turned all their happiness into misery, stunned her for a moment; then a great wave of courage and determination filled her heart.

“Something must be done, and I am the one to do it,” she thought. “Yes; I won’t lose a minute.” She walked across the room and rang a bell. When a servant appeared, she asked him to fetch a sedan-chair for her immediately. When it arrived, she stepped into it, and desired the bearers to take her to the Consulate.



The night was as beautiful as the previous one, and Maitland was enjoying the fresh air on the veranda when Mrs. Sterling was announced. She had thrown a white shawl over her head and shoulders, and came up to his side impulsively.

One glance at her face was quite enough to show Maitland that she was in trouble. "My dear girl, what can I do for you?" he said, taking one of her hands in both of his.

"I want to speak to you," she said in a slightly hoarse voice. "Can we be alone somewhere?"

"Yes; come into my study."

The moment they entered the room, Evelyn came close to Maitland. "We're in terrible trouble," she said. "I have not the faintest idea what it means, but I know it means something dreadful. My husband was made a member of the Kolao-hwuy last night."

"What?" cried Maitland.

"My husband was last night made a member of a secret society here, which goes by the name of the Kolao-hwuy. It was for that purpose he suddenly left this house. What is the matter, Mr. Maitland?"

"Oh, nothing, my dear—nothing," replied the Consul; "only your news has startled me."

"I am ignorant of where the danger lies," replied Evelyn; "but I judge from Wilfrid's manner that it is very real and very grave."

"What possessed the man——" began Maitland.

"We have no time to go into that now," continued Evelyn, interrupting him with sudden passion. "Wilfrid was made a member last night. An hour ago I found a paper pinned with an arrow to the cloth in his study, summoning him to a meeting of the society. I took it to him. I do not know what the contents were, but they

evidently caused him the deepest distress. He has now gone to attend the meeting; and I, Mr. Maitland, I have come to you." Evelyn looked full into the Consul's face as she said the last words. "Will you help me?" she asked. "Will you save my husband?"

"I will do everything that man can do for you, my poor child. Your news has upset me a good deal. I know all about the Kolao-hwuy. I can't hide from you, Evelyn, that your husband is in extreme danger. You must let me think for a few minutes. Sit there, my dear; when I have arranged my thoughts, I will speak to you."

Maitland paced up and down his room in deep cogitation. Evelyn sat in her chair, leaning her face on her hands. She was trying hard to restrain her tears; a fearful weight lay at her heart. Maitland's manner, too, added to her alarm.

Suddenly he stopped and stood opposite to her. "Where is Sterling at this moment?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "I suppose he has gone to this terrible meeting."

"That can't be," said Maitland. "The meetings are always held late at night." He turned as he spoke, and again strode up and down the room; his brow was heavily overcast, as if he saw a fresh difficulty in his way. Evelyn's eyes followed him in mute agony.

After a time he again broke the silence. "Can you tell me, Evelyn, if there is anyone who knows your husband's usual haunts?" Maitland laid a peculiar emphasis on the word "haunts" that made poor Evelyn shiver.

"I don't know," she replied with a choking sensation in her voice. "Until last night, I thought I knew everything about him; but it seems I was mistaken. Perhaps his boy can tell us."

"Ah, that is a good thought," answered Maitland. "I will go and see the boy immediately. Now, my dear, listen to me: you're safest where you are at the present moment. I wish you to stay here; and I want you further to trust me, and to rely on my promise to do all that mortal man can to save your husband from the grave danger in which he has placed himself."

Evelyn stood up. "How can I thank you?" she said. "I felt from the first that you were the only one who could and who would help me. But I would rather go home now, please. Wilfrid might return at any moment, and would think it strange if I were out."

"Do as you like," replied Maitland, "only we have no time to lose." He drew her hand through his arm as he spoke, and conducted her downstairs to her sedan.

The coolies who were crouching beside it rose to their feet at a word from the Consul, and, without more ado, carried the chair towards the *hong* at a pace which taxed Maitland's walking powers to the utmost. On reaching the *hong*, Maitland immediately summoned Sterling's boy into his presence.

"Where your master have got?" inquired the Consul.

"I no savey," answered the imperturbable Chinaman.

"You no talkee me lie, pidjin. You savey very well. Tell me where he have got. You no tellee me, I send you to the Mandalin."

This threat had a perceptible effect on the boy. He lost his stolid indifference, and began to gesticulate as he said: "How can savey—master go plenty places."

"Tell me where that place opium shop belong?"

This last question was said at a venture. A sudden idea had darted through Maitland's brain that Sterling might be seeking refuge from his misery in opium. When

putting the question, Maitland looked at the boy straight in his eyes, and he saw at once that the shot had told.

"Suppose master go smoke opium, I can savey that place," he answered in a low tone.

"You can show me immediately," said Maitland, as he rose to go into the drawing-room to speak one last word to Evelyn. She was standing near the door, listening intently; her hands were tightly clasped together, her head slightly thrown back.

"I think I know where your husband is now," said Maitland in his most cheering tones. "Keep up your courage, and I will bring him back to you in less than no time."

Without allowing himself even a moment to glance at the poor young wife's stricken face, the Consul turned and went out into the courtyard, where Sterling's boy was waiting for him; and in silence the two walked out of the foreign settlement into the native city.

On entering the main street, the boy turned sharply to the right, down a narrow lane, and, after several more turns and twists, stopped suddenly and pointed at a house which stood just before them. On the side of the door was pasted a round piece of paper, which marked the character of the place.

"Wait here for me," said Maitland in an authoritative tone.

Without a moment's hesitation, he pushed open the door and walked into the squalid yard of the building. As he entered, he saw an attendant carrying some prepared opium and a pipe into the principal saloon. Maitland followed him swiftly. He found himself in a long low room. The sickening fumes of the drug hung heavy in the air, and stretched on different divans lay eight or ten men in various stages of intoxication.

As long as he lived, Maitland never forgot this sickening sight. Some of the opium victims were inhaling the first few whiffs from their pipes, and were chatting eagerly to one another. Others, who had passed this stage, were sleepily breathing in the smoke, and were fast entering that land of dreams in which others, again, were already revelling. The pale and haggard features of these wretched men were in striking contrast to the painted cheeks of two girls who were supplying their wants. None of the men took the least notice of Maitland; but one of the girls came quickly up to him and offered him a place on a divan, and also a pipe.

Maitland pushed her aside in disgust, and, looking more keenly into the faces of the smokers, discovered, with a strange thrill of pain and satisfaction, the haggard features of the Englishman whom he had come to rescue. Sterling was lying in a half-stupor, waiting for the refilling of his pipe. Maitland went quickly up to him, took him by the arm, and gently shook him. Sterling gazed at him with a confused stare, then exclaimed, in an accent of terror, "Who are you?"

"Come along, Sterling. I am Maitland, your friend. I have got something to say to you."

Once in the courtyard, a cup of tea, which was immediately supplied, had a wonderful effect on Sterling. He recovered his senses, and with them came a feeling of shame which bowed him to the ground. "How did you know where I was?" he asked. "And why have you come to see me in my disgrace?"

"Because I have something to say. It is this: I am determined to save you from yourself, and also to save your brave wife from misery and shame."

At the word "wife" Sterling uttered a groan and

covered his face with both hands. "You don't know what you are saying," he answered. "I am in the hands of those whom to disobey is death."

"I know what you mean," said Maitland; "but, remember, I am on the side of right against wrong, and I swear that I will save you were you in the hands of fifty Kolao-hwuy."

"You can't, Maitland—you can't," said the wretched man. "I am lost—I am lost!"





## CHAPTER III.

### *BAD NEWS.*

**N**O human being could look more absolutely limp or less capable of moral effort than the unfortunate Sterling did at this moment. But Maitland, who knew the demoralizing effects of opium, was not to be discouraged. "Be a man, Sterling," he said. "If not for your own sake, for that of your wife. Pull yourself together, and put yourself in my hands. You know I am not one to say what I don't mean."

"I know you are not," replied Sterling. "If you can drag me out of this bondage, I shall be eternally grateful to you. But there," he continued, the abject expression returning once more to his face, "you can't save me even if you would; and even if you are able, Evelyn will hate me the remainder of my life for this disgrace."

"No," said Maitland; "you wrong her. If I read your wife's character aright—and I think I do—she is one of the best women that God ever made. It will be her delight to help to lead you back to a new and better life. Now, come along with me; we must get back to the Consulate as quickly as we can."

As he passed out of the courtyard, Maitland turned towards the door of the saloon, and saw that the two attendants had evidently been watching his interview with Sterling. Of this he thought with nothing but disgust; but now above their heads appeared a face which filled him with serious misgivings. In those malignant features he saw a mixture of hatred and anger, and felt sure that it belonged to an emissary of the Kolao-hwuy. He was right. Lin had been one of the occupiers of the divan, and saw in the presence of the English Consul the possibility that Sterling might escape from him.

With all speed Maitland now hurried his unfortunate young friend back to the Consulate. Having reached it, he put Sterling, who was still weak, dazed, and trembling, into a chair on the veranda, and immediately afterwards sent a servant with a note to Evelyn, begging her to come over and take up her quarters at the Consulate.

In a surprisingly short space of time Maitland saw her sedan-chair enter the courtyard. He went to meet her, and, without uttering a word, brought her immediately to the veranda. Sterling lay back in the chair in which he had sunk, sleeping heavily. Maitland pointed to him and immediately turned away. For a moment after he had left her, Evelyn stood in a state of hesitation. The man whom she now looked at in his weakness and disgrace was in no sense the hero of her happy love-dreams. For a brief moment a pang sharper than any sword passed through her heart; but real love, after all, is not easily conquered. The next instant the affectionate girl was kneeling by Sterling's side, her arms were round his neck, her kisses pressed his cheek, and tears for the first time flowed freely from her eyes.

Hasty directions were meanwhile given by the Consul



for the reception of his unlooked-for guests. He called his faithful constable, Bryce, and gave him stern and rigorous directions that the gates of the consular compound were to be kept carefully shut and guarded, and that the watchmen were to have special orders to be more than usually on the alert. The night was far spent when Maitland at last betook himself to his bed; but at early dawn he was up again and about. He knew only too well that he had not a moment to lose, if Sterling was really to be rescued from the clutches of his formidable enemy.

As soon as the conventionalities would permit, Maitland sent his principal tingchai (messenger) to the Taotai with a message to say that he would call upon him at noon if convenient, on a matter of importance.

When Sterling and his wife appeared at breakfast, Maitland did his best to seem unconcerned, and to talk to his unlooked-for guests as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Evelyn's face was white, and there were black lines under her eyes, but otherwise she looked calm and composed. Sterling, on the other hand, was evidently intensely nervous; he ate next to nothing, started at every sound, and looked up apprehensively when a servant happened to enter the room. By nature he had all an Englishman's pluck; but opium had effected the most disastrous results, and, as Maitland saw, he was unable at the present juncture to pull himself together.

After breakfast the two men went to smoke their Manila cheroots on the veranda. When they found themselves alone, Maitland turned immediately to Sterling and said abruptly: "Now, look here, Sterling. It's no use mincing matters: you're in a frightful mess."

"I am, indeed," replied Sterling; "and," he added, his

voice slightly shaking, "I am in a worse mess than even you could possibly dream of."

"Well, my dear fellow," said the Consul, "you must treat me as a man does his doctor—you must tell me everything. I can do nothing to aid you if I don't know all."

"It is awful!" said Sterling; "but the lot has fallen on me to murder the Tartar General, who has been waging war against the society, and unless by to-morrow night I have done the deed, my life is forfeited."

Maitland's brow became heavily clouded. "That certainly is worse than anything I thought of," he said. "But, after all, it doesn't matter so long as you are in this Consulate. While you remain here, you are safe against all the wiles of the Kolao-hwuy; but, remember, you must do exactly as I tell you."

"I have promised Evelyn that I will," replied Sterling, "and however low I have fallen, please God, at least I'll keep that promise."

"That's right. Now you are getting more like yourself. Pray, give me your attention carefully. I have thought matters over, and there is nothing for it but what I now propose to do. I am going this morning to the Taotai to get from him two of his most experienced detectives, who shall come here and guard you night and day until we can ship you to England."

At these words a ray of real hope lit up Sterling's haggard face. "How is it possible for me to thank you?" he exclaimed. He sprang from his chair, and, suddenly taking the Consul's hand, shook it with a grip and vehemence which was as iron compared with the nerveless twitching of his fingers a short time back. "Your goodness leaves me no words to express what I feel," he said.

“But,” he added, “however terrible my position, it will be simply impossible for me to get away for another month, as Stephenson—one of my partners—will not be out here for two or three mails.”

“Well, never mind,” said Maitland cheerily; “we’ll look after you for that time. And now I must be off to the Yamun.”

Though the Consul had assumed a cheerful air in talking to his guest, his mind in reality was the reverse of easy, and many and dark forebodings seized him as he was borne in his consular chair to the Taotai’s residence.

When he approached the Yamun, his tingchai, taking his card, went ahead to announce his arrival. As soon as the sedan-chair drew up at the Yamun, the centre doors were thrown wide open, and a messenger, bowing low, invited the Consul to enter.

Without dismounting from his chair, the coolies carried him into the compound as far as the steps leading up to the principal hall. Here the Taotai stood ready to receive him.

With many bows, the host conducted his guest into the reception-room, and placed him immediately in the seat of honour on his left hand. The interchange of many compliments followed. The servants brought in tea, and, as is usual, remained in the apartment within earshot of the Consul and his host.

But this state of affairs did not at all suit Maitland’s purpose, and he leaned over to the Taotai and whispered a request that they might be left alone for a few moments. The Taotai immediately issued a command that the room was to be cleared. The moment this was done, Maitland began to speak about his business. He told his terrible tale in brief, clear words which it would

have been impossible to misunderstand. He described the young Englishman in graphic touches, just alluding to the weakness which had made him a prey of the terrible Kolao-hwuy, and dwelling also on the many good points in his character. He described the threats which had been employed to induce him to attend the initiation ceremony, and spoke in graphic words of his present bitter repentance. He finally ended by saying that he was certain Sterling would gladly lay all the information he possessed before the authorities.

On hearing these last words, the Taotai's brow cleared. "That condition alone saves your friend from being accused of the crime of belonging to the society," he said. "Can you give me the name of the man who entrapped him?"

"Yes," said Maitland; "his name is Lin. I saw him for a moment last night at the opium den, when I went to look for poor Sterling. He is as ill-favoured a scoundrel as ever I saw; and from the expression of his face, I feel sure he was vowing vengeance on Sterling for allowing himself to be drawn out of his clutches."

"I will send to the opium shop and secure that fellow at least," said the Taotai. "The question now, however, is this: What is to be done with the Englishman? As you are aware, his life is in immediate danger; and I shall want him to give evidence against these men as I catch them."

"That is what I came about," said Maitland. "At present Sterling is in my Consulate, and as long as he remains within the compound he is safe. But he has his business to attend to, and what I would ask your Excellency is this: send me two of your sharpest detectives—so that one can be on duty night and day—to follow Sterling when his business calls him beyond the protection of my flag."

"I will do it," said the Taotai, "on the distinct understanding that he shall be forthcoming whenever I want him to give information or take evidence from him."

"Agreed," said Maitland. "Now I will no longer detain your Excellency."

So saying, he drank off his cup of tea as the signal of the conclusion of his visit. The Taotai conducted him with courteous ceremony to his chair, and bowed low in response to Maitland's parting salutations.

On arriving at the Consulate, Maitland went at once to the veranda, where, as he expected, he found Sterling and his wife. They were talking earnestly together, and Sterling's face looked animated, and even hopeful, again. When they saw Maitland, they hurried to meet him.

"What news?" said Sterling.

"I have arranged everything satisfactorily," replied the Consul. "The detectives will be here in half an hour, and one will always be ready to go with you whenever business calls you to the *hong* or elsewhere."

"How can we thank you?" said Evelyn, her bright eyes filling with tears as she raised them to Maitland's face.

Sterling said nothing, but the expression of his face showed plainly that he would now leave no stone unturned to regain that strength and manhood which the use of opium had deprived him of.

Tiffin was announced, and afterwards the two men smoked their cigars in comparative peace. Alas! this peace was soon to be broken. Maitland had just risen to see to the duties of his office, when Sterling's boy came forward with a scared face, holding a piece of paper in his hand.

"Me findee this piecee chit on master's table," he said as he handed the note to the Consul.

Maitland took it, and translated the Chinese characters as follows: "*The die is cast; your death-warrant is signed.*"

Maitland crushed the paper in his hand, and called Sterling to follow him. "Read that," he said. "The scoundrels are evidently determined to have a shy at you; but we will be one too many for them."

Sterling turned pale as he read the missive. "For God's sake, don't tell Evelyn!" he exclaimed.

"Not I," answered Maitland. He took the paper from Sterling and locked it up in his secret drawer.

Sterling went slowly back to where his wife was sitting. She had returned to her place in the veranda. It was comparatively cool there; and relieved from some of her worst fears, and having absolute confidence in Maitland, she was idly employing her fingers with some gaily-coloured embroidery, which she was preparing to ornament her own pretty drawing-room. The many-coloured silks and wools lay in her lap, a bright colour was in her cheeks, and her beautiful dark eyes, full of love and relief, looked full at her husband as he approached her. Her attitude and expression stabbed the unfortunate young man to the heart. Her quick eyes saw all too soon that there was some fresh trouble.

"Sit down by me, Wilfrid," she said. She made a great effort to speak cheerfully. "See how natural and peaceful everything seems; and you certainly are safe here. Now, you must keep up your courage; it is that dreadful opium that has upset your nerves."

"It has been the cause from first to last of my undoing, Evelyn."

"Why do you look so pale now? Is there anything fresh the matter?"

“No, no, my darling. I am in a mess, and must get out of it as best I can.”

“And the Consul is so kind and brave. Was there ever a man like him?” exclaimed Evelyn.

“If I do escape, Evelyn, I shall certainly owe my life to him.”

“You are perfectly safe, so long as you stay here.”

“But I can't stay here always, Evelyn—that is just the point. I must get back to business this afternoon.”

Evelyn's face turned very white at these words. “You must not stir until the detectives come,” she said.

Sterling laughed impatiently. “To tell the truth,” he said after a pause, “I don't much believe in them. What are two detectives, sharp as they doubtless may be, against the machinations of a society like the Kolao-hwuy? But there, my darling, I am frightening you. What a brute I am! There, Evelyn, don't cry. I wonder you care a bit for a fellow like me; but if my life is of any value to you, I will certainly do all in my power to preserve it for your sake. Now let me help you to match these silks. You know my eye for colour is more perfect than your own.”

Evelyn tried to smile, and to keep back the tears which ever and anon filled her eyes.

As long as her husband was by her side, she felt that he was safe, but she dreaded indescribably the moment when he must leave her. An important meeting was to be held in his office that afternoon, and as his clerks knew nothing of the scrape into which he had got himself, it was, he considered, necessary that he should attend it. As the moments flew by, he became more and more restless, and even went into the compound to ask Bryce if the detectives whom the Taotai had promised to send had yet arrived.

After a time, two quietly-dressed and rather stupid-looking Chinamen were seen to enter the compound. They had a short consultation with Bryce, who a moment or two afterwards put in his appearance on the veranda. He asked Sterling to step outside with him.

The young man complied. The Chinamen, who called themselves Foo and Chang, bowed a low obeisance to Sterling. They then told him in a few words that he might now feel himself absolutely safe. They assured him that they would not intrude themselves on his notice in any way; but also, never for a single moment would they allow him out of their sight.

"You are safe now," said Foo. "Your Excellency may go in and out exactly as you please. We know the emissaries of the Kolao-hwuy, every single man of them, and no harm can possibly happen to you."

The man called Chang further told Sterling that Lin had been arrested by the Taotai, and was now in custody in the prison-house of his Yamun.

This fact went further than anything else to reassure the Englishman, and he went back to say "Good-bye" to his wife in better spirits.

"It's all right," he said. "If ever there was a brick in the world, it's our good friend Maitland. I will go at once to my *hong*, see my people, transact all the necessary business, and be back with you before dark. Keep up your courage, my dear wife; I verily believe the danger is past."

To Sterling's astonishment, it was just at this juncture that all poor Evelyn's self-control gave way. "I can't bear it," she sobbed. "I feel that the danger is not past. As you said yourself, what can two men do against hundreds? Oh, don't leave me, Wilfrid. Stay here, or at least allow me to accompany you."



"That would indeed be folly," answered the young man. "What could you do, dearest, at a meeting of my tea-tasters?"

"Nothing," she answered with a heavy sigh. "Oh, why are women so useless, when they love so much?"

"Useless!" echoed Sterling. "It is love like theirs—like yours—that keeps the world straight. Now good-bye. Don't despair. I vow and declare that I'll be back with you before you have time to miss me."

Evelyn made a great effort to check her tears; but when Sterling had really gone, she flung herself back into the deep chair in which she had been sitting on the veranda and gave way to a burst of terrible grief.

"How can I bear it?" she moaned. "All the terrors of last night were nothing to what I am now enduring. No; my fancies are not really nervous. I feel that some terrible fate is going to overtake my husband."

Poor Evelyn never forgot the slow torture of the next two hours. Maitland was busy attending to the duties of his office. She was absolutely alone, and the time seemed to crawl on leaden wings. She became more and more nervous, until at last her dread reached the culminating point of agony. "If Wilfrid is not in by dusk," she said to herself, "I will go myself to the *hong*. I cannot endure this suspense any longer."

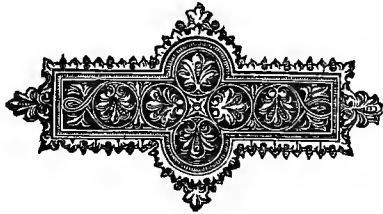
At this moment there was a commotion in the compound. Evelyn, peering through the dusk, which was already beginning to set in, saw the detective Chang enter hurriedly, go up to Bryce, and speak to him.

This was enough. As if wings were on her feet, she flew downstairs, and, running out, went up to the constable and laid her shaking hand on his arm. "What is it? what is it?" she gasped in a choking voice.

Bryce was much startled when he saw her. "Won't you come in, Mrs. Sterling?" he said. "I will take you at once to my master."

"Oh, I know there is bad news," she gasped. "You have something to say," she continued, fixing her eyes on Chang and speaking in a new tone of command. "I insist upon knowing immediately. Where is Mr. Sterling? Why have you left him?"

The man threw up his hands in despair. "He has vanished," he exclaimed. "The Englishman turned a corner and vanished before my very eyes."





## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE TAOTAI.*

**A**LL Evelyn's worst fears were immediately realized. With wild despair at her heart, she rushed into Maitland's office. One glance at her face revealed to the Consul that something had happened.

"All is lost! They have taken him!" she said with an exceeding bitter cry. As she spoke, she sank into a chair, and rocked herself to and fro in her misery.

"Tell me exactly what you have heard," said Maitland, taking her hand.

Evelyn looked up at him. Her throat was choking, and try as she would, no further words would come. Fortunately, at this moment the detective appeared at the door. It must be a circumstance of more than usual excitement to effect any change in the stolid features of a Chinaman, but the man, to Maitland's horror, showed manifest signs of agitation. His yellow complexion showed a greenish tinge, his eyes were bloodshot, and the hand in which he held his fan trembled visibly.

"What has happened?" asked the Consul, speaking in Chinese.

"I will tell your Excellency," replied the detective.

“I went with his Honour to his *hong* this afternoon, and waited there until he had finished transacting business. At six o'clock he told me to follow him to the Consulate. I did so; but happening to meet an acquaintance close to the corner of the Street of Longevity, I stopped for an instant to speak to him. I then turned the corner, and his Honour was nowhere to be seen. I searched for him everywhere, and made inquiries of the bystanders, but could neither hear nor see anything of him. The only man who could throw the least light on the subject was a shopkeeper, who said that he had noticed three men hanging about the corner of the street all the afternoon; but when I questioned him further, he denied having seen any gentleman pass.”

“You have betrayed your trust,” said Maitland, “and have allowed the members of that abominable society to carry off the Englishman, who was under the direct protection of the Taotai. If he is not found and brought back alive, your head may be lost.”

“Have mercy, your Excellency!” cried the man, in an agony of terror. “I stopped for only one instant, and I have made every possible effort to get news of his Honour.”

“You must follow me to the Taotai's Yamun,” said Maitland.

Glancing at Evelyn, who, wrapped in the stupor of despair, took no notice of him, Maitland hurried from the room. A moment later he was being carried as fast as four stalwart coolies could bear him.

As he entered the Yamun, he saw by the number of tingchais about that the court was sitting. On reaching the tribunal, he found the Taotai seated by a table with a prisoner in the courtyard before him. Maitland was too preoccupied to recognise the culprit. He hurried forward

as the Taotai rose to receive him. "I have bad news, your Excellency," he said.

"What is it?" asked the Taotai. His tone expressed sympathy, for Maitland's perturbation was too evident not to be noticed at once.

"Sterling has been carried off by the Kolao-hwuy," exclaimed the Consul.

"Where and how?" asked the Taotai. "Were not my detectives with him?"

"That is true," replied Maitland; "but, unfortunately, the detective Chang, who was following the Englishman from his *hong* to my Consulate, turned for a moment to speak to an acquaintance. At that instant Sterling was carried off. A shopkeeper who stood near said that he saw three men loitering near the corner of the street for some time. They doubtless were emissaries of the Kolao-hwuy, and did their fell work while Chang's attention was otherwise engaged."

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed the Taotai fiercely. He raised his head, saw Chang, and called to him in angry tones: "How dared you lose sight of the Englishman for a moment?"

The man immediately fell on his knees, and with loud protestations declared how diligently he had sought Sterling the instant he discovered he had been carried off.

"You have been shamefully neglectful," said the Taotai; "and the only way in which you can save yourself from the consequences of your crime will be by bringing the Englishman back again safe and sound. Go at once and bring the shopkeeper who saw the three men."

The detective hurried off, and the Taotai turned to Maitland. "I was examining a man connected with this pestilential society as your Excellency came in," he said.

"Perhaps he may be able to throw some light on the matter."

On hearing these words, Maitland turned and looked at the prisoner. He immediately recognised him as the man whom he had seen the night before at the opium den. The features were, however, altered. Then they had been full of malignant hate, now they were expressive of a queer mixture of agony and obstinacy. This state of things was easily explained. An executioner was driving wedges into wooden boots, which were crushing the man's ankle-bones and knee-joints. Infuriated as Maitland felt, he could not but experience a pang of compassion for the wretched sufferer.

"Is it necessary, your Excellency," he said to the Taotai, "to use such torture to this miserable man?"

"It is," he replied; "he is one of the most obdurate villains I have ever come across. If you will stand by me now, I will proceed with his examination. The Englishman Sterling," said the Taotai, raising his voice and looking full at the half-fainting prisoner, "was carried off to-day by your vile society. Tell me who planned the capture?"

"I don't know," answered Lin defiantly.

"Put in another wedge," said the Taotai to the executioner. This order was immediately obeyed. With a heavy blow, the man drove in a wedge, and Lin's whole frame quivered with the agony.

"Tell me who planned the capture," repeated the Taotai.

Lin made no answer, and at a nod from the Taotai the executioner drove the wedge to the head. The pain was more than human strength could endure, and Lin fell back in a dead faint.

“Carry him away for the present,” said the Taotai, “and bring him back when he has recovered consciousness. Now,” he said, turning to Maitland, “we must see what can be done to save your friend, and—— Ah, here comes the shopkeeper. I will first question him.—Did you see the Englishman?”

“I did not, your Excellency.”

The shopkeeper confessed to having seen three men hanging about the street corner. “They were all three tall. One had a black complexion, another was deeply marked with small-pox, and the third had only one eye.”

“This crime,” said the Taotai, “was committed at your door, and unless the Englishman is recovered, you and those in your neighbourhood will be punished for allowing such a disgraceful matter to happen in your street. Now go, and come back to-morrow morning with some news, or else beware.”

The shopkeeper, on being dismissed, struck his head three times on the pavement, and then hurriedly rose and departed.

“I would impress on your Excellency,” said Maitland, turning to the Taotai, “that what we do we must do quickly. It may be that even now Sterling has been murdered.”

“I doubt it,” said the Taotai. “According to their rules and practices, the society will hold a meeting before deciding on the Englishman’s immediate fate. My hope is in Lin. Up to now he has been obstinate, but I think I know of a way of making him speak.”

Here the Taotai gave a grim smile.

Maitland could not help shuddering. After a pause, he asked under his breath: “When shall I hear from you?”

“To-morrow morning at latest. I hope by that time to

be able to give you some definite news. We shall have to follow your friend to the 'Willow Lodge,' and it is possible we may have to go in force. What number of Englishmen can you bring?"

"There is not an Englishman in the settlement who will not gladly aid me," said Maitland. "I should think I could count upon twenty."

"That will be quite enough. I shall bring about twice that number."

Maitland now hurried back to the Consulate. As he entered his compound, Evelyn, who had evidently been waiting for him, came forward. He could not help starting when he glanced at her. The change in her appearance was almost indescribable. Yesterday she had been a bright and happy-looking girl, with the fresh colour and bloom of youth; now her cheeks were deadly pale, and deep black rims surrounded her eyes, which were red and staring. She was twisting the remains of her handkerchief, which was little more than a shred, in her nerveless hands. In a hollow voice, which had lost all its old ring, she demanded hoarsely: "Have you any news?"

"Not yet," replied the Consul, trying to assume a cheerful tone, "but I hope to have something to tell you soon," he added. "Now go and lie down; you are looking ill and exhausted."

"How can I rest?" she replied. "At this very moment those wretches may be murdering my husband. Do you think, under such circumstances, it is possible for me to rest?"

The repetition of almost his own words gave Maitland a shock. "My dear," he said suddenly, "you must not give up hope. I quite think that we may be able to give you back your husband safe and sound."



“Are you telling me the truth?” asked the poor girl, “or are you only trying to comfort me? Ever since you left me,” continued Evelyn, “I have been praying to God; I have been begging of Him to save my husband. Although I pray, I seem to be absolutely without hope. Oh, I know you are doing your best, and you are kind—very kind; but I have no hope—none, none.”

“Your feelings are quite natural,” said the Consul. “The position is a terrible one. I can’t deny this fact for a moment, but you may absolutely depend on all being done that can be done. Come, let me take you to your room. Rest assured that I will bring you news the instant it arrives.”

Overmastered by Maitland’s strong will, Evelyn obeyed like a child. She went to her room; but to rest was impossible. When she found herself alone, she threw herself upon a sofa, where she tossed about in agony, listening to every sound. At times, too, she rushed to the veranda which overlooked the courtyard, in the vain hope that some messenger might be arriving with tidings. As night came on, she fell into a feverish and fitful sleep, which was broken by wild dreams and imaginings. At daylight she rose, and, seating herself on the veranda, waited for Maitland’s appearance. Her restlessness was over for the present: she sat motionless, in a partially stunned condition.

At nine o’clock a note came from the Taotai, asking the Consul to call upon him. Maitland received it with a sense of disappointment. He had fully expected that some definite news would be forthcoming. He went immediately to the veranda, where Evelyn was sitting, and told her that the Taotai had sent for him.

She raised her eyes to his face. “I hoped you would have had news this morning.”

"I certainly hoped to have heard something," said Maitland; "but perhaps I may have news for you when I return. I judge from the tone of the Taotai's note that he knows more than he chooses to say. Now I will go, and be back with you as quickly as possible."

The Taotai received Maitland cordially, and told him that the torture which had been applied to Lin had at last had the desired effect; he had confessed that it was at his instigation a party of three members of the Kolao-hwuy had been told off to kidnap Sterling; that he had probably been carried off to one of their secret resorts; and that a council would most likely be held that evening, at which he was to be brought up for judgment and sentence.

"The scoundrel admitted," said the Taotai, "that the sentence would probably be death, and that by *Lingche*, or the lingering process."

Maitland's face grew cold and stern. "How are we to prevent this horrible atrocity?" he said.

"We can do nothing till evening. The movement of a body of men in the direction of the Yellow Lodge by daylight would be the instant signal for the removal of your friend to some inaccessible fortress. I would suggest that we start about an hour after sunset; that should bring us to the Yellow Lodge about the time when the members meet."

"But how are we to find our way?"

The Taotai gave a grim smile. "I have reduced Lin to a state of compliance," he said. "I have given him a respite from torture, on condition that he leads us direct to the meeting-place."

"Can you trust him?" asked Maitland.

"I think I can. He knows that at the slightest deception the executioner, whom I shall take with me, will at

once behead him. It is fortunate that we have not to go for some hours, as at present he is unconscious, and I have left him in the hands of the gaolers until his senses return."

As Maitland returned to the Consulate, his feelings were of a mixed nature. He fully believed that the Taotai would do everything in his power to save Sterling and to seize the leaders of the Kolao-hwuy. Self-interest, if no other motive, would prompt him to this course. A capture of so important a kind would certainly lead to his being promoted to a higher office; but he also felt that the chances of saving his unfortunate young friend were but slight. He recalled Evelyn's words, her despair, the dumb misery of her face.

"She has reasons for her dark forebodings," murmured the Consul under his breath. "I know only too well the cruel barbarity of the League. The slightest mistake in the expedition for capture will lead to Sterling's instant execution. Yes, I confess I feel almost as hopeless as that poor girl at this moment." Full of heavy fears, Maitland entered the Consulate. Evelyn saw him, but she seemed to read his thoughts, and made no effort to rise and meet him.

"I must keep my alarms in check for her sake," thought the Consul. He came forward boldly, and made valiant efforts to cheer the unhappy young wife. She listened to his story, standing before him like a block of marble. Her face was white and motionless, her eyes sought the ground. When Maitland had finished speaking, Evelyn said, in a quiet, determined voice: "I will go with you."

Maitland endeavoured to show her the fearful risk she was running. But when she declared that she would lose her

senses if left behind, he saw she spoke truly, and consented to her going on condition that she took some refreshment, went straight to bed, and undertook to obey him implicitly when on the expedition.

The day which followed was one of terrible suspense. The Consul found it impossible to settle to his ordinary duties. The feeling of hopeless despair which had seized him as he was returning from the Taotai's Yamen increased as the hours flew on. Half an hour before the appointed time, he knocked at Evelyn's door and told her to be ready when he sent for her.

As the clock struck eight, the Taotai was seen to arrive at the trysting-place. A moment later he was met by Maitland, Mrs. Sterling, and a party of stalwart Englishmen. Maitland and Evelyn were carried in sedan-chairs; but Bryce, Captain Jeffreys, and other friends of the Consul's, accompanied the expedition on foot.

"I don't like the lady coming; but I suppose there is no help for it," said the Taotai, pointing with a shrug of his shoulders to Evelyn's chair. The party immediately departed in silence. As they moved on, Maitland glanced at a figure which was borne at the head of the procession in a chair, and recognised with some difficulty that it was Lin. His features expressed intense suffering, and he appeared more dead than alive. Now and then he was seen to open his eyes, and to direct the bearers on the desired road. They went slowly forward in the intense darkness. To both Evelyn and Maitland the distance seemed interminable. They passed the bridge where Sterling had been met on his first expedition, and reached the Hall of Fidelity and Loyalty. When they came to this spot, Maitland fancied that he heard a movement amongst the trees. His thought was evidently shared by

Lin, for he partly raised himself, and turned towards the thicket that covered the hills.

Maitland whispered his suspicions that they had been seen to the Taotai, who immediately gave orders to the coolies to go as fast as they could. Though the way was steep and rugged, the coolies carried their burdens quickly over the ground. They passed the Pavilion of the Black River, and the Palace of Justice, and at last Lin whispered to the man beside him: "Tell his Excellency we are close there."

Maitland overheard the words, and, getting out of his chair, went immediately to Evelyn's side. "You must stay here with Bryce," he said. "I dare not take you another step." Evelyn strongly objected to remain, and was only persuaded when she heard that her presence might interfere with the saving of her husband.

The Taotai, who seemed impatient at the brief delay which Maitland had caused while talking to Evelyn, immediately ordered the party to hurry forward.

For a moment they halted to gain breath for the last spring, and finally, at a command from the Taotai, they rushed into the Yellow Lodge. The sound of hurrying feet told them that their presence had been discovered, and that their quarry were fleeing. Maitland rushed forward with a few of the foremost soldiers, and almost immediately found himself within the inner hall. At the first glance, he thought that it was empty; but, peering through the gloom, he discovered one motionless figure, which appeared to be standing with outstretched arms in front of the tribunal. The Consul rushed forward, and, to his inexpressible distress, saw that it was the form of his friend. The unfortunate Sterling was fastened to the cross, with the wooden tally recording his sentence over

his head. Maitland's eyes quickly read the following sentence: "The English traitor to the Kolao-hwuy, sentenced to death by the Lingche process." The unfortunate man's head had fallen forward on his breast. His face was ashen pale. Maitland's first impression was that he was already dead. A cry, however, from one of the soldiers quickly and joyfully undeceived him.

"The Englishman is safe! he is unhurt: we are in time," said the man. "Cut him down—he is unhurt."

This was done in a moment; and Sterling, still unconscious, was dragged out of the hall into the outer air.

Had the rescue party been two minutes later, the dread sentence would have been carried out to the full. As it was, Sterling was safe. He opened his dazed eyes and looked around him. "Where am I?" he gasped. "Is it over? I can bear nothing further."

"It's all right, old fellow," said Maitland in his ear. "Keep up your courage. Your wife is waiting for you not a hundred yards away. You will soon be well enough for me to take you to her."

Maitland poured some brandy out of a flask which he was carrying, and induced Sterling to swallow the stimulant. His colour returned almost on the instant, and he sprang to his feet. "How can I thank you?" he said with a gasp. "Where is Evelyn? I must go to her."

The return journey was made without adventure; and a week later Sterling and his wife were shipped off to England, from which haven of refuge they are never likely to return to the horrors of the Celestial City.



**MRS. WYNDHAM'S SEASON OF TERROR**







## MRS. WYNDHAM'S SEASON OF TERROR

### CHAPTER I.

#### *THE ADVANCE OF THE JAPS.*

**W**HEN Charles Wyndham took his pretty young wife out to Port Arthur, some of her friends rejoiced in the fact that she would be in the same country with Richard Maitland, his courage and resource, and his well-known kindness to his own country-people, making them feel assured that Clara would be safely protected if under his auspices. The fact that his Consulate was very far from Port Arthur was unrecognised by these old-fashioned folk, China being to them, to a great extent, a *terra incognita*. The fact that both Clara and Maitland were each inmates of the Celestial country was in itself reassuring, and when writing they now and then congratulated her on the fact. By what strange circumstances she did eventually secure the aid of the warm-hearted Consul this story describes.

One evening towards the end of a certain October, the streets of Port Arthur were covered with a sprinkling of

snow. A keen north-west wind was blowing the flakes full against the sides of the horses and in the faces of the foot-passengers. It is well known that no Chinaman will face either rain or snow if he can help it, but this was a time when personal likes and dislikes had to give way to stern compulsion. It was a time of war. News of a very grave and startling character had reached Port Arthur that afternoon. It was made sufficiently clear even to the dull minds of the Chinamen that the Japanese had gained victories in Corea, and had crossed the Northern frontier into Manchuria. The defences of Port Arthur must therefore immediately be put in order. The Chinese officers were completely bewildered, and if it had not been for the half-dozen foreigners in the employ of the Government nothing but confusion would have reigned in the great fortress.

Happily for the Chinese, however, their foreign allies were staunch and self-reliant, and the man above all others in whom the authorities placed their utmost confidence was the young Englishman, Charles Wyndham. He had accepted the post of instructor in gunnery, and with zeal and courage had worked the natives up to a certain proficiency in the art. He was a dark-eyed, well-set-up young fellow, with straight eyebrows and a resolute face. On this particular afternoon there were lines of care about his mouth, and as he worked and ordered his men about, those who listened might have heard him sigh from time to time. The Chinamen who worked under him, and who never thought of danger until it was upon them, wondered at his lugubrious face; but they obeyed his sharp words of command without a murmur, and having done what was immediately necessary, he bade them a brief "Good-evening," and started off with a swinging pace to his home.

The house Wyndham was hurrying to was little more than a military hut, but his young wife had an artistic eye for adornment, and understood the method of making comforts out of the most unpromising materials.

On this special evening her little drawing-room appeared as a paradise of ease and comfort. A bright fire was blazing in the grate, and a shaded lamp gave a subdued light, which softened without concealing the brilliant face and pretty figure of the young mistress. She paused now in her work, straightened the table, on which supper was already spread, poked up the fire to a brighter blaze, and then, turning to the window, looked anxiously out. A well-known step was heard approaching, and the next moment Wyndham put in an appearance.

"Ah! there you are at last. How glad I am to see you!" she cried.

She threw open the hall-door, and drew her husband into the pretty drawing-room. He kissed her tenderly, pushed back the hair from her brow, and looked into her dark eyes.

"I could not help being late, Clara," he said. "News has come: the Japs are advancing towards Port Arthur. What a fool I was to bring you into a mess of this kind!"

"You were nothing of the sort," she replied, with spirit. "When I married a soldier, I knew what to expect."

"But I never thought you would be drawn into this kind of thing," he answered.

He sank into the nearest chair. There was an expression of despair on his face.

"What can be the matter, Charlie? Even if the Japs do come you will take care of me, won't you?"

"Look here, Clara, let's have something to eat first,

and then we'll talk the matter over. I am as hungry as a hunter, notwithstanding all my anxieties."

"Well, supper is ready. Will you wash your hands first?"

"Yes, I'll be back with you directly."

He left the room. Clara rang the bell, and the next moment a native servant appeared with some covered dishes. They were laid silently on the table, and the man withdrew.

Mrs. Wyndham went up to the neighbourhood of the fire and looked hard into the flickering blaze. Whatever she saw there seemed to give her strength, for there was not a trace of trouble, not a vestige even of anxiety, on her fine face when her husband came back to her.

"Ah, that's good!" he said smiling, as he drew up his seat to the table. "You must carve the dishes to-night, little woman. I am too dead tired to lift an unnecessary finger."

"Have you been very busy all the afternoon?" she asked.

"Yes, trying to teach those fellows their duty."

"Are they incorrigible?"

"Sometimes I think so, Clara. Pray don't let us talk of them. What was your latest news from England?"

"I had a letter from mother no later than to-day. They are all well."

"Have they given over crying for your absence?"

"They know I am quite safe with you, Charlie."

"Let me see—how long is it since you bade them good-bye?"

"Oh don't, Charlie dear—*don't* let us think of home to-night. This is my real home. With you, whatever happens, I am perfectly content."

"That's just it," he muttered, grinding his teeth—"with me; but what will she do without me, poor girl?"

He found it impossible to eat any more, and pushed back his chair from the table.

She glanced at him anxiously.

"It is three months since we were married, and I bless every day of the time," she said. "Now, Charlie, it is not your way to give in when things look a bit dark, and we always expected the Japs to come, did we not?"

"Of course we did. It is a shame for me to be down-hearted when you are so plucky. Come here, little woman; draw up your chair close to my side."

She did so, nestling up against him, and laying her head on his shoulder. The fire burned to a fine red glow; the window-curtains were not fully drawn, and some Chinamen passing by paused for a moment to look at the pair.

"That is the Englishman and his bride," one said to the other. "But he marches with the troops, does he not? She will have a bad time when she is left in Port Arthur alone."

"Now, Charlie, speak, unburden yourself," said Clara. "Do you really think that the Japs will take Port Arthur?"

"God only knows!" replied Wyndham. "They have managed to scramble into Manchuria, and, Clara—I would cut out my tongue rather than tell you this news if I could help it—I am appointed to go with a force to drive them back."

"What!" said Mrs. Wyndham. "You?"

"Yes, God help you, child! I must leave you here alone."

She turned white to her lips, then rose hastily, walked

to the fire, and bent down under the pretence of putting on more coals. In a moment she raised herself and looked her husband full in the face.

"Well," she said; "and you think I cannot manage. But I can. I always intended to be a good soldier's wife. The time of trial has come a little sooner than I expected; but you need not be at all afraid on my account, Charlie."

"Was there ever such a brave darling!" he cried. He sprang to his feet and clasped her to his heart. "Clara, I certainly will not be down-hearted when you show such courage."

"I am not a bit afraid," she replied.

There was an inward trembling which she said nothing about. In her heart of hearts she dreaded even to glance into the ghastly future which would leave her alone, the only Englishwoman in the fort; but now her duty was to cheer and encourage her husband.

"Tell me everything," she said. "If you go to meet the foe, of course you'll repulse them. You will win renown, Charlie, and I shall be prouder of you than ever."

"I'll do my best, for your sake," he replied. "Now, listen to me, Clara. I shall probably be away only three or four weeks. We hope to come upon the Japs in ten or twelve days, and then, depend upon it, there won't be many of them left in Manchuria. Directly we have settled their business we shall come back. All you have to do is to stay quietly where you are, and expect me—oh, in no time!—to be with you again."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

Her voice was quite bright; the colour blazed on either of her cheeks. She laid her hand caressingly on her husband's.

"Certainly I do," he replied.

He kept back the inward sigh which rose up from his heart, for he knew well that he was telling a falsehood.

The position of affairs was in reality the reverse of encouraging, and Wyndham knew that not only must he leave his wife unprotected at Port Arthur for possibly an indefinite period, but he would also have but a ragged following with which to oppose the onward march of the Japs.

"Well, Charlie," said Clara after a pause, "all we can do in the present emergency is to hope for the best. Things are never as bad as one expects them to be beforehand. Of course, I don't like you to leave me, and, somehow, I never thought that such a thing *could* be possible. But as you have to go, I'll be as plucky as the wife of a soldier ought to be." Here she gave him a bright glance. "Cheer up, old boy," she said, bending forward and kissing him on his cheek. "And now, when do you start?"

"The day after to-morrow. I shall be as busy as a bee until the moment comes, and you must help me all you can."

"Of course I will," she said; but her heart beat hard, and she found it more difficult each moment to keep her composure. Suddenly she rose to her feet. "It is later than I had the least idea of," she said. "You are dead tired. Won't you go straight off to bed and have a good sleep?"

"I think I will," he answered. "I have not the least doubt that the reason why I feel so despondent is because I am quite spent."

"You'll be much better in the morning," she answered.

"Now go to bed; I'll follow when I have made up my accounts."

The moment she found herself alone, Mrs. Wyndham flung herself on her knees by the deep armchair in which her husband had been seated. There she gave way to a short half-hour of despair.

"How can I bear it?" she cried, choking back the words even as they rose to her lips. "The anguish of doing without him! the loneliness of my position! But he at least shall not know what I suffer."

She bent her head again. Thoughts of her English home, of her happy married life up to the present dark moment, swept over her in a flood. Then the strength which is always given to true courage came back. She rose to her feet, and pressed her hands to her eyes.

"I won't give way," she cried aloud. "I daren't give way. I am an Englishwoman, and my husband is a brave soldier. He goes in the cause of duty; I stay behind in the same cause. He'll find me to the very end staunch as steel and firm as a rock. Yes, I'll cheer him on to the very end."

The next morning Clara's face was not even pale, nor could any despondency be traced in the bright light which shone in her eyes. There was a great deal to be done, and very little time had either of the pair to devote to thought. Wyndham spent the greater part of the day with his gunners, and when the evening came, he was so absolutely tired out as to be able to do little more than sleep.

Early the next morning he and Clara parted.

"I'll be back with you in a month at the farthest, all being well," were his last words to her.

"You will find me here whenever you return," she said in reply.



He kissed her passionately, and the next moment had left the house.

The order had been given that the troops were to start at eight o'clock, but, after the way of the Chinese, nothing was ready at the appointed hour. It was nearly noon before the bugle sounded to march.

Wyndham's campaign was scarcely begun before he saw that he had not the least chance of fulfilling the hopes with which he had cheered his young wife. It would be difficult indeed to tell when he should return to Port Arthur. The first night the troops only got as far as Kinchow, and it was a full fortnight before they found themselves in touch with General Sung's army in Manchuria. Here news met them which was the reverse of reassuring. The southern stronghold of Chiulien had fallen, and the Japanese were reported to be in full march on Fenghwang.

On hearing these tidings, the two generals—Sung and Kung—determined to oppose the Japanese. Wyndham, to his own delight, was detached for duty with the field force, and marched, under Kung's command, to meet the enemy. His low spirits revived as if by magic. The terrible time of inertia was over. A good fierce battle—the victory which he felt almost assured ought to be theirs, and he might once again be returning to Port Arthur and to Clara.

“At last!” he said to himself. “Oh, of course, we shall win a decisive victory. Our troops number fourteen thousand men. They make a brave show as they march along with banners flying and arms glistening. It is true we know very little as yet about the Japanese force; but at least we are certain that our men considerably outnumber theirs. Yes, things look to be on the mend at last. Give me the chance, and I'll fight with a will.

Surely I have more than any other man in the whole of this army to fight for—the safety of my wife. Oh that I had never brought her from England! When I think of her I feel nearly mad.”

“You are summoned to go immediately to General Kung’s tent to discuss the plan of the impending battle,” said an aide-de-camp who rode up to where Wyndham was standing at that moment.

“I’ll come at once,” replied the Englishman.

He said a word or two to his men, and started off, arriving in a very short time at the tent of the commander.

Anything less like the ordinary tent of a warrior in the field it would be difficult to imagine. Kung and his aides-de-camp were smoking opium on an extemporized divan, and their pipes were filled and lit by a female attendant with painted cheeks and brilliant attire.

Wyndham had asked two or three native commanders to accompany him, and on their entrance Kung roused himself from his pipe, and desired the attendant to retire to an adjoining tent. The young Englishman immediately asked a question through his interpreter.

“I want a map of the country,” he said.

Kung started when this request was made. He gave an ambiguous smile, and, stretching out his hand, produced with an air of pride a work on the art of war, published in the last century. Wyndham glanced at it with disgust and laid it down.

“This is no use whatever,” he said. “Have you not a map of the country as it now is?”

“No,” replied Kung, “and as far as I can tell,” he added, “there is no such thing in existence.”

“Well, then, please tell me at once what is your scheme of attack?”

To this the General replied in a very leisurely manner, and Wyndham quickly perceived that he had little or no idea even of the elements of war.

"It is all too evident what is meant," thought the Englishman. "Kung's intention is to throw the burden of the fighting as much as possible on my gunners. Well, I have trained them to a certain extent, and am abundantly willing to accept the position. Any action for me, provided it leads to victory."

He discussed the matter a little longer with Kung, and it was at last arranged that Wyndham's gunners should advance in front of the right and left of the line, that they should be supported by cavalry, and that the infantry should advance simultaneously with them. Eight o'clock on the following morning was the time fixed for the advance. Wyndham left the General's tent in a very complex state of mind.

"I don't like the look of things," he said, turning to one of his companions as he spoke.

The man stared at him, but did not reply.

"There is no use expecting sympathy from that quarter," thought the young man.

He suppressed some angry words which rose to his lips, and thought hard over his isolated and peculiar position.

"There's one thing which I must face," he thought, as he rode back to his gunners. "General Kung is an utter coward; he has neither the will nor the power to command his troops efficiently. It is true we outnumber the Japanese, but if once the enemy breaks through my line of gunners, the battle will be inevitably lost. Well, if I can save the day I will. There are still two hours of daylight left. I will ride immediately to reconnoitre the enemy."

Taking his most reliable sergeant with him, and avail-

ing himself of every bit of shelter, the Englishman was able to get near enough to the enemy to enable him by the aid of his field-glasses to get an accurate idea of its position. He quickly recognised, with a sinking of the heart, that the Chinese would have a very difficult task before them on the morrow, but he determined more firmly than ever that, as far as in him lay, he would do his utmost to repulse the Japanese.

Sleep was far from his anxious mind that night; so much depended on the morrow that he could scarcely control his fevered impatience, and at an early hour he was up and about. Long before the time appointed for the march his guns were limbered, and he and his men ready to start.

"There is no stir as yet amongst the cavalry and infantry," said his interpreter, coming up to him.

Wyndham perceived to his disgust that this was so.

"Very well; I'll go and wake up Kung," he said aloud.

He put spurs to his horse, and rode rapidly off to the General's tent. The chieftain was in bed, and fast asleep. With some roughness Wyndham aroused him, and told him that the troops ought now to be on the march.

Kung stared at the intruder, gave vent to a deep sigh, and then, finding there was no help for it, rose, and in a few minutes was fully dressed. In his heart of hearts he resented Wyndham's peremptory methods of rousing him to a sense of his duties, but as he could not but recognise that the business in hand was serious, he soon despatched the different aides-de-camp to the various divisional commanders, directing them to take up their positions at once. Most of these worthies were as drowsy as Kung had been till aroused by Wyndham, and it was quite ten o'clock before the troops were ready to march. At last

the hoisting of a flag at the General's tent, and the sounding of the bugles, showed that the march had really begun.

A brisk, frosty air blew in Wyndham's face as he rode forward, and once again the blood tingled in his veins. Having chosen his site on the previous afternoon, he had little doubt that Kung would see the advantage of trying to shell the enemy from this position. But he little knew the mind of the Chinese General.

Within a mile from the chosen spot an order reached him from Kung to halt and open fire.

"Tell his Excellency," he replied to the aide-de-camp who brought him this message, "there is no use whatever in halting here. In firing at this range only a stray shot would reach the Japanese; we should simply be throwing away shot and shell. Pray tell the General," continued Wyndham, "that I reconnoitred yesterday, and that about a mile further on there is a position from which we can do good execution."

The aide-de-camp, who was no friend of Wyndham's, and had from the first resented the Englishman's interference, rode sulkily away, and the young man halted his gunners to await his answer. To his disgust he saw that the cavalry were dismounting from their ponies, and the infantry were lying down, as though they had done enough for one day. In a very short time the aide-de-camp was seen riding quietly back.

"The General repeats his order," he cried: "you are to halt and open fire. General Kung is determined in this way to draw the Japanese from their intrenchments."

Wyndham looked furious, and turned away his head, unable to reply. His place was, however, to obey, and he had nothing for it but to order his men to

unlimber the guns, and prepare for action. As near as he could judge, the enemy were two and a half miles distant. He gave orders accordingly that that should be the elevation employed. He himself saw to the firing of the first gun, and perceived with some slight satisfaction that the shot fell close to the Japanese earthworks, doing, however, no sort of harm. Not caring to waste his shot, he directed his men to fire slowly. At the end of an hour he rode over to Kung, and asked how long he wished this sort of thing to continue.'

"Until we draw the Japanese from their intrenchments," was the reply.

The General laughed as he spoke. He was seated in his tent enjoying breakfast, and was in high good-humour. Wyndham was invited to share the repast.

"I could not eat," answered the Englishman.

He then went on to explain the folly of firing at such a distance.

"I don't mean to kill," laughed Kung in reply. Then he said, with a show of conviction, "The sound of your guns will be quite enough to frighten the Japanese from their stronghold."

To argue further with such a man was useless, and in great disgust Wyndham returned to his gunners. Another hour was spent in useless fusillade; then there came a movement in the Japanese lines. Wyndham caught up his glass, and perceived with satisfaction that an advance was being made. Better anything than the misery of the last hour. He hastily sent a messenger to Kung to inform him of the fact.

The Japanese were at last really on the march, and as they advanced, Wyndham contrived to throw some shell into their midst. In return, their artillery opened fire

with uncomfortable precision on the Chinese troops. One shell exploded close to where the young Englishman was standing, but though three of his men were killed by it, he escaped as by a miracle. His gunners, who had been carefully drilled, stood the fire with comparative composure, and for a time there seemed a chance of matters going well. But far otherwise was the conduct of the cavalry and the infantry. The shells, as they burst into their midst, created dire confusion, and wherever there was the least chance of shelter the men took advantage of it.

As the attack developed, it became obvious to Wyndham that the Japanese artillery was in far greater force than he had any idea of, and although the fire of his guns was accurate and telling, it in no way impeded the advance of the troops. He now saw to his despair that the day was likely to go against them. The infantry and cavalry were already in a state bordering on panic. Kung, instead of encouraging his men, had retreated to a place of safety in the rear.

The position was most critical. A regiment of Japanese cavalry appeared in each flank of the line in position, thus threatening to outflank Kung's troops. Every minute the fire became heavier, and as soon as the infantry got within range, a terrible rifle-fire still further threatened to destroy the Chinese forces. So fatal was the execution done that his men fell fast and thick about Wyndham, and were so reduced in number that he was obliged to send several guns out of action.

"Tell Kung that his only chance now lies in charging with his line against the advancing Japanese," shouted the Englishman to a hastily-summoned messenger.

The man galloped away. He found Kung, who was

hiding in the rear, and who received this message with a ghastly face. Fear had already completely bewildered him, and it is to be doubted if he even understood the meaning of Wyndham's words. The fact that the Japanese were within half a mile of his position was, however, very quickly recognised. Without uttering a word in reply to the messenger, the General turned, scrambled immediately on his pony, and, followed by his entire staff, took to flight. His example was immediately followed by the troops, and a *sauve qui peut* followed.

"Good God! the dastard has deserted me," muttered the Englishman to himself.

It required but a glance to show him how critical was his own position. He was left with two batteries of artillery unsupported by any other troops, and in face of a large advancing force. To face the position any longer would have been simple madness, and in order to save his guns he gave the order to limber up, and with his remaining men succeeded in carrying the guns from the field.

With a heart like lead, he made his way in the direction of Fengwang, and succeeded in reaching the shelter of its walls unmolested by the enemy. Five miles further on he overtook the still trembling General.

"We have done all that could be expected of us," said Kung when he saw him. "To court absolute defeat would have been worse than madness."

To this speech the Englishman felt too miserable and too indignant to make any reply.

Kung turned and regarded him carefully.

"You seem down about something," he said. "Now listen. I am about to send a despatch to Port Arthur. In it I shall say——"



"What?"

"That we have won a splendid victory."

"You will not dare," said Wyndham, turning pale.

"Dare!" echoed Kung. "You forget to whom you speak; but I will forgive you, for you did your small best. Perhaps you would like to write a letter to your wife; if so, it can accompany my despatch."

Wyndham turned his head aside; he felt almost unable to speak.

"Write to her," said the General. "You can go into one of my tents; you will find materials there."

"There is no chance of my returning to her for the present?" asked the Englishman.

"None, unless you would desert me, which is not likely."

"No, I cannot desert a failing cause," muttered Wyndham to himself. "Terrible as the present prospect is, I must remain now with Kung's forces."

He entered the General's tent, and, sitting down, drew a sheet of paper towards him, and began his miserable task. He tried hard to make the best of the story he had to tell, but, try as he would, he could not but reveal the truth to Clara. He must remain with the army in Manchuria; there would be no chance of his returning to Port Arthur until the Japanese should be driven back and the roads to that fortress effectually secured.

Meanwhile, Kung, well pleased with himself, and in high good-humour with the rest of the world, sat down and prepared to indite a despatch as false as his own nature. It ran in the following terms:

"A RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION.

"Your slave begs to inform your Excellency that on the 10th of the eleventh month, the Dwarfs [Japanese] ven-

tured in their folly to approach the Imperial Army. Your slave had difficulty in suppressing for the moment the ardour of his men, and when at last the Dwarfs came within striking distance, your slave gave orders for opening fire upon them. Like the noise of thunder the guns roared, the earth shook, and the flashes of the cannons like lightning illumined the heavens. The shots scattered death and destruction in the ranks of the Dwarfs, who, after making a vain stand, fled in the utmost confusion. Seeing the enemy shaken, your slave charged them at the head of the cavalry, and destroyed all those whom the guns had spared. Eight thousand corpses were counted on the field, and so thick were the dead that your slave had to withdraw to his present headquarters, which are ten miles from the field of battle.

“May your Excellency live long and flourish abundantly.

“KUNG.”





## CHAPTER II.

### *THE TAKING OF PORT ARTHUR.*

**C**LARA WYNDHAM was twenty-two years of age, and before her marriage had spent all her life in a sequestered part of England. Her nature was naturally both bright and courageous, and, although her present circumstances were about as dark as they could be, she determined when her husband left her not to give way to her anxiety. When she saw the last of him on the eventful day when he marched off to Manchuria, she turned into her now desolate little home, and said some cheery words to the good-natured amah (native servant) who attended her.

“We must get the whole house into perfect order against your master’s return,” she said to the woman.

“He no return any more,” was the dismal reply; but this Clara pretended not to hear.

Days passed, and the outlook grew gloomier. There were, of course, no tidings whatever from Wyndham, and the news which the amah picked up from her Chinese friends was the reverse of reassuring. Clara did not often care to venture outside her little home. She was the only Englishwoman in Port Arthur, and although one or two of her countrymen were to be found

there, the only one she knew was a man in trade of the name of Parker. He was a stout, middle-aged person, with a keen eye to the main chance. Wyndham had begged of him to visit his wife occasionally, in order that she might have the pleasure of talking to someone who knew her own tongue.

On a certain morning when the wind blew bitterly from the north and sleet showers fell at intervals, Clara received her husband's letter. Its news was depressing; but the delight of beholding his handwriting, and of reading the words he had written, prevented her realizing this. She was reading the letter for about the fifth time when Parker was announced.

"Well," he said, "so you have heard from your husband at last?"

"I have," she answered, "but his news is not good. The Chinese forces have been defeated, and Mr. Wyndham does not know when he can return to Port Arthur."

"I wish you were back in England," said Parker, giving the beautiful girl an unquiet glance as he spoke. "I cannot understand," he continued, "why Wyndham brought you out to place you in your present perilous position."

"I won't listen to any blame of my husband," answered Clara, with a flash in her eyes. "Surely a woman can bear what a man can." Then she sighed heavily. "The thing that tries me is not the danger, but the inaction," she said. "I am forced to spend hour after hour in this little hut, with no company but my amah and my own hateful thoughts."

"God in heaven help you, madam!" said the man. "You may at least rely upon me," he added, "if any danger should arise."

"I am sure you would do what you could for me," answered Clara gratefully; "but now just tell me one thing, will you—do you think the Japanese will attack Port Arthur?"

"If all we hear is correct, there is little doubt of it, Mrs. Wyndham; and when that day comes I can only say, Heaven help us all!"

'You don't think, then, that the Chinese will oppose them?'

"Not effectually. They are a pack of cowards—the most villainous nation on God's earth."

"Oh, pray don't speak so loud," said Clara; "my amah understands a little English. I do not fear ordinary danger," she continued, drawing up her slender figure to its full height, "but I do dread treachery; it is the thought of that which now and then almost turns my brain."

At this moment the amah, a stout and very ugly Chinese, entered the room.

"You want to lite" (write) "too much-ee quick-ee to your husband," she cried. "The Governor is sending a despatch, and one piecee man can catch-ee letter from you in one hour time."

"Very well, I'll write at once," said Clara. "Go now; do not keep wandering about the room. I'll ring if I want anything."

The woman departed, somewhat sullenly.

Mrs. Wyndham said good-bye to Parker, and then ran to her desk, took out a sheet of paper, and began to write. As she did so the lovely colour revisited her cheeks, and her dark, beautiful eyes grew bright as stars. Wyndham was never destined to receive that affectionate letter, but it did his young wife good to write it. When she had

finished it, filling it up with every scrap of hope she could possibly put in the written words, she folded it, kissed it, and addressed it to her husband. When the messenger called it was ready to go.

The rest of the evening passed miserably. A sort of pall seemed to hang over Port Arthur: even the faces of the Chinamen looked anxious and disturbed. Clara Wyndham watched them from behind her window-screen as they stopped in the street in little knots eagerly talking, gesticulating, and now and then wringing their hands. Surely something dreadful was about to happen. Her husband was far away. There was no fate too awful to which she might not be exposed. She went to bed late that night, and it was nearly morning before she fell into a feverish sleep. From this she was awakened by the booming of a gun. The sound at first mingled with her dreams, and she imagined that her husband was being shattered to pieces by a Japanese shell. A second boom, however, brought her to full consciousness. Unaccustomed to war alarms, she thought at first that the firing might be a salute in honour of some national Chinese festival, but she was quickly undeceived. Hurrying feet of men in haste and agitation passed and repassed her house, and the next moment her amah with a terrified face burst into the room.

"The Japanese men have come. Just now they fire big guns," said the woman.

"Do you mean that they are attacking Port Arthur?" asked Clara.

"They have not come this place yet; they too much fight Kinchow's side," replied the woman.

Mrs. Wyndham knew what this meant, and her heart sank within her. In the old days, as they seemed to her now, Charlie had often jokingly said that if he were laying

siege to Port Arthur, he should begin by landing a force at the narrow neck of the Kinchow Peninsula, thus cutting off the Port from the rest of the world. The amah's words convinced her that this was what the Japanese had done. There was now, therefore, a Japanese army between herself and her husband—she trembled at the thought.

“Help me to dress,” she said to the amah.

The woman, who, in her own uncouth way, was fond of Mrs. Wyndham, immediately began to wait upon her. Clara had a sympathetic and bright way which won her affection, even from the most unlikely people. The woman now tried hard to talk on indifferent matters while she bustled about, and then brushed and arranged her mistress's luxuriant hair. Clara, however, scarcely heard her prattle. Her thoughts were far away with Charlie in the dreary plains of Manchuria, and now and then with those she loved next to him in her English home.

“Now, Daffodil,” she said to the woman, “I am going to see my friend, Mr. Parker. Bring me my hat and cloak at once.”

“Outside hab got snow,” said the woman, holding up her hands; “me go out call Mr. Parker.”

“No, thank you, Daffodil. I would rather go by myself.”

Parker was in his store, busily packing up his loose goods which were wont to be exposed to attract customers when Mrs. Wyndham entered. He was startled at seeing her, and terrified at her look of misery.

“You are out very early this morning, madam,” he said, trying to put a tone of indifference into his words.

“Yes,” she replied. “I have good reason to come. I want to ask you a question. Is it true that the Japanese have landed at Kinchow?”

Parker paused for a moment, looking full at his visitor's speaking face.

"Yes, it is too true," he replied then; "and a very bad business it is," he continued. "I suppose they will try to take this place next; but the Chinese tell me they can defend the port against any number of Japanese."

"Do you really think they can?" asked Clara.

"They say so, Mrs. Wyndham, but I do wish your husband were here to put some backbone into them."

"God help us all, I wish he were!" said Clara in response.

Her face turned white as death; she bit her lips to keep back the tears which she was too proud to shed.

"You look very bad yourself, madam," said the man; "you must try not to be frightened. Be quite certain of one thing, that whatever happens, I will do my best to defend you. You have been left in my charge in a measure," he continued.

"Yes, I am sure you will do what you can," said the poor girl; "and now I must not keep you longer. I will go back to my own house. Perhaps things will not turn out so disastrously as we fear."

"Perhaps not," answered Parker; "but you must allow me to see you home."

He did so, returning quickly to his store, and murmuring some words under his breath in much agitation.

"God help that poor girl if the Japs take possession!" was his thought of thoughts. "I wish to heaven she was out of this!"

All day long the sound of distant firing could be heard, and the next evening a rumour began to spread that Kinchow had been taken. Parker called two or three times a day at Clara's house. He saw her on each of these



occasions, bringing her the current news. Towards night it was his painful duty to confirm the report of the capture.

"What will they do next?" asked Mrs. Wyndham.

"I suppose they will advance on this place."

"Do you think the Chinese will really try to defend it?"

"I hope they will," replied the man, "for if the Japs get in, God help us all! But now, madam, let us hope for the best. I saw the Chinese General to-day, and he told me he will make mincemeat of the Japanese in a very short time, if they venture to appear."

Clara knew what Charlie's estimate of the fighting qualities of the Chinese had been, and she shuddered to think that the safety of the place depended on them.

Her distress was confirmed by the reports which were brought in hour by hour. The Japanese were steadily advancing towards the fortress.

On the following morning the amah came to inform Mrs. Wyndham that the Chinese General had called to see her. A rumour had reached him of the presence of a beautiful English girl in the fortress, and he had come as much out of curiosity as any other sentiment.

"I have come," he said, bowing low, when she appeared in her little drawing-room, "to assure you that you have no cause whatever for alarm. If the Japanese come, I and my men will quickly make mincemeat of them."

"I am very much obliged to you," answered Clara. "I hope, in that case," she added, "that they will not be foolhardy enough to approach the fort."

"Let them try," answered Li, looking very grand and pompous; and, walking to one of the windows as he spoke, he said a few more words, trying to convey to Clara his

admiration of her, and his desire to defend her in every way in his power.

The next morning, however, to her astonishment he called again. On this occasion he looked full of agitation, and had the air of a man who wanted to unburden himself. So marked were his feelings that concealment was no longer possible.

"The despicable Japs, lady," he said, speaking through an interpreter, "have, with that thievish conduct which distinguishes them, advanced against this place, and are now quite close to it."

Here the beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, though the day was a very cold one.

"So I have heard," replied Clara, curious as to what was coming, and almost amused at Li's evident terror. "I did not know," she continued, "that you felt any apprehension with regard to the result. I thought you were sure of victory."

"So I am—so I am. Of course, my troops might have swept them into the sea."

"Then why don't they?" asked Mrs. Wyndham.

"Because, lady, I want to lure the Japanese to complete destruction, and to this end I propose starting off tomorrow in the steam launch for Chefoo."

"Do you mean to say you are going to desert your post of duty?" asked Clara, with a mingling of terror and disgust in her tone.

"I am going that I may come back with a force sufficient to completely overwhelm them, and I have come here this morning to advise you to come with me, to escape from the attack on the town and possible danger to your life."

"I cannot do that," said Clara. She rose as she spoke. There was no mistaking the look of supreme con-

tempt on her fine face. "It may be a Chinese custom," she continued, "for men to desert their post in the face of danger, but English women do not do that kind of thing. Mr. Wyndham left me here, and I shall stay here until I get directions from him to go elsewhere."

Li looked at the beautiful girl standing at her full height before him with an admiration which almost overcame his fear. He had long secretly admired her beauty, and had wondered at the complete confidence which existed between her and her husband. He had contrasted this state of things with the condition of his own household and those of his friends.

"You must please yourself, of course," he said, after a pause. "I ask you to come to Chefoo out of kindness. I think that you are very wrong not to accept my proposal. Mr. Wyndham is in Manchuria, and cannot be here to save you from all the terrors of the siege. You would be quite as near him there as you are here, and he would be able to come to you then without let or hindrance."

"I can only repeat what I have just said," said Clara, softened a little by Li's evident goodwill towards her. "My husband has left me here, and here I shall stay until I am imperatively driven from the place."

Further argument being useless, Li took his leave with many compliments and profound apologies for having troubled the young English lady.

That same night he embarked for Chefoo, leaving the defence of the town to a subordinate. His visit, and the announcement of his desertion, disturbed Clara considerably. The incidents of the last few days—the fact that the firing had become not only constant, but sounded nearer and nearer—made it impossible for her not to recognise that Li's action was prompted by immediate

danger—in short, she guessed only too well that the crisis was at hand. It came sooner than she had expected.

The next morning she was startled from her sleep by a sound the like of which she had never heard before, and which she recognised as the bursting of a shell. She rose at once, and hastily called her amah, whose terror was piteous to behold.

“Oh, lady, why you no go yesterday with Li!” she shrieked, wringing her hands as she spoke. “This Japan man come, kill us all.”

“But perhaps the Japanese will be defeated,” said Clara. She uttered her words with a sinking heart. “Come, now, and dress me at once,” she added. “I must go out, and see for myself what is going on.”

“No, lady, you must not go out door,” said the woman. “It not safe. Jap man soon enter Port Arthur.”

This gloomy prognostication proved indeed to be the case. The Japanese had already captured the outer fort, and had turned the guns on the harbour. Fortunately, Mrs. Wyndham's house was just under a high bank, and so was entirely protected against shot from the land side; but from her window she could see that the Japanese fire was carrying death and destruction on all sides. The sights which now met her eyes were painful and shocking. The streets were strewn with the wreckage of houses blown to pieces by the Japanese shell, while in every open space the bodies of men were lying in the ghastly attitude of death. In the roadway in front of the house several had already fallen, and one wounded man was rolling over and over in his agony. This was more than the kind-hearted English girl could witness in inaction. Calling the amah to follow her, she went quickly out into the street, and, with the help of the amah, carried the wounded man into

the house and laid him on a bed. He was quite unconscious. Clara, with infinite tenderness, stripped off his clothes, and proceeded to lay bare the wound. A splinter of a shell had ripped up his right arm, and had carried away part of his breast.

Mrs. Wyndham had attended a course of ambulance lectures before leaving England, and had in this way learned the first principles of the healing art. She now busied herself washing and dressing the wound, and had the satisfaction of seeing the man gradually return to consciousness and comparative ease. The occupation was doubtless good for her, and helped to distract her attention from the events which were passing around her. These were alarming enough: the fire of the musketry grew heavier and heavier; the shrieks of the wounded and dying filled the air. The wretched amah seemed to have lost all self-control, and lay, in the abandonment of terror, crouching at Clara's feet. Mrs. Wyndham's fine nerves, however, seemed to rise to the occasion. She wondered once or twice why Parker did not come to protect her; but seeing she was alone, she determined to fight for her life valiantly to the very last.

The fire of heavy guns was now exchanged for the rattle of musketry, and towards evening the Japanese fought their way into the streets of the town. Then followed a scene common enough in the East at such times. The Chinese soldiers threw away their arms, slipped off their uniforms, and began the deadly work of pillage and outrage. Happily for her, Mrs. Wyndham's servants remained stanch in their loyalty, and, knowing the way of their class, took the precautions to barricade the door and windows. Repeated attacks were made on the house, but the rioters, finding it defended, moved on, in their haste,

to easier captures. At dusk, however, a more serious attack was made by a party of ex-soldiers, who, knowing that the house belonged to a foreigner, expected to reap a rich harvest from the pillage of it. They battered the door with heavy blocks of timber, and so alarmed the servants that Clara was obliged to leave the side of the wounded man, and to take command of the defence. As the door yielded to the savage assailants, the coolies, by Clara's orders, put fresh supports against it. These in their turn gave way, and Clara saw that it was becoming a question of a hand-to-hand fight. Hastily she armed her men with the weapons in the house, and, taking a revolver herself, she stood pale but calm, determined to defend her life and honour to the last.

In a moment's time a loud shout announced that the door and its supports had at last yielded, and four brutal-looking Chinamen were preparing to force their way over the beams and pieces of furniture which stood between them and their prey.

"Move another step and I fire!" called out Mrs. Wyndham, quite forgetting that the ruffians were happily no English-speaking people. But her action spoke quite as distinctly as though she had addressed the men in the purest Chinese.

"Sha! sha!" (Kill her! kill her!) shouted the leader.

These were the last words he uttered. As he sprang over the barricade, Clara drew the trigger, and he fell dead, shot, as chance would have it, through the heart. For a moment this checked the others; but only for a moment. With wild shouts they ran together to the assault, and though Clara wounded one or two, and though the coolies used their swords as well as they could, the ruffians forced their way into the house.

At this terrible moment, even amongst the din and confusion, Mrs. Wyndham heard the word "Halt!" sounding at the door. The word was familiar, and brought a gleam of hope, though in her agitation she was quite at a loss to imagine whose could be the voice. For a flashing instant she even hoped that by some fortunate circumstance her husband might have come back; but only for an instant, for before she could really collect her thoughts she saw her assailants laid low by soldiers in uniform whose physique and appearance announced them to be Japanese.

The officer who was with them came forward just as the last Chinaman fell to the ground, and, taking off his hat, made a low bow. He then addressed Mrs. Wyndham in excellent English.

"I am sorry, lady, that these Chinamen should have behaved so badly. I sincerely hope you are not hurt."

"Not in the least, thank you," was the quiet reply. "I am very grateful to you for having saved me from those men."

So saying, Mrs. Wyndham led the officer into the drawing-room, while his men and the house coolies removed the bodies of the rioters.

The officer had now time to observe his hostess, and it was plain that he looked at her excited but lovely face with unmixed admiration.

"May I ask," he said, after a moment's pause, "how it is that you, an English lady, are here alone?"

"My husband was sent," replied Clara, "to oppose your troops in Manchuria."

"In what part of Manchuria?" asked the officer.

"Near Fenghwang—at least, he was in that neighbourhood when I last heard from him. Have you any news from that part?" she added eagerly.

"We have," was the reply; "and if you will give me your word of honour that you will not communicate it to a single soul, I will tell you what it is."

"Oh, how heartily I shall thank you! I will, indeed, promise faithfully not to tell anyone."

The beautiful pleading face, the anxious words, touched the heart of the visitor, and he said deprecatingly:

"I am much afraid my news will not be satisfactory hearing to you."

"Do you mean that they are all killed?" asked Clara, her face turning white.

"No, far from it, indeed," replied the officer. "The Chinese army retreated to Newchang, and are, so far as we know, at that port now. I have no doubt," he added, in an attempt to cheer her, "that at this moment your husband is in the safe keeping of the British Consul."

"You have saved me from danger and from anxiety, and I thank you from my heart," replied Clara. "Now, perhaps, I ought to tell you that I have a wounded Chinese soldier in here. He was shot down in the street yonder, and I brought him in to dress his wounds."

"How kind of you! but I will relieve you of this anxiety. We are establishing a hospital, and I will send round an ambulance for him directly I get back to headquarters. Now, may I ask you your name?"

"Most certainly; my name is Mrs. Wyndham. Will you not, in return, tell me yours?"

"I am Marshal Kittagawa, in command of the troops here," he said, with a low bow.

"Once again I must thank you, Marshal Kittagawa; you have saved my life, and also relieved me from anxiety of the worst and most torturing kind."

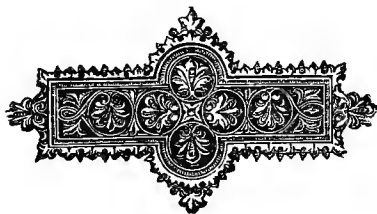
"You allude to your husband?"



“I do.”

The Marshal walked to the window and looked out ; thoughts of a bewildering nature were surging through his brain.

“The most beautiful woman I ever saw,” he muttered to himself. “Her husband is nothing to me. Doubtless if the fellow is not dead he soon will be. She shall be mine. I will make her my wife, in spite of all obstacles. If her beauty did not dazzle my eyes, her courage would alone have won my heart.”





### CHAPTER III.

#### *A FALSE FRIEND.*

**M**ARSHAL KITTAGAWA went back to headquarters with his soul, as he expressed it, on fire.

“That beautiful girl shall be my wife before another moon is over,” he murmured over and over again to himself. “Now, how shall I manage it? By getting rid of the husband, of course. It will be easy to win her affections by expressing sympathy for that fellow, to whom, anyone can see with half an eye, she is devoted; and then if I cannot compass his death, which must surely be possible, I can, at least, cause a report to that effect to be conveyed to her.”

By the time he reached his rooms, the Marshal was in high good-humour. He was a man who had been accustomed to many climes. He had served as military attaché in Paris and at London, and flattered himself that he was as good a judge of character as any man alive. He recognised at a glance Mrs. Wyndham’s devotion to her husband, and saw that if he was to win her he must work on this chord in her heart.

As a rule Kittagawa was a stern and silent man. Like all Japanese, he was short and dark; but, unlike most of his countrymen, the lower part of his face showed evidence

of strong determination of character. Judged by the European model, he was better-looking than the majority of the Japs, and had the complexion rather of a Caucassian than of one of the yellow races.

Notwithstanding the excitement of the morning and the tremendous amount of work yet to be done, Kittagawa's thoughts were entirely devoted to the subject of Mrs. Wyndham. He could scarcely sleep that night, and early in the morning was back at poor Wyndham's hut. By Kittagawa's orders a body of Japanese soldiers had been stationed round the hut during the night; they now made way for their chief, and he soon found himself in Clara's presence. She looked pale and tired; there were black shadows under her eyes, and the result of yesterday's agony was apparent all over her lovely face.

"I do not know how to thank you," she began impulsively.

The Marshal went forward and seized her hands.

"I have been thinking of you," he said, with emotion; "I cannot get you out of my head. You are unsafe here. You must come immediately to headquarters, and allow me to place the most comfortable tent I have at your disposal."

"But my husband left me here," she said.

"Under existing circumstances he could not for a moment counsel your remaining here. I could scarcely sleep last night for thinking of your danger. You must come with me; your amah and boy can, of course, accompany you."

"You are more than kind," said Mrs. Wyndham; "and perhaps it may be best," she added.

"It is the only thing to do. Be sure, madam, that all that a man can do to render you assistance in so critical a moment will be my greatest endeavour. My proposal is

that as soon as possible we start for Newchwang in order that you may rejoin your husband."

"Do you indeed mean that?" said Clara. Her eyes grew very bright; then all of a sudden her composure gave way, and she burst into tears.

"Don't," said the Marshal; "the sight of your grief quite unmans me."

"It is your goodness," sobbed the poor girl. "Oh! you don't know what I have suffered: the thought of his danger, and the—the long parting."

"I quite understand," said Kittagawa. "And now some of my soldiers shall move your belongings. I cannot rest until you are in a place of safety."

Clara left her drawing-room, where this interview had taken place, to seek the amah.

"Marshal Kittagawa is more than kind," she said to the woman. "He wants me to go at once to headquarters; you of course will accompany me."

To this proposal the ugly old Chinese woman shook her head.

"I no like that man," she said. "What for he make such fuss? Don't go with him, missus; let Mr. Parker take care of you."

"No, no," said Clara, laughing; "you don't understand; you will come with me. Why, you silly old woman! the kind Marshal intends to take me to Newchwang to rejoin my husband."

"I no like that man," repeated the amah.

"Well, like him or not," said Mrs. Wyndham, "you have got to obey me now. Pack what we require; we must leave this dear little home within the next hour."

There came a ring at the front-door, and Clara ran herself to open it. Parker stood without.

"Oh, come in," said Mrs. Wyndham; "I think I have good news for you."

"Why, you look quite bright!" he said, in astonishment. "I called to know what you intend doing under these new circumstances."

"Of course, my one and only desire," answered Clara, "is to rejoin my husband, and by hook or by crook I meant to do so at the first opportunity. But before I tell you anything further, what do you intend to do yourself?"

"For the present I intend to stay on here, for the Japanese are excellent customers; they have nearly emptied my store, and, what is more, they have paid for everything they have taken. I should think," added Parker, fixing his eyes on the eager face of the girl who stood opposite to him, "that your best plan would be to take a passage on the first steamer to Chefoo, there to wait for a ship going to Newchwang."

"Oh, I can do better than that," answered Mrs. Wyndham. "I can scarcely tell you how more than kind Marshal Kittagawa has been; he is going to take me himself to Newchwang, where I hope my dear husband will be able to meet me."

"I no like that man," said the amah, poking in her ugly old head at this juncture.

Clara could not help laughing.

"It is extraordinary, the antipathy the old woman has taken to the Marshal," she said to Parker. "Indeed, I have never met anyone kinder. He insists on my moving to headquarters, and I am going there to-day."

At these tidings Parker looked grave.

"I should not place too much dependence on Kittagawa," he said, after a pause.

"Why, you are as bad as the amah," said Clara. "No,

I am not going to be prejudiced," she added ; " I like Marshal Kittagawa ; I know I am doing right in accepting his escort to Newchwang."

" Are you going to headquarters to-day ?"

" Yes ; he has given me leave to take the amah and my other servants. I am to have a tent to myself, and my own coolies and servants are to look after my comfort."

" Well, I don't quite like it," said Parker ; " but really, under the circumstances, it may be the best thing you can do."

The kind-hearted little man left the house oppressed by misgivings ; but Mrs. Wyndham's position was such a peculiar one that he scarcely knew how to advise her.

" She is between two fires, poor girl!" he muttered to himself. " If she remains here, there is no saying to what indignities she may not be subjected. On the other hand, the Marshal has no reason to be good to her, and if his character is what I have heard, I fear she may be doing wrong in throwing herself so completely upon his mercy."

But Mrs. Wyndham herself had no such fears. Before the end of that day she had removed, with her possessions, to the Japanese headquarters. The Marshal received her with effusion, and immediately placed a most comfortable tent at her disposal.

" It is possible," he said, " that I may not be always in your neighbourhood on the road, but I will at least take care that one of my aides-de-camp shall see that you have all you want. Your servants themselves will also see to your comforts."

" I don't know how to thank you enough," said Clara. " I am all impatience to start," she added. " In how many days do you think we shall get to Manchuria ?"

"Probably six or seven, but it must depend to some extent on the weather."

"And you will really see me safe to Newchwang?"

"I will do my utmost. If there is any difficulty in my getting there, I will arrange that you shall have a safe-conduct through the Chinese lines."

"How good you are!" murmured Clara. Her eyes were bright; the old bloom which had faded from her cheeks during the last few weeks of anxiety had returned to them. The Marshal gave her a glance of keen admiration.

"This is a very comfortable tent," he said; "it is a double one, and has a sort of additional room in it which your amah can occupy. You must expect very cold weather on the journey."

"I should like to ride during the journey," said Clara; "I have got my favourite Mongolian pony."

"You must not attempt it," said the Marshal; "if you did such a thing at this time of year, you would probably be frost-bitten all over."

"That seems too awful a fate to run the risk of," she answered, smiling. She then left him, and busied herself with the amah in making preparations for their journey.

On that night her heart was full of excitement and gratitude. She continued to think the Japanese Marshal the best of men. He was the first person she had met since Charlie went away who seemed to take a personal interest in her. As to his being actuated by any *dernière pensée*, it did not occur to her unsuspecting nature even for a moment.

At an early hour the next day the march northward began. The Marshal had placed a sufficient number of the troops in garrison in order to secure Port Arthur, and started with the rest of his men *en route* for Newchwang.

Clara travelled in a covered cart ; another cart was supplied for the luggage, and a third for the amah and boy. The troops marched off punctually, and Mrs. Wyndham could not help recognising the width of the gulf which separated the smart, trim, well-disciplined soldiers of the Japs from the Chinese rabble which Wyndham had been accustomed to command.

The first camping-ground was reached just at dusk, and an orderly, who had been specially told off to attend to Mrs. Wyndham, led her to the General's headquarters, close to which her own tent was now carefully fixed. A brasier was burning in the middle, and a camp-bedstead was acting its daily part as an arm-chair ; a little round table stood close to it, and altogether there was an air of comfort about the room which she did not expect to find. After a quiet rest at the end of the fatigues of the day, and a frugal repast furnished from the Marshal's kitchen, and supplemented with a tin of biscuits from Parker's store, the Marshal himself appeared.

Clara motioned him to a chair, and he sat down facing her.

"I am all solicitous to know how you fared on the road," he said. "I have every hope that you will find this tent comfortable, and all these arrangements to your liking."

"I never knew that a journey in such cold weather could be made so endurable," answered Mrs. Wyndham.

"Well that is all right. Believe me, there is nothing I would not do for you." Then he gave her a prolonged stare of broad admiration.

She started, and drew herself up, the colour flaming into her cheeks.

"How happy your husband will be to find you again !" said the wily Marshal instantly.

At the mention of Wyndham's name the sudden look of



alarm left the young wife's face, and tears sprang to her eyes.

"Oh, how I love him!" she said impulsively. "When we meet, how he will thank you, Marshal, for the service you are rendering me!"

The Marshal bit his lips.

"I will bid you good-night now," he said; "we must resume our march at a very early hour."

He left the tent, but only to stamp his foot outside.

"I must take means to get that report circulated with regard to Wyndham's death," he reflected.

He returned to his own tent, but, being too excited to sleep, he paced up and down until the small hours. Finally he wrote a despatch, which he carefully sealed, and early the next morning gave it into the charge of an orderly. This man had implicit instructions, and Kittagawa smiled to himself as he thought them over during the ensuing day.

"She may fret for a bit," he reflected; "but in the end she cannot hold out against what I have to offer. Whether the husband is really dead or not, I am absolutely determined to secure her."

Meanwhile Clara had spent a restless evening. The look in the Marshal's dark eyes, the fervour of his tones, the passion which sprang into his voice when he spoke to her, had not failed to arrest her uneasy attention. For the first time she began really to doubt him, and to wonder if she had done wisely in placing herself so unreservedly under his escort. She was tired, however, from her long march, and as she was fully committed to the journey, there was nothing now but to make the best of it.

By the time the amah had spread out the armchair into a bed she was more than ready for sleep. The cold had

been intense during the day, and the breeze had that numbing effect which cold winds in high latitudes always have. The reveille woke her all too soon; but though not much inclined to move, she was ready to start when the advance was sounded.

Day now followed day in monotonous succession. Each evening the Marshal repeated his visits, and Mrs. Wyndham had more and more reason to fear and dislike him.

On the tenth evening, just before the army reached Newchwang, Marshal Kittagawa paid his usual visit. He looked excited, could scarcely keep still, and his bold eyes sought Clara's with a look in them which terrified her. She stood up at last, trembling slightly.

"How soon do you think we shall have arrived at a point from which I shall be able to branch off to Newchwang?" she asked.

"We shall all arrive at Newchwang to-morrow," he answered.

"Do you indeed say so? I had not the slightest idea we were so near. Oh, how happy your tidings make me!" All the fear left her face. She hated herself for having doubted the Marshal even for a moment. "You have been my good friend," she said impulsively; "and when my husband sees you he will know how to thank you."

"Then, you expect to meet your husband in Newchwang to-morrow?" asked the Marshal.

"Why not? You have assured me that he was there."

"I certainly did think so," he answered. He turned his head aside and hesitated as he spoke.

"Why? What is the matter? Have you bad news for me?" she asked, turning pale.

"I am deeply sorry for you," he answered; "I cannot conceal the truth from you any longer. A report has

reached me, which seems to have an excellent foundation, that your unfortunate husband has died in consequence of his wounds."

"Oh, impossible!" said Clara. "You cannot expect me to believe you." She laughed excitedly. She was too much stunned to take in the meaning of the Marshal's words. "I know Charlie is alive," she said, with conviction. "Reports of that kind are always circulated. You don't frighten me, Marshal. I shall see my husband at Newchwang to-morrow."

"At any rate, Captain Wyndham will not be at Newchwang," said the Marshal impatiently. "The letter which I received informed me that he had gone to Yingkow, had been received by the English Consul, a man of the name of Maitland——"

"Richard Maitland! I know him," said Clara, her eyes kindling.

"I am informed further," said the Marshal steadily, "that Wyndham died at the Consulate about three weeks ago. I can show you the communication, if you please."

As he spoke, he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and took out a letter. He unfolded it, and placed it before Clara. It was written in Japanese. She was trembling greatly now; a cold fear took possession of her heart.

"I cannot read your writing," she said, lifting her beautiful eyes to his face, full of dumb agony. "Read it for me, will you?"

He did so, coming close to her, and dropping his voice to a low, sympathetic whisper.

"I am truly, truly sorry for you," he said; "but I fear there is truth in this report."

"Then leave me now, for I cannot talk to anyone," murmured the unhappy girl.

The Marshal left the tent with slow steps. The last he saw of Clara she had flung herself into the nearest chair, and buried her head on the rough little table which stood in the centre of the tent.

The next day the Japanese army entered Newchwang and took up their quarters within the garrison. A comfortable room, one of the best in the place, was allotted to Mrs. Wyndham, and as early as possible in the evening the Marshal paid her his accustomed visit. Notwithstanding his hardened nature, he was really shocked at the change in her. Every scrap of colour had left her face; her eyes were swollen from weeping. Much of her great beauty had deserted her.

"This state of things must not go on," reflected the Marshal. "She will no longer be beautiful if she gives way to such frantic grief."

"I am sorry to see you so melancholy," he said; "you must cheer up."

She interrupted him.

"I have made up my mind," she said, "and am glad that you have called. Will you give me an escort to convey me at once to the English Consulate at Yingkow? I do not for a moment believe that my husband is dead. Anyhow, I should like to find myself under Mr. Maitland's protection."

"Have you no feeling for those you leave behind?" asked the Marshal suddenly.

"My duty is towards my husband. I feel that he is alive. I have no desire except to get to him as quickly as possible."

"Then, listen to me for one moment," said the Marshal

suddenly. His voice trembled with the depths of his passion. "I cannot keep this secret any longer. I love you to distraction. I have loved you ever since I first saw you that day at Port Arthur. I cannot give you up. Forget that English husband of yours. Believe that I am right : believe that he is no longer in existence. Be my wife, and when we go back to Japan you shall have wealth and position second only to the ladies of the Mikado's Court."

In his fervour he seized her hand, which she was too much startled and shocked to rescue from his grasp. At length she found words.

"How dare you insult me in this way!" she cried. "Is this your chivalry and honour? Is it for this that you induced me to accept your escort? I hate and despise you, and, please God, will never speak to you again! Leave me immediately!"

As she said these words she rose from her chair. She was taller than the Marshal, and as she stood casting scorn and defiance at him from her full, lustrous and flashing eyes, her beauty returned in a more marked degree than ever. The Marshal was a brave man, and had had many experiences, but he was cowed by the indignant fury of the English girl.

"You will think better of this before morning," he said. "Please understand that you are completely in my power. Your English husband is dead, rest assured on that point ; and even if he were not, he is irretrievably ruined, whereas, according to our rights and customs, I can offer you an honourable marriage with wealth and titles."

"Go!" was all Clara's answer ; and, in obedience, the Marshal turned and left her.

The amah came in presently, to find her mistress deadly pale and sobbing bitterly.

"What for you cry so badly?" said the woman.

"Oh, it is not only my grief with regard to Captain Wyndham," said poor Clara—"you know I told you that I did not for a moment believe he was dead—but it is the Marshal." Here she related in broken words exactly what had taken place.

"I tell missis that man no good man. Missis laugh, but all the same I talk-ee true pidgin."

"Yes, I see now that you are perfectly right," said Clara. "The Marshal is a bad, wicked man, but, oh! what am I to do? for I am completely in his power. I will not stand it," she said; "I will escape, come what may."

"What can do?" asked the amah.

"I must get to Yingkow. The English Consul there, Mr. Maitland, is an old friend of mine. I believe my husband is with him. I am convinced that he is alive. Yes, I will go there."

"But you cannot," said the amah. "Marshal Kittagawa watch all the gates. You no can pass, and if you go you no can walk to Yingkow."

"But surely I could hire a pony; I do not care what it costs. Oh, I must leave here; I feel in the utmost danger. I dare not trust myself with that dreadful Marshal."

"Well, I tell you what," said the amah, "you no go, but I go. I know Newchwang and the people. I hire pony, and go to Yingkow. I go now speak to boy; he help me buy pony."

The amah left the room, returning presently to whisper to her mistress that the matter might be arranged.

"I leave early in the morning," she said. "You get letter ready."

Clara rushed up to the old woman, and flung her arms round her neck.

"God bless you!" she said. "You don't know our God, but the Providence above will reward you."

She then sat hastily down, and wrote a letter to her husband.

"MY DARLING,

"I know you are alive," wrote the poor girl. "They are trying to frighten me with reports of your death; and the Marshal—oh, I thought him a good man, but I cannot speak of his conduct now. The amah will take you this, and I feel certain that you and Mr. Maitland will do your utmost to rescue me. I dare not add any more, except that I would rather die than be false to you."

When this letter was finished, Clara gave it to the amah, who fastened it hastily into the lining of her dress. At an early hour the next morning the faithful woman left the fortress.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE RESCUE.*

**T**HE amah started on her journey with slow steps, one reason being that her small feet forbade any rapid advance, and another that she was anxious not to appear in any haste. By keeping to the back-streets she avoided all observation on the part of the Japanese pickets, but on reaching the city gates she found her passage barred in a most effective manner, for not only was the huge portal closed, but a smart-looking Japanese sentry was standing on duty in front of it.

“Wo yao ch’u men ch’ü” (I want to go out of the gate), she found courage to say to the sentry, who, being so far unenlightened as not to be able to understand the Chinese tongue, called to the guard-room for an interpreter.

“Who are you?” asked this gentleman.

“I am a woman of the people,” said the amah, “and am surnamed Wang.”

“Why do you wish to leave the city?” he demanded.

“I want to go to work in my garden.”

“Well, I cannot give you leave. All you can do is to wait here until the officer of the guard comes round.”

This delay made the amah very anxious. She had hoped that her story would have gained her a ready exit;



but this having failed, there was nothing for it but to obey. Her only consolation was that Clara's letter was so cunningly sewn into the lining of her dress that she felt sure that this, at least, would not be found.

The soldiers of the guard-room gave her a place on the k'ang, the brick bed that ran along the side of the room, and beyond some slight badinage left her to her own resources.

At the end of a couple of hours the officer of the guard made his appearance, and the amah was duly ushered into his presence. In answer to his inquiries, she repeated the story of the garden, but broke down rather in the cross-examination which followed. At the conclusion of the interview the officer said that he must have her searched, and if nothing questionable were found upon her, he would allow her to pass out. The amah loudly protested against this indignity, and vowed by all the virtues of her ancestors that her story was absolutely true.

"As I said, you must be searched," repeated the officer.

And in obedience to a word of command, two soldiers led her off into an adjoining room, and carried out their instructions without any undue outrage on the Chinese woman's sense of propriety. The letter escaped notice, but not so the ten dollars which Clara had given her with which to hire a cart for her journey.

"Kung hsi fa ts'ai" (I congratulate you on having acquired wealth), said the interpreter, with a grin.

"The money does not all belong to me," answered the amah. "My neighbours have given it to me to buy them vegetables in the gardens."

The officer, when he was told of the discovery, showed signs of doubt with regard to the Chinawoman's explana-

tion. But as nothing else suspicious was found upon her, he agreed to let her pass.

Once outside the city, she inquired where she could hire a cart, and after much difficulty found an owner who was willing to let her have his cart and mule. With the stolid imperturbability of a Chinaman, the man was in no hurry to start, but the amah was urgent. She feared lest the Marshal should discover her flight, in which case he would certainly send in pursuit of her. With persistent worrying the man was persuaded to harness up, and with as little delay as possible the amah started on her journey.

The road was bad and hilly, and the twenty miles seemed to her impatient soul like one hundred. She was stopped by one Japanese picket on the way, but having satisfied their inquiries by the production of the pass given her by the officer of the guard, she was allowed to proceed. Just as night fell she reached the settlement of Yingkow, and once there drove directly to the British Consulate.

Maitland, who had been busy all day, was smoking his after-dinner cigar on the veranda of the Consulate, when Bryce came to say that a Chinese woman had arrived from Newchwang, and wished to see the Consul immediately.

"Show her in," said Maitland.

When the amah appeared, he spoke to her at once.

"Ni shih na'rh lai ti?" (Where have you come from?) he demanded.

"I have come, your Excellency," replied the amah, "from Newchwang. I am the servant of an English lady of the name of Wyndham, and have brought a letter to his Excellency, her husband."

Maitland sprang eagerly from his seat.

"Bryce!" he called to the man, who was standing in the

anteroom, "go at once to Mr. Wyndham, and ask him to step over to the Consulate."

Bryce saw by his master's manner that something important had occurred, and lost no time in delivering his message.

Wyndham, whose haggard face showed how much anxiety he had lived through, hastened to obey the summons. He had been in and out of the Consulate already twenty times that day, asking Maitland's advice, chafing at the delay which prevented his returning to Clara, talking over his fears and hopes, too distracted to settle quietly to anything. Now, with a face on flame, he rushed into the Consul's presence.

"Wyndham, old chap, I have news for you at last," said Maitland. "Here is a letter from your wife, which your amah has just brought. Go into my room and read it."

"Thank God!" cried the young man.

He took the letter and went into the lamp-lit study. Eagerly, and with trembling fingers, he tore open the envelope, and, though the sight of Clara's handwriting was an indescribable joy to him, his rejoicing was soon turned into unspeakable rage and anxiety. The unhappy girl's few, pathetic words went straight to his heart, he read between the lines at a glance—what horrible danger was she not in? With white lips and startled eyes he went back to the Consul.

"Well, Wyndham, what news have you?" asked Maitland.

"I could not have worse," answered Wyndham. "That scoundrel, Kittagawa, has given Clara to understand that I am dead, and has had the infernal insolence to propose marriage to her."

"The blackguard!" said Maitland; "I wish I had him here for five minutes."

"I would give something for a sight of him," said Wyndham; "but now the question is, What is to be done? My poor girl is in that brute's power. He got her to consent to accompany his troops to Newchwang, and now she is practically a prisoner in the garrison."

"We must question the amah further," said Maitland.

He did so, speaking rapidly in Chinese. Then he turned again to Wyndham.

"Things do look very bad," he said; "and how this woman managed to escape is a wonder. Your wife is under close guard, and there is no doubt that the Marshal has conceived a violent passion for her. When he finds out that the amah has escaped, there is no saying what he may not do."

"I shall start for Newchwang immediately," said Wyndham.

"And go to your certain death, my dear fellow. If you act rashly now, believe me, all will be lost."

"Then, what is to be done? How am I to sit still, with this letter in my hand?"

"I grant you it is hard; but, believe me, you will only rescue your wife now by diplomacy. I shall question the amah again."

Maitland turned to the woman.

"The Marshal," she replied, in answer to one of his queries, "has taken the Tartar General's Yamun [official residence], and my mistress is not allowed outside the gates. At the back there is a garden where she walks about, but no one outside is allowed to see her or speak to her."

"Are the walls high?" asked Wyndham.

"Yes," replied the woman, "and each gate is guarded by a sentry."

"How did you get out?" demanded Maitland.

"I ask to get things from the town," was the reply.

"Does your mistress go into the garden of the Yamun at any particular time?" asked Maitland suddenly.

"No," replied the woman; "sometimes she does not go out at all, but stays in her room, as she does not feel safe from the Marshal anywhere else."

"The brute!" murmured Wyndham.

He got up and began to pace the room.

"Well," said Maitland, "you can go now to the servants' quarters; perhaps by to-morrow morning we shall want you to carry a message back to your mistress."

The amah bowed and withdrew. No sooner had she done so, than the two men sat down to discuss the position.

"We must remember one thing," said Maitland: "we have got to deal with a thorough scoundrel—one who will not hesitate to commit any villainy to accomplish his purpose. From the official notice which I received when the Japanese occupied the city, I gather that the gates are carefully guarded, and that no one is allowed to enter or leave the town without being searched. It is obvious, therefore, that, even if we could get your wife out of the precincts of the Yamun, we should never be able to get her out of the city."

"Would it be possible to get her over the wall?" asked Wyndham.

"That might possibly be done, for, like the walls of all Chinese cities, those of Newchwang are dreadfully out of

repair, and I have often seen boys climbing up and down them as I have passed by on shooting expeditions."

"If a Chinese boy can climb the wall, so can I," said Wyndham. "Well, that settles one thing: I can get into the city in that manner."

"It may be done," said Maitland thoughtfully, "and the time of year is all in your favour: the days are short, the nights long, and the moon is young. As Consul, I have nothing whatever to do with the Japanese, who are merely governors by conquest; I cannot, therefore, help officially to liberate your wife, and you must trust to your own right arm to get her out of her difficulty. The first thing, therefore, is to send her a letter telling her what you propose to do; this the amah can convey to her to-morrow. You must desire her in the letter to walk in her garden at a certain hour every day, and look out for a signal from you."

"And what next?" asked Wyndham.

"I would then propose that you should disguise yourself as a Chinaman, and climb over the city wall some evening after dark. My tingchai's [official messenger] family live in Newchwang. I would suggest that you go to his house and there make your arrangements for the rescue."

"Capital!" cried Wyndham. "When can I start?"

"To-morrow evening would be the soonest. The amah must have time to get safely back to Newchwang, and we must get you your disguise. I will now summon Bryce and talk the matter over with him."

"And while you are talking," said Wyndham, "I will go and write to Clara."

He left the room as he spoke.

Early the next morning the amah returned to Newchwang, having first carefully sewn the letter which Wyndham had

entrusted to her into the lining of her coat. She then mounted her cart, and was driven quickly back to the city.

In the meantime Bryce had secured a complete suit of Chinese clothing for Wyndham. Amongst it was a large hood such as Chinamen always wear in cold weather. When the young Englishman had put on this change of dress, it completely concealed his identity, and the conspirators were delighted with their success.

"I shall be off at dark," said Wyndham.

"I am sorry to retard your movements," said the Consul then; "but I really think you must restrain your impatience until mid-day to-morrow. You must give the tingchai time to communicate with his family, and the amah will want to make preliminary arrangements with your wife."

This was too reasonable to be gainsaid, and Wyndham therefore submitted, though with a bad grace. The thought of his wife's danger was half maddening him, and he could only secure repose of mind in rapid action. At last the long hours of waiting dragged themselves away, and the young man started for Newchwang.

His journey was a slow one. The road, which, like most Chinese roads, was made up principally of holes and ruts, made it practically impossible to go much out of a walk. Although the Englishman desired the driver of his cart to make all possible speed, it was dusk before the cart drove to the caravansary in the suburbs of Newchwang. Then Wyndham, having paid the coolie his fare, strode out into the street. A moat ran round the city at a distance of about fifty yards from the wall, and a pathway bordered its edge. Along this the Englishman took his way, wishing before it became quite dark to make sure of the best point at which to climb the wall. He walked northward from

the east gate, and found, as Maitland had told him, that the wall was broken and bulged in this portion of its length. Still, it was at least thirty feet high, and, though an active man, he felt that the mount would be a stiff bit of climbing, more especially in his Chinese robe and shoes. There was also another danger. The wall was not out of ear-shot from the east gate, as Wyndham quickly discovered by seeing a flash from the guard-house on the wall, and by hearing the sound of the thud of a bullet in the bank of the moat. The Japanese sentry were evidently on the alert, and it was plain that his steps had been heard and his presence so near the wall after dark resented.

The shades of night were, however, fast falling, and he determined to lie down behind a tumble-down wall which maintained a precarious existence on the edge of the moat. He would wait here until it was dark enough to make his venture. At last the time came, and he crept carefully up to the foot of the wall, having first tucked up the skirts of his robe to give free play to his legs. Slowly and carefully he began the ascent. It was more difficult than he had expected; the bricks were loose and afforded no firm foothold, nor safe grip for his hands. More than once a brick fell to the ground at his touch, and when he had mounted about twelve feet, the brick he was standing on and another which he was clawing with his fingers gave way together, and down he slipped again, reaching the earth with his elbows, knees, and shins bruised, grazed, and bleeding. At this moment he perceived, to his horror, that he had been heard: lights moved rapidly along the top of the wall, and the tramp of armed men approached the spot above him. He hastily betook himself to the shelter of the mud wall, and waited patiently until all was once more quiet above.



The night was a bitterly cold one, and his hands and legs became almost numb. For a couple of hours he was obliged to crouch down in his place of concealment; then once more he crept up to the wall. This time he moved further northwards until he reached a spot which his hands told him was even more broken and sloping than the place he had before attempted. The Chinese shoes, with their thick felt soles, had proved themselves so very inconvenient for climbing that he took them off, and tying them with a string round his neck, he once more began his ascent. This time fortune was kinder to him, and his toes, freed from the shoes, got a firmer hold. As he mounted, his spirits and courage rose to the occasion. All his senses were alive, and he listened eagerly to assure himself that he was undetected. At last, to his infinite delight, his hand touched an embrasure in the parapet, and, after a mighty effort, he lifted himself to the top of the wall.

It was now pitch-dark, and he felt that it was hopeless to attempt to find the tingchai's house before daylight. Maitland had given him full directions as to the position of this dwelling, but light was necessary to enable him to make sure of his way. Stealthily he crossed the top of the wall, and began the descent into the street. In the daytime this would have been a very easy matter; but so dark was the night that he had to step blindly, with the result that he lost his footing, and rolled incontinently to the bottom. His next move was to seek some shelter where he might defend himself from the bitter east wind which was cutting him like a knife. Stealthily he crept along, feeling the walls of the houses with his hand, and had just got to the corner of a street, when he saw the lanterns of a Japanese patrol approaching the spot where he stood. He darted backwards, but a loud summons

from the Japanese officer in command announced the unwelcome fact that he had been heard. He retraced his steps at the double, and ran silently on his still shoeless feet. All might have been lost, but fortunately at this juncture he discovered by the sense of touch a small side-street, down which he hastily retreated. Here he was safe, and to add to his relief he discovered a ruined house, within the outer wall of which he took shelter.

Early in the morning he arrived at the tingchai's house, who, to his infinite delight, was waiting to receive him in person.

"Tung-chia lailo" (The master has come), said the man in a low whisper, and, leading Wyndham into his kitchen, he introduced him to his wife. This woman was busily engaged cooking rice at a small stove. When she glanced at Wyndham, she could scarcely believe that she was looking at an Englishman, so dirty and woebegone was his appearance.

"You must go and have a wash, and then something to eat," said the tingchai.

"I shall be only too glad to do so," answered Wyndham; "and then I hope you will be able to answer my questions."

The man nodded, an intelligent look lit up his face—that look filled the young Englishman with a sudden sense of alarm; he felt that the tingchai had no good news for him. He hurried off to wash, and then, snatching a morsel of food, turned impatiently to the man.

"What is your news?" he asked.

"Your boy was here last evening; the lady did not dare send you a letter. She is in great excitement, but also in great trouble; she begs of you to hurry, as she does not know what steps the Marshal may take."

"My wife must be rescued this evening," said Wyndham.

"I suppose," he added, the words trembling on his eager lips, "there is no hope of doing anything until night?"

"None whatever," replied the tingchai, "and even then the rescue will be attended with the greatest danger. Mrs. Wyndham desired her boy to tell you that she walks in the garden every day from four to five. But are you aware that a sentry with a loaded rifle is always on duty by the gate at the north wall of the garden?"

"He will have to be disposed of," said Wyndham, tightening his lips as he spoke.

"There is only one way of doing that," answered the tingchai, "and that may be done if you are prepared to use your knife."

"I am," replied the Englishman. "I look upon the whole crew as a set of kidnappers, and I should no more scruple to shoot or stab one of them than I would to shoot a pirate."

"If you stick to that," said the tingchai, rubbing his hands with delight, "you can do it."

"What do you propose?" asked Wyndham.

"Well, this: The gate is close to the angle of the wall, and when we have made all other arrangements, either you or I must creep up to the sentry and stab him. It won't do to shoot, it makes too much noise."

As the man said this, the expression on his face became almost radiant, and his fingers twitched as though he longed to hold a dagger which might thrust into the body of the unfortunate sentry.

"If anyone is to do such a horrid business, I must be the man," said Wyndham; "you must not run such a risk on my behalf. But, now, how are we to arrange that my wife shall be ready and able to get out of the postern?"

"There is a difficulty in that," answered the tingchai;

“but I have already made careful inquiries, and I find that the Marshal always sups at eight o'clock : that, then, is the hour when we must carry out our scheme. Your boy must manage somehow to get hold of the Marshal's key of the gate. He happens to be a clever fellow, and the Marshal, I hear, has taken a liking to him, so that he goes in and out of his rooms as he pleases. To-night your wife, with the amah and boy, must go through the gardens to the gate, and then, when you have disposed of the sentry, they will have to make use of the key to free themselves. The amah and boy had better come straight to this house, and hide here until the affair has blown over and we can send for them ; but I will go with you and the lady, and help you to lower her over the city wall. Mr. Maitland will have carts waiting for us at a little distance, and once in them, we must make the best of our way to Yingkow.”

“No plan could be more excellent,” said Wyndham. “We must make the necessary arrangements for to-day.”

“Leave that to me,” answered the tingchai.

He rose as he spoke, and presently quitted the house.

Poor Wyndham's tortures during the long hours of that day can be better imagined than described. He was truly a desperate man prepared for any deed which might result in his wife's liberation.

The tingchai did not return until dark. He told Wyndham that he had made all preparations—that Clara would be in the garden at eight o'clock, and Wyndham's boy, by name Asam, would have secured the key of the postern-gate.

“There is one thing,” said Wyndham, “which I have been thinking about—how is my wife to get over the wall?”

"I have also thought of that matter," said the tingchai. "We must have a rope with us, with a noose at one end; this we can fasten under Mrs. Wyndham's arms. The wall, as you discovered the other night, is not perpendicular, and slopes outwards; but the lady won't mind a scramble for liberty, will she?"

"Not a bit," answered her husband; "and I suppose," he added, "you and I can scramble down without a rope."

"Certainly we can. I have often as a boy slipped all the way down without doing more than wear holes in my clothes. I shall go out now to buy the rope."

He did so, returning with it in less than half an hour. A short time before eight o'clock that evening the two men stealthily made their way by a circuitous route to the eastern face of the wall of the Yamun. Along this they silently crept until they came within fifteen or twenty yards of the angle. Here they listened intently, and Wyndham with joy heard a movement on the other side of the wall, which he rightly interpreted to be the steps of his wife, the amah, and the boy.

"T'amên lailo" (They have come), he whispered to the tingchai.

"Lailo," laconically repeated the man.

But at this instant another sound broke on their attentive ears. The steps of the sentry could be plainly heard as he approached the angle of the wall.

"You have the dagger, have you not?" asked the tingchai. "Remember, if we are to succeed, you must use it to-night."

"I have it safe," answered Wyndham, laying his hand upon the hilt of a Malay kris.

The sound of the sentry's footsteps faded as he moved towards the other end of his beat, and the two men crept

up to the angle of the wall fully prepared to spring out on the unsuspecting guardian the next time he should present himself. They heard him approaching almost immediately, and Wyndham took a firm hold of his dagger. He was a brave man, and his nerves were usually steady; but at this supreme moment the sense that he was going to take a man's life in cold blood, and the knowledge of how much depended on the blow, made his hand tremble. There was no drawing back, however. He had firmly made up his mind that the deed must be done, and though a certain amount of horror attached to it, he was determined to carry it through.

Patiently he waited until the sentry almost touched him, and then at a nudge from the tingchai he sprang on his foe, seizing him round the neck with his left hand, and driving the kris against the man's breast. To his horror he felt the kris break off. The point had struck the plate in his cross-belt, and had snapped in two. It was now a hand-to-hand fight. Wyndham clasped the sentry with so firm a grip that he was unable to use his rifle, and now, throwing away the hilt of his dagger, he seized the man by his throat and bore him to the earth. Whether he would have won the victory or not remains doubtful, for the sentry was a strong man, and struggled hard in his enemy's overmastering grip; but at that moment the tingchai possessed himself of the Jap's rifle, and with the butt end dealt the wretched man some savage blows on the head. A low moan was all the response, and Wyndham rose to his feet, feeling sure that the man had received his quietus. He hastily wiped his brow, and tapped at the postern door.

To his delight, he heard the key turn, and almost immediately he held Clara in his arms. It was well that

he was there to support her, for she had heard enough of what was going on outside to turn very sick and faint. Wyndham lifted her over the body of the sentry, and with scarcely a word led her along in the wake of the tingchai, to whose guidance they were to submit themselves.

They soon reached the end of the street in which the tingchai lived, took a hasty farewell of the amah and boy, and then hurried on through devious lanes to the north-east part of the city wall. As they reached the foot of the rampart, they were horrified to hear the steps of armed men parading its summit.

"It is the guard," whispered the tingchai. "As soon as they have got out of ear-shot, we must set to work and be on the other side before the next picket comes by."

Silently they crouched down within the doorway of a house until not a sound was to be heard. They then crept stealthily to the wall, and the tingchai, who had the rope coiled round him, deftly and speedily arranged the noose under Mrs. Wyndham's arms.

"You don't mean that I am to go alone?" she whispered to her husband. "I cannot be parted from you again, Charlie; I could not bear it."

"I will be down directly after you, darling," he said, in the same low tones; "but I must stop now to help the tingchai to lower you down."

There was no time for any more words. Wyndham lifted Clara through the embrasure, and paid out the rope as she gradually descended. She was an active English girl, and with the support of the rope managed to scramble down without much difficulty.

Wyndham quickly followed her, and finally the tingchai passed the noose over one of the embrasures on the top

of the wall, and by the help of the rope descended himself with ease.

He had hardly touched Mother Earth before the steps of the returning picket were heard on the summit. Once again the three fugitives crouched down in the darkness, and it was not till all was quiet that the tingchai went in search of the cart which was awaiting them. He found the man in an outlying caravansary, and having safely deposited Clara and Wyndham in the cart, he settled himself on the shaft, and desired the driver to avoid the main road, and to take a by-track to Yingkow with all speed.

The night was perfectly dark, and to the fugitives the dreary hours seemed interminable. But an end must come to all things, and presently they knew that they were approaching the Chinese lines before Yingkow. Just then, however, the horrifying sound of a brisk fusillade on the main road caused them to halt abruptly. This was distinctly alarming, and the tingchai volunteered to go forward at once to discover the cause of the firing. He was away for nearly an hour, and on his return brought the disquieting news that the Chinese outposts had been engaged with the Japanese pickets, which, as they had learned from a wounded man, had been sent to recapture Mrs. Wyndham and her fellow-fugitives. At the tingchai's request the Chinese officer of the outposts sent with him a small guard, and under the protection of these men Wyndham and Clara were driven through the Chinese lines, and finally safely escorted to the English Consulate.

It was still pitch-dark, and the coldest hour of the night, but Maitland was up, and waiting eagerly to receive his guests.

"Welcome! welcome!" he said, holding out both his



hands to Clara, and drawing her into the bright light inside. "Not a word at present; I know all that you must have gone through, but now you are starving and nearly frozen. Come, I have a comfortable meal ready."

He led the husband and wife into a cheerful room warm with lamplight and firelight, and, closing the door behind them, left them together. No happier couple existed on this earth; their joy was beyond mere words.

Three months later Wyndham and his wife sailed for England, and now it is reported that Mrs. Wyndham is very busy describing on paper her experiences of the war. If such is the case, lovers of adventure will have an opportunity of learning in detail the course of events here merely sketched. She intends to call her forthcoming work "Fourteen Days' Captivity in the Japanese Camp."





TRAPPED BY A CHINAMAN.





## TRAPPED BY A CHINAMAN.

### CHAPTER I.

#### *THE FEAST OF LANTERNS.*

**G**EORGE KYNERSLEY, a typical young Englishman, was standing in the common saloon of the Inn of Benevolence and Virtue in the town of Lung-hsien, in the Middle Kingdom of China. He had a frown on his brow, his face was flushed, and there were tokens about his person as if he had lately engaged in a somewhat fierce tussle. An attendant approached bearing a letter, and Kynnersley turned on him angrily, but when his eyes rested on the handwriting, the frown between his brows was succeeded by an expression of interest, his eyes grew full of eagerness, and, seizing the letter, he tore it open.

It was in the English tongue, and ran as follows :

“MY DEAR KYNERSLEY,

“I hope you will be able to conclude your business at Lung-hsien as quickly as possible, for I have just had a cablegram to say that I may expect Diana Pemberton this evening. You may be sure that I shall take all possible

care of her until you come back to us. I have made arrangements about the wedding, and it can be solemnized as soon as you both wish after your return. I trust you will be able to hurry up your report; but in the meantime pray take a hint—be as careful of yourself as possible. Remember that, while you are at Lung-hsien you are out of my jurisdiction, as that place is more than thirty miles from Ch'anghai.

“ Hoping to see you soon, believe me,

“ Your sincere friend,

“ RICHARD MAITLAND.”

Kynnersley's eyes flew over these lines. He read the letter twice; then, crushing it into his pocket, he began to pace up and down the long room with hasty steps. His eyes were blazing with excitement, and his thoughts were as follows :

“ What an ass I have made of myself! Why can I never keep that confounded temper in check? I have just done what our good Consul warned me against, and have put one of the big men of this place into the worst possible humour. The Magistrate of Lung-hsien is my enemy from this time forth, or I am very much mistaken. The fact is, I never shall be able to brook the insolence of these low-toned Chinamen. I acted like a fool, but I believe if the thing were to happen over again I should again conduct myself in the same idiotic fashion. Well, the only thing to do now is to hurry up my report, and get back to Ch'anghai as quickly as possible.”

Kynnersley pushed his hair from his heated brow, and, taking up his hat, went out. As he passed the door of the inn, one or two Chinamen who were standing near looked after him.

"Do you know who that is?" said one to the other.

"No," was the reply.

"Where have your eyes and ears been? He is the foreign devil who knocked down the policeman Li this morning. May his father's grave be desecrated, and his bones thrown to the four winds of heaven!"

The other indulged in a loud laugh.

"I have heard of that affair, of course," he answered, "and it occurred to me to wonder how Li liked it when he was knocked down."

"That has nothing to do with it," interrupted his friend. "Who cares about Li? It is the honour of our Magistrate which is at stake. I would not care to be in the shoes of that foreign devil. Tseng was never yet insulted without having his revenge."

Both men laughed, and, going in the direction of an opium-saloon, entered and asked for pipes.

Meanwhile the whole little town was ringing with Kynnersley's extraordinary conduct, and the outrage he had offered to the Magistrate. Tseng was one of the greatest men in Lung-hsien, and the treatment he had received had turned his blood to white heat. With an evil frown on his ugly face, he strode through the rear courtyard of his Yamun to the apartment of the ladies. Mrs. Tseng was sitting fanning herself under the veranda. As she looked up, she saw at once that her husband was disturbed, and guessing the cause, for the rumour of the Englishman's affront had already reached her, she was well aware that creature comforts would have a more directly soothing effect than any sympathetic words she could use.

"Bring his Excellency's opium-pipe," she said to one of her waiting-maids, a pretty girl with almond-shaped eyes, cherry lips, and a winsome gait.

In a very short time the necessary paraphernalia for the enjoyment of the narcotic dose was at the Magistrate's elbow. He took the pipe with avidity; his nerves were highly strung, and he longed for the repose which he knew would come with the first few whiffs. He greedily sucked in the quieting fumes, and in a very short time his wife had the satisfaction of seeing the complete success of her remedy. The frown was no longer on his face, the twitchings at the corners of his mouth had disappeared, and after half a dozen pipes he rose refreshed and calm, ready to partake of a cup of fragrant tea, which Mrs. Tseng had carefully brewed for him.

"You have had a long and tiring day, I am afraid," she said, as he sipped his tea approvingly.

"I have," he replied. "The whole population of Lung-hsien seems to have turned criminal."

"Including the foreigner who was brought before you this morning?" continued his wife with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"Those foreign devils are worse than any Chinaman," cried the Magistrate; "and this one had the insolence to defy my authority. But I'll be even with him yet."

"What did he do?"

"Well, this. In the first place, he was arrested for assaulting a man in the street, and then, to make matters worse, he denied my power to deal with him, declaring that he was a foreigner. That was bad enough, but there is more to follow. He actually knocked down Li, the policeman, who tried to make him kneel before me, and then forced his way with great violence out of the court."

"What impertinence!" cried Mrs. Tseng. "He at least deserves one hundred blows with the large bamboo. What do you intend to do with him? But I suppose," she added



thoughtfully, "he is right, and that you really have no power to deal with him."

The angry Chinaman muttered and fumed.

"If I cannot punish him in one way, I will in another," he said. "I am going to send for Sung, in order to consult with him as to the best means of taking my revenge. Sung is a man full of resources," he added, with a grim smile.

Mrs. Tseng returned her husband's smile.

"Yes," she said, "Sung's ingenuity is unbounded. He is a most useful person."

"I am glad you agree with me, my dear," said the Magistrate.

He lay back on his divan, and thought over the position. Yes, there was no doubt Sung was the right man for his purpose.

There was no den of thieves in the town with which Sung was not acquainted, and criminals of every class, both male and female, were his chosen companions. If the Magistrate required any particularly dirty work done, Sung was always the man to do it.

"I will send for him immediately," said Tseng, rising from his couch. "The insult to which I have been subjected must not go unpunished a moment longer than I can help."

Accordingly, a messenger was sent to summon Sung to appear before the Magistrate of Lung-hsien. The man was found in a low opium-saloon. On receiving Tseng's summons, he immediately left his pipe and hastened to attend to it. In less than an hour he was bowing low before his master.

"You have probably heard, Sung," said Tseng, "that an Englishman knocked down the policeman Li in my court to-day?"

"Yes, your Excellency, the news has reached me; and if you do not return blow for blow with abundant interest I shall be much astonished. These foreign devils have forced themselves into the Middle Kingdom, and we shall have no peace until we have turned them out."

"I mean to do for this one, at all events."

"How, your Excellency?"

"I have not quite thought it out," answered Tseng, in a thoughtful manner fixing his keen eyes upon Sung's ugly face as he spoke.

The notorious criminal knew well what was expected of him. After a pause, during which he was thinking hard, he spoke:

"You are going to give a dinner on the evening of the Feast of Lanterns, are you not, your Excellency?"

"I am," replied the Magistrate, "and I have invited the Prefect to it."

"Will your Excellency also invite the Englishman? The Prefect hates him as much as you do yourself. All the world here knows what the Prefect's opinion is of these foreigners: how they disturb our trade, and carry away some of our wealth for themselves. This foreign devil has come here, as you are doubtless aware, your Excellency, to worm some of the most valuable secrets from our own tea-merchants. The Prefect knows that, and will go hand in glove with you in any scheme you employ for the foreigner's destruction."

"But I have no good feeling towards the Prefect," said Tseng, with a long-drawn-out sigh.

Sung's ugly eyes brightened.

"I am aware of that, your Excellency," he said, "and the Prefect hates the Englishman as much as your Excellency hates the Prefect. It is possible that I may be

able to hatch something which will satisfy your double enmity. I think it would be as well if your Excellency were to call on the foreign devil. It would ensure his coming."

T'seng's eyes lit up with satisfaction.

"I follow you to a certain extent," he said, "and I will do what you suggest. Remember, if you manage the matter as well as you have done several things of the same kind, I shall be for ever grateful to you; also bear in mind that there must be no apparent outrage committed on the foreigner, for, what with their Consuls at the ports and the Minister at Peking, we have no peace when one of the brood happens to be murdered."

"I will take care to remember your Excellency's instructions, and I am sure you will have nothing to complain of," replied Sung.

With a low bow he took his leave.

That evening Kynnersley, having walked off a good deal of his irritation, spent his time writing letters—one was to Maitland, whom he thanked for his kindness. He told him that he thought his business at Lung-hsien would be quickly over, and that in all probability he would be back at Ch'anghai before the week was out. The other letter was to the pretty English girl who had just left her native land to become his wife. In this he gave a faithful account of what had occurred in the police court that day, winding up with a sentence or two which was calculated to show that he did not think much of the affair.

"I promise to be more careful in future," he wrote, "and on the first possible occasion will try to appease the angry Magistrate."

These letters Kynnersley did not quite finish, as he thought he might have some further news to relate on the following morning.

He was just about to add to them the next day, when he was told that the Magistrate Tseng had called to see him. He hurried at once into his saloon to receive his guest, astonishment plainly written on his countenance. The contrast in the appearance of the two men as they bowed to one another was very marked—Kynnersley tall, fair-haired, with blue eyes and a fearless expression, his cleanly-cut features full of transparent honesty; Tseng, on the other hand, possessing all the attributes of the typical Chinaman of the lowest class. In stature he was of middle height, and his features were essentially Mongoloid; a pair of narrow eyes, which were fittingly expressive of treachery and cunning, peered out from above high cheek-bones, over which his yellow skin was tightly drawn; his nose was coarse and flat, and his lips thick and shapeless. Dirty in his person and mean in his appearance, he stood now the very antipodes of his host.

In his first astonishment Kynnersley could not be quite certain whether Tseng had come to visit him as friend or foe, but his doubts were set at rest when the Magistrate seated himself at his invitation and began to pour out the conventional compliments.

“What is your honourable age?” asked Tseng.

“My mean age is thirty,” replied Kynnersley, taking his cue from his guest, and speaking in the style of the country.

“And how long have you left your honourable land to travel in this contemptible empire?”

“I left my country”—Kynnersley could not make up his mind to apply a depreciating term towards England—“about three years ago, and have been employed in your honourable empire ever since.”

“With what object, may I ask, have you wandered

over the insignificant mountains and rivers of China? Has trade tempted you so far from home?"

"In the first place, I came to travel and amuse myself," replied Kynnersley; "but for the last year and a half I have been employed in a large tea-merchant's office at Ch'anghai. My employers are anxious to receive some statistics from other tea-merchants scattered over the country, and are employing me to collect these for them. Already I have gone through twelve out of the eighteen provinces of your honourable country."

"I fear you do not find much in this mean district to interest you."

"On the contrary, I find a great deal. The people, though not over-friendly towards foreigners, are the most typical Chinese I have yet met with. Their customs and superstitions are specially interesting, and I am particularly anxious to see the celebration of the Feast of Lanterns, which takes place, I believe, in a few days."

"It does," answered Tseng, "and it will give me infinite pleasure if you will honour my ignoble dwelling on that occasion. As you know, my Yamun is in the middle of the town, and you will have abundant opportunities of seeing the procession on your way there, and on your return."

Kynnersley accepted the invitation with alacrity, and the Magistrate, having drunk his tea as a sign that his visit was ended, took his leave. George Kynnersley walked to the door of the inn to see him off.

"Well," he thought to himself, "Chinamen beat everything. Here is a man whom I insulted yesterday, whose policeman I knocked down in his own court, now paying me a visit, and pouring compliments upon me as though I were his best friend. He ends up by inviting me to

visit him at his house. After all, these Chinese are not a bad sort."

The young man returned to his unfinished letter.

"It is all right about that row of yesterday," he added. "The Magistrate of Lung-hsien has more true forgiveness in his composition than anyone I have ever come across. Will you believe it: he has just called on me, and invited me to visit him at his house! I am to go there on the night of the Feast of Lanterns. Immediately afterwards, if I work hard, I expect my report will be finished, and I shall be able to return to Ch'anghai."

Kynnersley spent a few moments longer ending up his letter. He then fastened it up, saw it put into the post, and hurried off to his work in the business quarter of the town.

Meanwhile Tseng was in high spirits. He complimented himself at having been so completely able to conceal his real feelings, and at having induced Kynnersley to accept his invitation. As he approached his wife's apartments, he heard the sounds of talking and laughing, and recognised with pleasure the voice of Hyacinth, the favoured lady of his harem, and one whom curiously enough his wife had taken a great fancy to. She was a charming little thing, blithe and gay, with a merry sparkle in her eyes, and a very attractive manner. The ladies rose as their lord entered, and Hyacinth would have taken her departure in obedience to etiquette, but the Magistrate stopped her.

"Bring me my tobacco-pipe, and stay and amuse me," he said.

"The first is easier than the last," she replied. And as she busied herself in filling his pipe, she went on: "I was just telling my lady that I was looking through the lattice into the court yesterday, and saw the foreigner

knock down the policeman. It was the funniest thing I ever witnessed in my life ; I never saw a man so astonished as Li was. Down he went on his back, with his feet in the air, for all the world like a conjurer preparing to play with balls on his toes."

Hyacinth laughed out a merry peal of amusement as she remembered the incident. Her laugh was infectious, and even the Magistrate could not help smiling grimly at her account of his servant's discomfiture.

"Ah!" he cried, "it was the Englishman's turn yesterday. It will be mine next."

"But you must not do anything to the foreign devil. He is so good-looking that I nearly fell in love with him."

"What business had you to be looking out, you little busybody?" said Tseng, as he stroked her chin. "Little girls should keep to the 'inner apartments,' and then they would not fall in love with foreign devils."

Hyacinth smiled in reply to this speech, but she did not altogether like Tseng's manner. She was well accustomed in her life in the Yamun to glimpses of sunlight before storms, and she could not avoid having an uneasy feeling that mischief was determined against the big, strong foreigner. Her anxiety was increased when she heard that the Magistrate had been in close consultation with Sung on the subject of the insult offered to him, and she determined to keep a close watch on the subsequent course of proceedings. Her sense of justice and mercy was not very keen, but her sympathies were enlisted in Kynnersley's favour, and she had that love for manœuvring which is so deeply set in the hearts of Eastern women.

For the next two days she gave a good deal of thought to the Englishman. As the Feast of Lanterns approached, the whole city was in a turmoil of excitement. The

streets were filled with crowds of people eagerly buying lanterns of every conceivable shape and fashion in preparation for the great festival. When the evening of the day itself drew on, the houses and shops were literally ablaze with the light of countless lanterns, which turned night into day, and which further illustrated the taste and ingenuity of the makers.

By conventional license, ladies mixed freely with the crowd of sightseers, and Hyacinth, as she was borne slowly through the streets in her sedan-chair, enjoyed as thoroughly as anyone else the sights offered for her admiration. The friends and acquaintances whom she met were legion, and it was as if the harems of the city had been turned out into the thoroughfares. The cafés, with their pretty balconies looking on to the streets, were full of guests feasting and revelling, while the shopkeepers entertained their friends and customers with liberal hospitality. Never before had Lung-hsien appeared in such brilliant array. Trade was flourishing, the weather was fine, and no political difficulties preoccupied the minds of the people. On all sides lanterns dispersed light, and the sounds of music and song never ceased to please. The larger shops made brilliant displays. Some of the lanterns were covered with gauze and adorned with large characters of felicitous import; others, again, were in the shape of birds and animals, and still others were so cleverly arranged that each turn of the wind made them take varying forms as the breeze blew them this way and that; these in especial attracted the eager attention of the on-lookers. Now and then a lantern caught fire, and a shout, half of admiration, half of alarm, arose from the crowd.

Just as Hyacinth was passing down a crowded street, several blazed up at once, and there was serious danger that the paper windows and the fretted woodwork in front of



the shops might catch fire. The pleasure-seekers were too dazed to stop the spread of the flames ; but just before any serious mischief ensued, a strong arm struck down the flaming gauze and paper of the lanterns with a stick and put an end to the danger. Hyacinth could not help breathing a sigh of relief. So soon as the mischief was over, she turned eagerly to see who had appeared on the scene at so opportune a moment, and recognised in the owner of the helpful walking-stick the Englishman whose escapade in the Magistrate's court she had witnessed a day or two before. She watched him with unconcealed admiration, being quite delighted with his courage and strength. Then, as she perceived that he was striding along in a most un-Chinese way in the direction of Tseng's Yamun, she realized with a sense of pain that this brave, frank-looking foreigner was in absolute danger. This knowledge immediately destroyed all pleasure in the sights which she had come out to witness.

"Take me back immediately to the Yamun," she said to the chair-bearers ; and just as the Magistrate was welcoming Kynnersley with every demonstration of regard, Hyacinth's sedan landed her at her prettily-furnished apartments in the harem.

"What brings my young lady back so soon?" asked Jasmine, the favoured maid of the lovely Hyacinth. "Were the streets too crowded, or were the people rude?"

"Neither," answered her mistress ; "but I have an affair to attend to, and one in which I want you to help me. An Englishman is dining with his Excellency to-night, and I much fear that some accident may happen to him. I want you, Jasmine, to go behind the lattice-work in the gallery of the hall, and to take careful note of everything that befalls him."

Jasmine immediately agreed to this, as she was only too anxious to see all that was going on in the hall, and she just took up her required position in time to see the Magistrate step forward and bow low before the Prefect as he was ushered into the room.

The Prefect was a more refined-looking man than the Magistrate, and received his attentions with a certain indifference, as though he had a full right to them.

Being the superior officer, Tseng placed him in the seat of honour on his left hand, and to Kynnersley he assigned the next seat of consideration on his right.

The two principal guests bowed distantly to each other with no friendly greeting, and after the exchange of the usual commonplace civilities dinner began. By way of grace before meat, Tseng poured out a libation to heaven and earth, and, having satisfied these powers, took wine with his guests—each time a bumper; fortunately, however, the cups were little bigger than thimbles, or the effect of this proceeding might have been disastrous. Dried fruits, chopped eggs, ham, and other delicacies, were handed round, and were followed by a succession of courses which taxed Kynnersley's patience to the utmost. If it had not been for some singing-girls, who enlivened the feast with song, he felt that he could not have sat it out. Shark's fins, pigeon's eggs, wild-duck, chicken, sprouts of bamboo, sea-slugs, and bird's-nest soup followed one another in bewildering succession, while between each course lighted pipes were handed to the feasters. Chopsticks formed a serious obstacle to Kynnersley's enjoyment of the good things provided. The dry dishes he could manage with tolerable ease, but viands drenched with oil and sauces were too much for him. Seeing his difficulty, Tseng took up from time to time with practised hand a sea-slug, or some other

greasy delicacy, and kindly put it into his mouth. The proceeding was intensely distasteful to the young man, but etiquette compelled him to accept the act as a courtesy, and to endeavour to swallow the proffered *bonne bouche*.

Though the weather was not hot, the abundance of wine and viands made the robes of ceremony worn by the officials unendurable, and by degrees and by common consent they threw off first their outside capes, then their robes, until finally they sat like so many plebeians, with nothing to distinguish them, so far as their dress was concerned, from the coolies in the street.

As the wine went round, the fun grew fast and furious, and the Prefect soon showed signs in a very flushed face and thick utterance that he had taken more than was good for him. The servants let slip no opportunity of filling the winecups of the guests, and conspicuous among them was Sung, who devoted himself especially to supplying the wants of the Prefect and Kynnersley. The latter, not liking the wine, was sparing in the quantity which he took, and so was able to walk with a firm and steady step to the divan at the end of the room, to which the Magistrate, at the end of dinner, invited him and the Prefect to adjourn. But the Prefect was not equally fortunate, and he lurched so dangerously as he crossed the floor that Kynnersley caught him by the arm to steady him. This action was immediately resented by the tipsy official, who with some brusqueness shook him off, and in so doing fell at full length on the floor. There immediately rose a murmur in the room that Kynnersley had knocked down the Prefect as he had done the policeman a few days before, and there were not wanting some fiery spirits who were inclined to resent what they regarded as an insult to their countryman. But Tseng hastily explained matters, and peace

being restored, the three seated themselves on the divan, and prepared to enjoy the tea and pipes which Sung and a very ugly boy attendant prepared to serve.

The tea was first handed to Kynnersley, who, as Chinese etiquette demanded, immediately passed it on to the Prefect. As he was in the act of doing so, the attendant came up and touched him on the arm.

"There is an Englishman outside who wants to speak to you," he said. "He has a very special message, and will not keep you longer than a moment or two."

In some astonishment Kynnersley left the room, the messenger accompanying him.

"Now is my chance," muttered Sung to himself.

He softly approached the cup which Kynnersley had laid by the Prefect's side, and, while the Prefect and the Magistrate were conferring together, bent over it for an instant; the action was too short and too deftly done to be noticed, but it was long enough for his purpose.

Kynnersley, a flush of pleasure on his face, quickly returned.

"I must apologize for my absence," he said to the Magistrate, "but a servant of my friend, Richard Maitland, the Consul of Ch'anghai, has just arrived with tidings for me. I hope by to-morrow to finish my inquiries at Lung-hsien, and to return with this man to Ch'anghai. I trust you will overlook my want of courtesy in leaving you for a moment."

"Do not speak of it," replied Tseng in a very affable tone. "I am glad," he added, "that your business is so nearly concluded, and I wish you all success in what you have still to do."

"I am naturally in a hurry to be back," replied Kynnersley, "for I am about to be married, and the young

lady who is to be my future wife has just arrived from England ; I am impatient to see her."

For a second a peculiar look passed over the Magistrate's immobile face ; he glanced at the Prefect, and then looked significantly at the cups of tea, which were still in the positions in which they had been placed when Kynnersley had rushed out of the room. Kynnersley saw his glance, and immediately proceeded to enforce the etiquette which required him to present a cup to the Prefect. Holding it in both hands, he gave it with a low bow to the great man. The Prefect bowed courteously in return, and, being thirsty, drank off the contents at a draught.

"What nasty stuff!" he said, forgetting the rules of politeness laid down by Confucius.

He straightway began to splutter and make such wry faces that Sung, who was watching over him with special regard, brought a cup of wine to his relief. The Prefect held out a trembling hand for it, but the next moment, with a muttered oath, he dashed it on the floor. For some extraordinary reason he was beginning to suffer acute pain, and he rolled about on the divan in agony, groaning heavily.

Tseng looked greatly concerned, and cast many furtive glances at Sung, who maintained a dogged silence.

"Send for the doctor immediately!" said the Magistrate in a voice of authority.

An attendant rushed off to obey the summons, and in less than ten minutes the medical man appeared. After gazing at the sufferer through his horn-rimmed spectacles, he pronounced the attack to be caused by an excess of the hot principle in the system, and recommended acupuncture. The poor Prefect was now in such agony that he could not stand the operation, but by degrees some of his worst

paroxysms subsided, and the doctor, seizing the opportunity, thrust his needle into the muscles of the back and stomach with a ruthless disregard to the torture he was inflicting. For a time the acupuncture seemed to give relief, but in a few moments the Prefect became again contorted with pain. His face now assumed a livid hue, and the perspiration poured from his brow. With an intensity compared to which the first attack was trifling, the pain once again returned. The unhappy Chinaman's muscles grew rigid, his legs were drawn up, and his back was arched in his agony. Gradually consciousness left him, and by-and-by the contortions subsided, not giving, as before, conscious relief, but serving as a prelude to the end. With a sound which was half a sigh and half a groan he passed into the world of spirits, leaving on the divan the form which had once represented the Prefect of Lung-hsien.

"It was more serious than I thought," said the doctor. "The Prefect has died of poison."

"Poison?" cried Tseng. "Impossible! He dined here, and took nothing that we did not all share."

"He had a cup of tea after dinner, your Excellency," put in Sung, with a malignant sneer.

"So had we all," answered the Magistrate, "and you prepared it."

"Yes, your Excellency; but I did not give it to him."

"Who did?"

"His Excellency from abroad," said Sung, turning towards Kynnersley.

"Yes, I certainly gave him his tea," said Kynnersley, "just as Sung handed it to me."

"Examine the cup out of which the Prefect drank his tea, doctor," said Tseng.

The doctor took up the cup with a sage air, and, finding some sediment in the bottom, put a grain on his tongue.

“There has been poison in the cup!” he cried; “a single grain has burnt and tortured my tongue. The Prefect has come to his end by a strong dose of strychnine.”

The moment these words were uttered, at a sign from the Magistrate, half a dozen policemen moved towards Kynnersley.

“By your own confession you handed the Prefect a cup which has been proved to contain poison,” said Tseng; “I therefore arrest you on the charge of murder. Seize him, and take him to the prison,” he added to the policemen.

Kynnersley looked around him, but nowhere in the faces of the onlookers could he recognise one gleam of kindness. To resist would have been madness, and he therefore submitted to be led to the dungeons, where the victims of the Magistrate’s judicial wrath too often rotted away in their chains.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE ENGLISH GIRL.

**I**N Maitland's cheerful Consulate at Ch'anghai a pretty English girl in a white dress was standing by one of the open windows. A soft breeze was coming in, for the hour was early, and the great heat had not commenced. The girl was dark-eyed, and rather *petite* than otherwise; her face was framed with thick, soft, black hair, English roses still bloomed on her cheeks, and her red lips also bore abundant evidence to the fact that she had not long left her native country. She stood with an open letter in her hand eagerly devouring the contents. An approaching step caused her to turn her head; Maitland entered the room, and she ran gaily up to his side.

"Good news, padre," she said. She had always called the Consul by this name, as he happened to be her godfather. "I have just had a long letter from George, and he believes that his business will very soon be over at Lung-hsien."

"I hope so, Diana," was the reply. "He must be all impatience to see you, my dear, and small wonder! But come—I am thirsty—pray pour me out a cup of tea."

Diana Pemberton took her place at the head of the



table. She helped the Consul to his tea, chatting gaily as she did so.

“What a beautiful country!” she exclaimed. “I can at last understand why it is called the Flowery Land. Wherever I look there are flowers in profusion, and such beauties! After breakfast, while you are engaged over your tiresome duties, I shall first of all run round the gardens and see what is to be seen, and then employ myself writing a couple of letters—one, of course, to my dear old boy at Lung-hsien, and the other to mother. Poor mother! she will long to hear all about me. I wish I could give her the exact date of the wedding, but that must depend on George. It is tiresome, his not being able to fix the time of his return. Oh, by the way, padre, he gave me an account of a most amusing adventure in his letter. I must read it to you.”

“I shall be interested to hear about it,” said the Consul, giving her an affectionate glance. She was one of his special favourites, and he was only too delighted to welcome her to the Consulate. “The fact is, Di,” he said, “for my own sake I am rather glad of this delay to your wedding. You quite cheer the heart of an old bachelor.”

“You ought never to have been one,” interrupted Miss Pemberton with spirit. “You were cut out for a good, comfortable married man. You committed a sin in never fulfilling your allotted destiny. But now for my letter. Padre, what do you think George has done? He absolutely knocked down a policeman of the harmonious name of Li, refused to kneel to a Magistrate called Tseng, and then forced his way with violence out of the court.”

“What court?” asked Maitland.

“Oh, it’s just like me,” replied Diana; “I never begin a

story at the beginning. Well, it seems dear old George was arrested—absolutely *arrested*—by those vulgar insufferable Chinese for assaulting a man in the street. George declares that he really did nothing, simply pushed one of those low-bred little Chinese fellows out of his way as he was turning a corner. All the same, he was arrested and brought into one of their courts. It is scarcely likely, is it, padre, that he would brook that sort of thing? For my part, I am not the least surprised that he acted as he did. Plucky of him, was it not? Why, what have you got that frown between your brows for?”

“I don’t like it, Di,” said Maitland. “Those Chinese fellows are the very——”

The Consul drew himself up short. With an effort he refrained from saying the words which rose to his lips.

Miss Pemberton gave him an earnest glance. She saw, to her astonishment, that he was not only annoyed, but alarmed.

“What can be the matter?” she said. “You don’t surely think they would hurt a great big fellow like George? No, I cannot believe that for a moment. He was always able to take care of himself in his own dear, ungainly, but practical fashion. However, padre, I can assuage all your fears, for listen to the end of the letter.”

Here she opened the precious sheets, and read the following sentences aloud :

“‘It is all right about that row of yesterday. The Magistrate of Lung-hsien has more true forgiveness in his composition than anyone I have ever come across. He has just called on me, and invited me to visit him at his house. I am to go there on the night of the Feast of Lanterns. All my qualms are now laid to rest.’”

“But not mine,” said the Consul, beginning to walk up

and down in front of the open window. "By heaven! what induced the lad——"

"Padre, you are not really frightened?" said Diana, turning a little pale.

"Of course not, my dear—no, not really. Do not put yourself into a fret, Di. Just write your letters, and think no more about it. I'll look in some time before tiffin if I can. Good-bye, my dear girl—God bless you!"

"Padre! padre!"

But Diana spoke to empty walls, for the Consul had made his escape. As soon as he entered his office he sent for Bryce.

"Bryce," he said, "I want you to go to Lung-hsien."

"To Lung-hsien, sir?" answered Bryce. "It is there, is it not, that Mr. Kynnersley is?"

"Yes; and I wish you to get news of him, and as quickly as possible. Come over here, Bryce; I have something to tell you. First of all, understand that I do not wish Miss Pemberton to be alarmed, so whisper nothing about your destination to any of the other servants. The fact is this: I am not at all easy in my mind. Mr. Kynnersley, as you know well, has got all the spirit of his countrymen, and the foolish fellow has just committed a very serious offence against a man in power at Lung-hsien. Now listen attentively, and I will give you a brief account of the state of the case."

Bryce regarded his master with the immovable calm which always characterized him; but as the story proceeded, his lips twitched once or twice, a sure sign that he took in the full gravity of the position.

"And that is not the worst," continued Maitland. "The worst of all is that there is no doubt whatever that the Magistrate is hatching some mischief, for he has

invited my young friend to dine at his house on the Feast of Lanterns."

"The Feast of Lanterns is celebrated to-day," answered Bryce.

"So I remember. Now, how soon can you start for Lung-hsien?"

"Within an hour, sir, if you wish it."

"I do. Get tidings for me, and come back as quickly as possible. If Mr. Kynnersley returns to his hotel in safety after the dinner, see him, and urge him to finish his work at once and to come back with you to Ch'anghai to-morrow. But if, on the other hand, anything happens"—here the Consul broke off and brushed the hair from his forehead, a sure sign of perturbation—"if anything happens, Bryce—oh, I do not suppose they would go to the length of taking his life, but there is really no saying—come back to me without a moment's delay. The serious part of the affair is this: my young friend is outside my jurisdiction, being more than thirty miles away from Ch'anghai. There is not the least doubt that these Chinese ruffians have acquainted themselves with that fact. Now off you go, Bryce, and, remember, not a hint to anyone here. I would not have Miss Pemberton alarmed for the world."

That day at dinner Diana missed Bryce, to whom she had taken a fancy.

"Why does he not wait on us?" she asked. "It is such a relief to see his nice English face. I am sorry to tell you, padre, that I have taken a great dislike to those ugly Chinamen—boys you call them, don't you?"

"Yes, my dear; they are all boys here."

"How strange! But, padre, you look very grave, and you have not yet told me where Bryce is."

"He has gone up the country on a little piece of business for me. Don't worry about him, Diana."

"And you are not really anxious about dear old George?"

"Why should I be? As he said in his letter to you, the Magistrate seems to have quite forgiven him."

"*Seems!*" echoed Diana. She looked with a queer, penetrating, troubled gaze at her godfather. "I wish I could understand you," she said; "I cannot help fearing that you are hiding something from me."

"Then, my dear," said the Consul, giving her a steady glance, "I will not conceal the truth from you a moment longer. I believe you are a plucky girl; you come of a plucky race, Di, of the sort of people whose nerves tighten and strengthen in face of an emergency. It is true that I am a little anxious about that good lover of yours."

"Why?" asked Diana.

"Because I know the Chinese, and neither you nor George do. It was imprudent of George to excite the Magistrate's ire in the way he did. I shall be more glad than I can tell you when he is safely back with us, and in order to hasten that happy time I have just sent Bryce to Lung-hsien to fetch him."

"Oh, you best of dear old godfathers!" said Diana. She sprang from her seat, ran up to his side, and, throwing one arm round his neck, kissed him once or twice on his cheek. "Then that is all right!" she exclaimed; "George will, of course, come back with Bryce."

"I hope so," replied the Consul.

"Is there any chance of their returning to-day?"

"No, that is impossible; but by this hour to-morrow we may welcome them."

Diana rubbed her pretty hands together in her excitement.

"I am not going to be down-hearted!" she exclaimed. "I am determined to be worthy of the character you have given me, only please——"

Her lips quivered, and her dark eyes became clouded.

"What is it, Di?"

"Don't leave me too long by myself. Please, take me with you when you go out this afternoon."

"I can do that with pleasure. I have nothing special to do for the remainder of the day, so we will have a couple of sedan-chairs and ride a little way into the country. There is a lovely valley just outside the town where flowers grow in profusion. We will take baskets with us, and you shall gather a quantity to decorate George's room."

Diana acceded to this proposal with delight. The Consul arranged that they should start between four and five o'clock when the fiercest of the heat was over.

"And now I am going to my office," he said. "Keep up your spirits, Di, for I sincerely trust that we shall have George with us by to-morrow evening."

During their drive Diana's courage never flagged, and the Consul watched her with astonishment.

"She has either more pluck than I gave her credit for, or she cannot realize the gravity of the situation," he said to himself.

That night the Consul could scarcely sleep, and the next day he avoided Diana as much as possible. He had received no news yet from Bryce, but thought it likely that he might return that evening. As the hour drew near he sent an excuse to Di, and remained closely shut up in his office.

Between five and six o'clock Bryce walked quietly in. One glance showed Maitland that he had returned alone, and also that he had bad news.

"Well," said the Consul, "have it out at once. I see you have not brought Mr. Kynnersley."

"I have not, sir. I am sorry to say I have very bad news. Mr. Kynnersley has been arrested."

"Arrested!" cried Maitland. "He told us in a letter to Miss Pemberton that he was arrested for some trifling misdemeanour. Have they raked up that old story again?"

"No, sir. That first arrest was a mere nothing, but this, I am grieved to have to say, is a much more serious affair. Mr. Kynnersley has been arrested on the charge of having murdered the Prefect of Lung-hsien, and is at the present moment in the dungeons of the Magistrate Tseng's Yamun. There is not the least doubt, sir, that there has been foul play, for, of course, Mr. Kynnersley is as innocent as I am."

"That goes without saying, Bryce," said the Consul. "But now tell me everything."

"I will try to, sir. When I arrived at Lung-hsien it was evening, and I went straight to the inn where our young gentleman was staying. It is called the Inn of Benevolence and Virtue, and is the best hotel in the place. I saw an attendant, who told me that his Excellency the English gentleman had gone to dine with Tseng, the Magistrate. I said I had a message for him, and asked my way to Tseng's Yamun. This information was immediately given to me, and I started off at once. It was no easy matter getting through the streets, for the Feast of Lanterns was on, and the whole populace seemed half mad with riot and excitement. When I got to the Yamun, I

asked for Mr. Kynnersley. He was an ugly chap to whom I gave the message, and for a moment he hesitated as if he meant to refuse me admittance; then another man whispered to him, and he gave as cunning a smile as I ever saw flit over a human face, and led me just inside the Yamun. He said he would go and tell Mr. Kynnersley that I was waiting to see him. After a moment's delay, out came our young gentleman, looking as fit as you please, and ever so glad to see me. I told him what I had come about, and that I meant to bring him back with me to-morrow. He said it was all right, and that if I liked to wait outside he would join me perhaps in half an hour or so. You may be sure I agreed to that, only I asked him why he could not come away with me there and then. He said that was impossible, but he would not keep me waiting longer than half an hour. I went out into the courtyard and waited for him until I was tired. I stood near one of the walls of the house, leaning up against it. The people carrying lanterns kept passing and repassing the gates of the Yamun, and the Magistrate's servants shouted and rushed to the gates and made a clamour so loud you could not hear yourself speak. All of a sudden there seemed to be a wild commotion, not only outside, but within the Yamun, and a couple of attendants rushed out. I heard the men talking to one another. I heard them say that his Excellency the Prefect, who it seems was dining with the Magistrate Tseng, had been taken suddenly very ill, and that the doctor was to be summoned. A couple of coolies rushed off with a sedan-chair to fetch him, and in about ten minutes or so he came back and went into the house. Then I heard nothing more for a bit, and was wondering why Mr. Kynnersley had not taken his leave, when some more people



came out talking and chattering as hard as they could. One or two words reached my ears, and I cannot exactly tell why, but I began to guess that there was foul play, and I pressed up close to the door. 'He has caught it at last,' I heard a man say. 'Li will be revenged now, trust our Magistrate!' And then another fellow laughed, and said something about two birds being killed with one stone; and then I heard a third party saying that the Prefect was dead, and that he was supposed to have died by poison. I pricked up my ears and got as close as I could.

"You may suppose, sir," continued Bryce, "that I was a good bit startled just then, when I tell you that at that very moment I saw Mr. Kynnersley himself coming out of the Yamun surrounded by several of those dirty policemen. His face looked white, but I can't say that otherwise he seemed much alarmed. Then a man near me said out loud, 'The foreign devil has poisoned the Prefect, and is being taken off to the Magistrate's dungeons.' I called out Mr. Kynnersley's name, and he heard me and started, and looked round and said (it was too dark for him to see me plain):

"'Are you there, Bryce? Tell the Consul what has happened. Of course I am innocent, but let him know at once, and——'

"He meant to say something more, poor lad! probably to give a message to Miss Pemberton; but the brutes jostled him on, and the next moment the doors of the prison were opened and he was shut out of view. I kept my ground a little longer, trying to gather some more information, but no one seemed inclined to say much except that the Prefect was dead, that he had met his death by poison from strychnine, that the Englishman without doubt had

given it to him in his tea, and that it would go hard with him.

“After thinking a bit I went off to the hotel, for it occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Kynnersley might find ways and means to send me a message there. I sat up all night listening and waiting, but got no tidings, and I was just about to hurry back to you, sir, when an attendant came into my room and said that a lady wished to see me.”

“A lady, Bryce?” interrupted the Consul; “surely we do not know anybody at Lung-hsien?”

“Well, sir, I have something to say which will surprise you. I went at once to Mr. Kynnersley’s saloon, and there was a young Chinese woman, veiled and disguised. The moment I came in she motioned to the attendant to leave us, and then raised her veil. She was a very pretty young woman, but I had certainly never laid eyes on her before.

“‘You are surprised to see me,’ she said, ‘and I have gone through a great risk in coming here. I know all that has occurred. You are an Englishman, and a friend of the gentleman who was arrested at Tseng’s Yamun last night.’

“‘I am, madam,’ I answered. ‘I am the servant of Mr. Kynnersley’s greatest friend, Mr. Maitland, the Consul at Ch’anghai.’

“‘I am very glad that you happened to come here,’ she said. ‘I was looking from my lattice, and saw you talking to Mr. Kynnersley a short time before he was arrested. Now, please remember that, if what I have done is ever found out, I shall lose my life; but I cannot bear injustice, and I have taken a fancy to the brave foreigner. He acted foolishly when he incurred the displeasure of a powerful personage like Tseng. He ought to have known

that we Chinese always revenge ourselves on our enemies, and Tseng regards Mr. Kynnersley as his greatest enemy.'

" 'Then, madam,' I interrupted, ' why did he ask him to his house ?'

" 'He did so for his own purpose. The moment I heard of the invitation I guessed that there would be foul play ; and last night, thinking it just possible that something bad might happen, I got my waiting-maid, Jasmine, to conceal herself in the gallery over the dining-saloon, in order that she might tell me if anything occurred. But Jasmine never returned, and when I inquired about her I was met by silence. I am certain that she was discovered in her hiding-place, and has been taken to the women's prison. The fact of her absence confirms my worst fears. I am sure she could give evidence in favour of the Englishman, and that her being locked up is to prevent her being capable of telling me what she has seen. I am certain that Mr. Kynnersley never poisoned the Prefect ; but the evidence is all against him, for he certainly handed the Prefect the cup of tea which caused his death. He will be tried immediately, before your Consul has time to communicate with the Minister at Peking. If you would do anything for him, pray hurry back at once to Mr. Maitland, and get him to interfere without a moment's delay. Remember, I only suspect foul play, but I know really nothing. The Englishman's life will be the forfeit if you do not put wings to your feet.'

" With these last words, sir, she dropped her veil over her face and left me. I ordered a cart and hurried back here as fast as I could. And now, sir, what do you propose to do ?"

Before Maitland could reply, there was a knock at the

door, and Diana, pale but with a resolved look on her pretty face, entered the room.

"You have come back, Bryce," she said, and she stared him fixedly in the face. "You have bad news; I know it. Where is Mr. Kynnersley?"

Bryce did not reply; he cast an alarmed glance at Maitland. Maitland went slowly up and took one of Diana's hands in his.

"You are a brave girl," he began.

She shook his hand away with an impatient movement.

"Don't keep me in suspense," she said; "I believe I have as much pluck as anybody, only I cannot stand suspense. What is it, padre? What news has Bryce brought?"

"My dear, you must know—and, believe me, I grieve for you from my very heart. Things have turned out exactly as I feared. Kynnersley was invited to dine at the Magistrate's Yamun, in order that that worthy might carry out a devilish scheme of revenge."

Maitland then repeated, in as few words as he could, the story which Bryce had brought him.

Diana, true to the courage which she had expressed, did not flinch once during the telling of the tale.

"Of course George is innocent," she said, when Maitland was at last silent.

"Yes, dear, yes; that goes without saying."

"But all the same," continued Diana, "those wretches will try to take his life."

"Certainly."

"Then you, padre, must go immediately to Lung-hsien in order to prevent them."

"Alas! Di, my dear—don't you know the truth? The worst part of the whole affair is that poor Kynnersley is

outside my jurisdiction. I personally can do nothing to interfere."

Diana stamped her foot.

"Then, who can?" she cried; "surely there is someone who can save George's life?"

"The only person who really can is the Minister at Peking."

"Then, padre, you will go to him at once: you won't delay a moment; you will lay the case before him? How soon can you get there?"

"It will take me three or four days, even if I start this very hour."

"You will go?" repeated Diana. She came close to him, and put one of her arms round his neck; her face was white as death, but in her eyes there gleamed a steady fire; she did not tremble, she was holding herself erect.

"My dear," said Maitland, "I will do all that man can do; but you do not know what these Chinese devils are. They will hurry on the trial. You know what that young Chinese woman—Hyacinth, I think, is her name—told Bryce?"

"Yes, yes. Could I forget?"

"She said the Englishman's life would be the forfeit if he did not put wings to his feet."

"You will put wings to your feet, padre; you will go to Peking immediately?"

"I can start within an hour. A steamer leaves Ch'anghai almost directly."

"Yes, sir," interrupted Bryce, "at five o'clock this evening."

"Send a coolie immediately to secure a berth for me on board," said Maitland to his servant.

Bryce left the room to attend to this order.

"Remember, Diana," said Maitland, the moment they were alone, "this is a very serious affair. There is no doubt that the Minister at Peking can and will interfere; but my dread is, that even before I reach Peking our poor young friend will be sacrificed to these wretches."

Diana thought for a moment deeply.

"I see the danger," she said. "The trial must be postponed."

"Yes, my dear; but how?"

"Only in one way—by my going to Lung-hsien."

"My poor, poor child! you don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do, padre; I shall go. You will let Bryce accompany me, won't you? I shall endeavour to see that Chinese girl, and get her to use her influence with this wicked Magistrate. If necessary, I will see the Magistrate myself. Ah, padre, you don't know what a woman's wiles can do—more particularly when her heart is set on a matter as mine is on this. Think what George's death would mean to me! Don't try for a moment to dissuade me, but give me your counsel. Forget that I am only a weak girl, and try to remember that I am a human being; that my lover's life rests in my hands; that I am determined to save him. When you start for Peking I shall go to Lung-hsien."

"Diana, Diana, you torture me!" said Maitland. "I ought not to allow this. You yourself may fall a victim."

"If George dies," was the reply, uttered in a faint and tremulous voice, "I shall not care in the very least for my own life."

Maitland turned his head aside, and uttered a groan.

"Why did I ever let you come out to this country?" he said.

“Well, I am here, and I must act,” was the reply. “Oh, don’t keep me waiting! tell me what I must do. Believe me, I shall take all good care of myself. But I feel so desperate, so determined, so full of fire, that I think, I do think, I shall succeed. Give me your advice, padre, and try—try to forget that I am only a girl.”

“How can I forget it, my poor innocent child? But, still—but, still, it does seem the only chance. God help us! the position is an awful one. I scarcely know what I am saying. The idea of sending you alone!”

“No, no; Bryce will be with me.”

“Diana, the whole thing is awful; I wish you would give it up.”

“I will not! with or without your leave I shall go.”

“Then, you take the responsibility on your own head?”

“I do—I do. Now, give me your advice.”

“You must have some money. I will give you two thousand taels. Bryce will carry it. You had better go to the Inn of Benevolence and Virtue; and Bryce will manage—he is a clever fellow, and thoroughly up to the ways of these Chinese—to get you an interview with Hyacinth. You must be guided by her then. Your one and only chance is to bribe the Magistrate to postpone the trial.”

“Can he be easily bribed?”

“All Chinamen can be bribed. It is your only chance.”

“No, no,” said Diana; “I have other weapons—a woman’s wiles. Ah, padre, you don’t know me yet! Now go and get ready for your long journey. I believe, I do believe, that between us we shall save him.”



### CHAPTER III.

#### *HYACINTH.*

**T**HE long and dusty journey to Lung-hsien was over, and Diana and Bryce arrived at the same hotel at which Kynnersley had put up. The excitement through which the brave girl had passed, coupled with her drive of thirty miles in a springless cart, had left their marks upon her. Her face was pale, there were dark shadows under her eyes, she was unable to eat, and, tired as she was, was far too anxious to seek repose.

“Now, Bryce, we must set to work at once,” she said, when they had secured rooms and Bryce came to her in her saloon to take her orders. “I must do what I have come to do without a moment’s delay. Do not be afraid; I shall not break down.”

Bryce gave her an admiring glance. Notwithstanding all the sorrow through which she was living, she had her feelings so completely under control that a stranger would have noticed nothing in her demeanour to attract attention.

“I want you, Bryce, to go straight to the Yamun,” she said. “I should like, of course, to go with you, but——”



"It would be much better for me to go alone, Miss," interrupted Bryce.

"Perhaps it would in the first instance. I must, I know, act warily. Well, then, go immediately to Tseng's Yamun, and endeavour, by hook or by crook, to get communication with Hyacinth."

"No easy matter," muttered Bryce.

Diana gave him an impatient glance.

"I know it is not easy," she said. "Nothing that we have come to do is easy; but I believe, Bryce, that you will be able to manage it. Can you not disguise yourself? Could you not go dressed as a Chinaman?"

"I could, miss, but I should be very likely to be found out. Remember, my face has already been seen at the Yamun. I am not afraid to go—I mean, there will be no danger to me—but the chances are against my being able to hold any communication with the lady who called to see me here."

"Well, well, at any rate you must go, Bryce, and take your chance. Remember how all-important it is."

Night was now falling, and darkness was settling down over the streets of Lung-hsien. Bryce soon reached Tseng's Yamun, and, by one of those curious bits of good fortune which are valued in proportion to their rarity, did encounter a maid-servant just as she was passing the portal of the ladies' apartments. It was so dark that no one noticed the unusual circumstance of a foreign man speaking to a lady's maid from the Yamun. Bryce went straight up to the girl, and, as he could converse in her language well, told her in a few words of Diana's arrival at the Inn of Benevolence and Virtue, and gave her a note which the English girl had written, and which he had translated for her into Chinese. This he now begged might be at

once delivered to the Lady Hyacinth. The maid stared at him, as well she might, looked frightened, glanced anxiously round her, seemed for a moment as if she meant to refuse, but then, intrigue being part of her nature, slipped the note quickly up her sleeve, and vanished, without a word, into the ladies' part of the Yamun.

There was nothing more for Bryce to do. With winged footsteps he returned to the inn, and told Diana of his partial success.

"And now, miss, if I might venture to advise," he continued, "I would beg of you to try and get some rest. You are sure to have some sort of news in the morning, but there is nothing more to be done to-night."

Diana hesitated; her anxieties were growing worse and worse; an untasted meal lay upon the table; she shook her head wearily.

"I can neither sleep nor rest," she cried. "Bryce, it is terrible to be so near Mr. Kynnersley, and yet not be able to see him, nor to hold communication with him."

"I know it, miss, and I pity you from my heart," said the faithful servant.

"But I have made up my mind not to give way," continued Diana.

She turned aside her head as she spoke to dash some tears from her eyes, and just at that moment a native servant entered the room. He went up to Bryce and told him that a person waited without who wished to see him without a moment's delay. Bryce instantly left the room. A Chinese woman veiled and disguised was standing in the passage.

"I have received your note; take me to the English lady immediately," she said, speaking rapidly in the Chinese tongue.

Without a single word Bryce led her into Diana's presence.

"Miss Pemberton," he said, "this is the Lady Hyacinth. I am afraid I must stay while you talk to her, as you will want someone to interpret for you."

"Stay, of course, Bryce," replied Diana. She went quickly up to the veiled figure and took her hand.

"It is good of you to come," she cried. "Believe me, I have no words to express my gratitude."

This speech Bryce translated. Hyacinth stood perfectly still without replying. She had thrown up her veil, and was now gazing with a strange mixture of curiosity and embarrassment at the European lady. She had never seen an Englishwoman before, and to meet one now for the first time under such strange, and even perilous, circumstances disturbed her habitually calm demeanour. Diana, on the other hand, was absorbed by one thought and one only. She saw as if in a dream Hyacinth's almond-shaped eyes, rounded cheeks, and dainty figure, but these made little or no impression upon her; the one longing desire of her soul was to consult her visitor on the subject of Kynnersley's danger.

"I will tell you what I want in as few words as possible," said Diana, speaking rapidly and with emphasis. "I know all that has happened to Mr. Kynnersley. I know, too, that you are his friend. My servant has told me how you braved great danger in order to give him a chance of his life. He has not been tried yet, has he?"

"The trial will take place the day after to-morrow," was the reply.

"Then, we must put it off. I have come here for the express purpose. I am convinced, and I know you are the

same, that Mr. Kynnersley is quite innocent of the crime of which he is accused."

Hyacinth did not answer, but her dark eyes were fixed with a peculiar expression on Diana's face. Diana's whole manner, her enthusiasm, her fire, her extraordinary excitement, were matters of extreme wonder to the Chinese girl.

"He is innocent," repeated Diana. "I see the fact in your eyes. He must be saved at any cost. Mr. Maitland, the English Consul at Ch'anghai cannot interfere in the matter himself, because Lung-hsien is outside his jurisdiction, but he has gone to Peking to see the Minister, who will at once give him the necessary order for the release of the Englishman."

"But Peking is a long way off," answered Hyacinth. "It will take many days for the Consul to cross the rivers and mountains which separate Peking from Lung-hsien."

"I know that well," replied Diana; "and it is because of this great distance, and because time must be gained, that I have ventured to ask you to help me. I propose calling on the Magistrate to-morrow to ask him to postpone the trial for several days."

"He won't do that," replied Hyacinth. "He told me only this morning that the trial was to be held without doubt the day after to-morrow."

Diana looked with anxious eyes at her visitor. The crucial moment had now arrived. She was puzzled how to go on. She had reached the point on which all depended. She felt ashamed to speak of a bribe, feeling sure that, were she in Hyacinth's place, she would immediately leave the room in righteous indignation. But, happily for her, she remembered that Chinese ways are not English ways, and so timidly and gently she approached the subject.

"Before I came to China," she began, "I studied your

customs and tried to make myself acquainted with your ways and with your people. I could not learn much, but I did learn something. I am well aware that this is a poor neighbourhood. The Magistrate, Tseng, must have much to do with his money. Now, it would be most gratifying to me if, in return for any kindness he happened to show me, I might be able to place at his disposal sums which would make his tenancy as Magistrate an easier one than it probably is."

Bryce translated Diana's well-chosen words in excellent Chinese, and Hyacinth, far from expressing displeasure, showed, by her sparkling eyes and attentive attitude, that she was by no means offended.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, after a pause.

"You can stand my friend. You can ask the Magistrate to delay the trial. If he refuses, you can use your influence with him to induce him to change his mind. Oh, if you only will I shall be for ever grateful to you."

As Diana spoke the tears started to her eyes.

"The Englishman is as strong and brave as a hero of antiquity," said Hyacinth; "and I will certainly do all in my power to help both him and you. You may depend upon that."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Diana. "In the meantime I shall not leave a stone unturned on my own account. I have come to Lung-hsien for an express purpose: I mean to visit the Magistrate personally; I shall call at his Yamun to-morrow."

Hyacinth looked at her in astonishment.

"I would not do that if I were you," she said.

"I must; I have come for the purpose. Believe me, I shall not lead you into danger."

Hyacinth did not reply. After a pause she rose.

## Trapped by a Chinaman

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“You had better not tell me any more,” she said. “If there is trouble, the less I know the better. Rely upon my influence being used in your behalf. Now I must go; if I should happen to be missed, things would go badly with me. Be sure if I have any news I will communicate with you at once.”

Diana grasped her hand. The Chinese girl lowered her veil and left the room.

The moment she did so Diana sank upon a divan and gave herself up to anxious thought. Yes, Hyacinth was likely to help, and to help greatly; but she knew well that she herself must be the one to save her lover from the terrible danger in which he was placed. She resolved that no personal fear should stay her. She would do her utmost, be the consequences what they might. Accordingly, early the next morning Diana ordered Bryce to fetch her a sedan-chair. This was obtained, and, having mounted it, she made her way to the Magistrate's Yamun, Bryce, of course, following her. The centre doors were shut, but there was plenty of room for her chair to pass in by the side-entrance, and, as she had no desire to raise the question of etiquette, she told her coolies to carry her straight into the courtyard. There two or three tingchais were standing in attendance, to whom Bryce handed one of Maitland's large Chinese visiting-cards, on which was inscribed a request that the Magistrate would grant the English lady an interview on a matter of great importance. This message evidently created much excitement. Messengers came and went, and servants and others appeared at doorways and windows to gaze at the foreign devils. A considerable interval occurred before the tingchai brought back a message to say that the Magistrate would receive the English lady and her servant.

On receipt of this intimation Diana immediately dismounted from her chair, and, followed by Bryce, passed through the entrance hall into a room beyond, where Tseng awaited her surrounded by a number of official attendants, all of whom had crowded in for the pleasure of seeing a barbarian woman.

The Magistrate at the best of times was not a pleasant-looking man, and on this occasion the frown on his coarse features added to the general roughness of his appearance. With scant courtesy he invited Diana to seat herself, and then asked abruptly what she wanted with him. Maitland, notwithstanding his hurry, had already coached her as to the terms and expressions to be used should she be lucky enough to secure this interview. Now, entirely disregarding the Magistrate's rudeness, she broke out into complimentary language, Bryce interpreting without an instant's pause.

"Your Excellency's learning and wisdom," she said, "are known throughout the four seas, and happy are the people who live under the fostering care of your Excellency's administration."

A slight relaxation of the ugly frown on Tseng's face testified to his appreciation of these compliments, which were as false as they were well timed.

"Unfortunately," Diana went on, "an Englishman has incurred your Excellency's displeasure. I am perfectly well aware that your Excellency's wisdom and insight are such that you will at once arrive at the root of the matter. But at the same time, in accordance with our laws and customs, the British Consul should be present in your Excellency's court at the trial, if it were only that he might be a witness to the learning and penetration which it is well known your Excellency possesses. The request

## Trapped by a Chinaman

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which I therefore venture to make is, that you will postpone the trial for ten days, so as to enable the Consul, who has gone to Peking to consult the English Minister and the officials of the Tsungli Yamun on the matter in question, to be present at your august court. I beg that you will cast your benign glance on my humble request."

"The crime of which the Englishman is charged is one of life and death," replied Tseng. "Had the murdered man been one of the whitecoats (namely, the people), I might possibly have granted your request. But please remember that the victim in this case was the Prefect of this town and district. In murdering him, the murderer, whoever he happened to be, took the life of a representative of the 'Son of Heaven,' and the law, majestic and impartial, must at once be put into force."

"Ask the Magistrate if you may speak to him alone," whispered Bryce in Diana's ears.

"May I talk to you by yourself?" she asked at once. "There are eyes and ears too near us at the present moment."

"By all means," was the reply. With a wave of his hand Tseng dismissed the servants and attendants. "Now, then, be quick," he said; "I have no wish to be discourteous, but my business is pressing, and I have much to attend to."

"I will not delay you a moment longer than I can help. Your Excellency must know that your English prisoner is a man of consideration, and both the English Minister at Peking and the English Consul would be held responsible in England if anything were done to him contrary to the laws of our country. If your Excellency would deign to grant my request, I have with me an order for two thousand taels, which I would beg you to accept in payment of the



charges which would be necessarily entailed by the postponement of the trial."

Diana's eyes shone as she spoke, the colour flushed brightly in her pale cheeks. Tseng gazed at her with a momentary admiration for her beauty, and a decided quickening of his heart-beats at the mention of the considerable bribe which she offered him. He was a needy man. He had had to pay a considerable sum for the purchase of his office. The district had been impoverished by a long drought, and the Magistrate had long been the victim of uneasy fears that he would not be able to squeeze out of the people the amount which the bank had already advanced him. Diana's offer was, therefore, doubly tempting, and it was plain, by the expression on his face, that he was sorely tempted. But he quickly recovered himself, and said, with an assumed air of importance :

"A great crime has been committed, and it is my duty to inquire into the circumstances connected with it at once. I fear, therefore, that I cannot grant your request."

The colour left Diana's face, and her eyes lost their brightness. Without a single word she turned away, Tseng only deigning to escort her to the door of the room.

Deeply disappointed and alarmed, she returned to the inn, feeling that her only hope now rested upon what Hyacinth could do. Bryce shared her misgivings, but was not quite so despairing as she was, for he knew well what very itching palms belonged to the pigtailed race.

"You must remember one thing, miss," he said : "even if the Magistrate meant to accept your offer in the end, he would be likely to refuse it at first. He is a good bit too knowing to yield all of a sudden, and I saw by his eyes that he was tempted."

“Whether that is the case or not,” replied Diana, “we must not leave a stone unturned to bring extra pressure to bear upon him. You know, Bryce, unless we do something the trial will take place to-morrow. If Mr. Kynnersley is tried, he is certain to be convicted. At any risk the trial must be postponed; we must manage to see the Lady Hyacinth again to-day.”

“I don’t know how that can be done,” said Bryce, a perplexed look creeping into his face.

“It must be done. You must go again to the ladies’ part of the Yamun, and try to communicate with the maid.”

“I will try, of course, miss; but I do not expect to have much chance of success.”

Early in the afternoon Bryce went back to the Yamun. On this occasion fortune was not so kind to him as it had been on the previous day. He had to wait about for hours, and could not get a sight of any of the women. At last, seating himself in a tea-house exactly opposite, he tried to while away the time by drinking cups of tea and watching with anxious eyes the sacred portals of the house. Then, just when the dusk was falling, his weary waiting was rewarded, for Primrose, the pretty maid whom he had accosted on the previous evening, appeared at the gates, and looked about her up and down the street, evidently expecting someone. Bryce instantly went and stood at the door of the tea-house. Primrose saw him and crossed the street. Under the pretence that she wished to purchase something, she entered the shop, and, while the man was tying up her parcel, took the opportunity of walking past the table at which the Englishman was sitting. Bryce was quick to avail himself of this opportunity to deliver his message.

"Please ask your mistress to come to the inn this evening," he said; "we have bad news."

Primrose looked acquiescence, and, without saying a word, crossed the street and disappeared through the Yamun door. Bryce now went back to Diana.

"I was kept waiting a long time," he said, "but I had success in the end. I saw the same girl again, and delivered your message for the Lady Hyacinth."

"Do you think she will come?" asked Diana.

"Yes, miss, I feel certain she will. She has taken up this business, and it would be unlike a Chinese woman to drop it once she devoted her attention to it."

Diana began to pace up and down the saloon.

"I wonder when she will be here," she remarked restlessly.

Bryce stood near the door, and watched his young mistress with ill-concealed anxiety.

"On one point I have made up my mind," said Diana. "If Hyacinth does not come to-night, or even if she does come and assures me that there is no chance of my bribe being accepted and the trial postponed, I shall appear in court myself to-morrow."

"That would be a very rash thing to do, miss."

"Rash or not, I am determined. But, hark! a servant has come into the room; yes, and with a message. Bryce, I wonder if Lady Hyacinth has arrived."

Bryce went up to the man, listened to what he had to say, cast an anxious glance at Diana, and left the room. A moment later the Chinese girl came in. She was veiled as on the preceding evening, but threw up her veil the moment she saw Diana, and began to speak eagerly.

"I know everything," she began. "Tseng told me this afternoon that he had seen you, and that you had made

your request to him. He further said that he had refused it. I did not make any remark to him at the time, for I wished to see you first, to know exactly how matters stand."

"Matters could not be worse," cried Diana. "My agony and terror are almost intolerable."

"Did you make him the offer you spoke to me about last night?"

"I did. I said I would give him an order for two thousand taels if he would postpone the trial. He refused, and now my only hope rests with you."

"I think I shall be able to persuade him," said Hyacinth, in a low voice; "and I rather believe," she added, "that his motive in refusing was to induce you to make a higher offer. He is under the impression that all foreigners are boundlessly rich, and that you might quite as easily give him four thousand taels as two thousand."

"I wish I could," replied Diana. "I would give him all the money I possess, but at the present moment that is all I can offer. I have only been able to get this sum together by borrowing from the Consul."

"Then, if that is so," answered Hyacinth, "I must try to make him accept the two thousand taels, and I feel almost certain I shall succeed."

"I hope you will be able to," said Diana; "but please do not delay a moment in using your power. Remember, the trial comes off to-morrow."

"I know. I shall go back immediately—he shall hear my opinion to-night."

As Hyacinth was leaving the room, Diana called her back.

"Have you heard anything of your maid Jasmine?" she asked.

“I only know that she is in prison. The Magistrate has said nothing about her to me, so I thought it best not to make particular inquiries.”

“But her evidence,” said Diana, “will be of the utmost importance to us, and it makes it more than ever necessary that the Consul should be present at the trial, in order to insist on her being produced. When may I hope to hear from you again?”

“If I can persuade Tseng to put off the trial, I may get him to return your call to-morrow morning. His coming will therefore be a sign that I have succeeded, and that he is willing to accept the two thousand taels.”

Hyacinth then took her leave.

On the next morning at an early hour Diana felt much relief when a tingchai from the Yamun arrived, bringing the Magistrate's card, with a message that he would be at the inn in a few minutes.

Diana received her guest with every token of respect. Tseng was not a man whose manner could ever be cordial, but there was now a less unyielding look on his face than on the previous day. It was not his cue to begin at once on the real matter in hand. He talked to Diana of the tea they were drinking, of where it was grown, and when the first leaves sprouted, and of half a dozen other trivial subjects. But at last the English girl's impatience could stand the strain no longer. She broke into Tseng's guarded conversation.

“Will your Excellency allow me to return to the subject of our conversation of yesterday? The Englishman in your Excellency's prison is to be my husband, and I love him with all my heart.”

The Magistrate started at this, according to Chinese views, very unmaidenly expression. The idea of a young

lady being in love with her husband before marriage was quite foreign to his orthodox ideas. He looked at Diana with an expression which showed that he had not a scrap of sympathy for her, and after a moment spoke.

"We have had great trouble with foreigners lately," he said, "and it is necessary to be very particular in our dealings with them."

"But did not Confucius himself say, 'To have friends coming from a distance, is it not pleasant?'" quoted Diana. "Your prisoner has come from a distance, and he would be a friend if you would allow him. The Master, if he were here, would, I am sure, treat him with kindness, and my request with consideration."

"I perceive that you have studied our Classics," said the Magistrate, softening a little. "But when the Master talked about a distance he did not mean England."

"How can your Excellency tell? The knowledge possessed by Confucius was profound and far-reaching, and to his penetrating glance the Western nations were doubtless as familiar as the Persians or the Tibetans."

"You show discernment," said the Magistrate, "and I am disposed to do all I can to help you; but to put off the trial for ten days is a serious matter, and will entail considerable expense."

"I quite understand that, and it was on that account that I ventured to offer your Excellency the two thousand taels which I have here. Will you allow me to hand you the money now?"

So saying, Diana placed the paper representing the amount in the hand of the Magistrate.

Tseng bowed somewhat awkwardly, and looked over his shoulder to see that none of his retainers were in sight. After a few more complimentary remarks he took his leave

with his newly-acquired wealth, and Diana was left to the enjoyment of having achieved successfully the first part of her programme.

"And now, miss," said Bryce, when he returned to the room after seeing the Magistrate off, "you will, of course, go back at once to Ch'anghai?"

"Certainly not, Bryce. I shall remain here until Mr. Maitland joins us."

"But you can do nothing further, miss. It will be impossible for you to see Mr. Kynnersley."

"Never mind, I shall remain at Lung-hsien," answered Diana, "for"—an anxious expression clouded her face for a moment—"for, Bryce, try as I will, I cannot quite trust that dreadful Magistrate."

At a late hour that evening Hyacinth once more appeared. She looked bright and triumphant, and when Diana kissed her she returned the English girl's embrace with warmth. Hyacinth had carried her point, and there is not a woman in the world to whom carrying her point is not an occasion for satisfaction.

The two girls seated themselves on a divan and talked long together.

"Before you leave me," said Diana, "I must ask you to accept this small remembrance."

So saying, she removed a small diamond brooch from the front of her dress, and presented it to her guest.

"I don't like to take it," said Hyacinth, shaking her pretty head, and looking with sparkling, covetous eyes at the gem. "It is, I know, lovely, but does it not seem like a bribe?"

"It is nothing of the kind," answered Diana with warmth. "I give you this because I love you and am very grateful to you. Please wear it as a remembrance of our friendship."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Hyacinth. "On those terms I will accept it with pleasure."

The English and the Chinese girl once again kissed each other, and Diana observed that Hyacinth's almond-shaped eyes shone with the unusual glitter of tears.

The next few days passed without anything special occurring. To Diana, all impatience and concealed anxiety, they dragged themselves away like lead. Her thoughts, her hopes, her longings, were with Kynnersley in his dungeon. If only she might see him, if only he might know that she was close to him! Each night Bryce ventured into the vicinity of the Yamun, but, as there was no news of any coming trial, Diana's hopes rose, she began to believe in Tseng, and trusted that Maitland would arrive before the end of the tenth day. On the evening of the seventh, however, the poor girl was awakened out of her partial dreams of security in a rude manner. A messenger brought her a letter from Hyacinth. It was evidently written in great perturbation.

"A despatch," she wrote, "has just been received from the Viceroy of the province, ordering Tseng to put Mr. Kynnersley on his trial without a moment's delay. Be sure that I have done all I can to persuade Tseng to keep to his engagement with you, but he will not listen to me. He is full of terror, and when in that condition is quite unmanageable. He says the trial must come on to-morrow, as it would be as much as his neck is worth did he not obey the secret orders from Peking to hasten on the inquiry. My heart is pierced with grief, but what can I do?"

Bryce read this letter aloud to Diana. When he had finished it, he watched his young mistress with a face which plainly showed his own dismay.



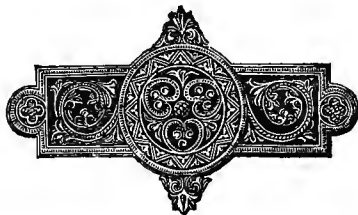
“It is just *possible*,” he said, after a pause, “that the Consul may arrive here to-morrow.”

“Can I not see Lady Hyacinth to-night?” asked Diana.

“I fear not. She would have come had she dared. No bribe now, miss, will induce Tseng to risk his neck. The trial will come on; we have got to face that fact.”

“I know,” said Diana, “and I am trying to face it. I shall be present in the court; if he should see me, he will know at least that he is not deserted.”

Her lips trembled, her composure gave way, she burst into tears.





## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE TRIAL.*

**T**HE morning broke dull and drear, a condition which accurately reflected the unhappy English girl's feelings. Sleep had been impossible, breakfast was a mockery, and Bryce watched with much trepidation the very visible traces of the terrible strain to which his lady was being subjected.

"If the anticipation of the trial produces such agitation, what will the sight of Mr. Kynnersley standing before his judge on the charge of murder effect?" thought the faithful attendant.

But Diana was made of sterner stuff than most girls. Hers was both a brave and unselfish heart. Putting a great restraint on herself, she soon got her feelings completely under control, and, when the time arrived for her to start for the Yamun, walked with unfaltering step to her sedan-chair.

The coolies bore her quickly through the streets, Bryce following them. The streams of traffic were incessant, and Diana, notwithstanding her misery, could not help noticing the expression on people's faces as they passed, and the gaudy shop-signs which hung out into the narrow

streets. Presently they reached an open space, on which were planted two high, flag-bearing poles, which stood sentry on either side of the gate of the Yamun. A more than usually large crowd had collected at this gloomy portal, for the report had gone about that the foreign devil, who had murdered the Prefect, was to be tried for the crime.

As on the former occasion, the coolies carried Diana in by the side-door, and deposited her chair in the courtyard. A crowd of unsympathetic, and even hostile, lookers-on immediately pressed round the chair; but Diana stepped lightly to the ground, although Bryce felt as he gave her his hand that she was trembling all over.

"Bear up, miss," he said respectfully; "I feel sure that all will come right."

"I am better now," was the reply. "Lead me at once, Bryce, to the part of the court where I can see without being seen."

In obedience to this direction, Bryce, who knew the geography of the Yamun, led Diana to the south part of the courtyard, facing the Magistrate. The prison, as Bryce was aware, was on the eastern side of the tribunal, and he knew well that the accused would be brought in by the north-east corner, and would be placed in front of his judge, with his back to Diana. This was all the better, for did Kynnersley see that she was present, his fortitude would doubtless give way.

After some slight delay the Magistrate appeared, followed by two or three clerks, who took their seats at small side-tables, and also by a number of tingchais and executioners. It was fortunate for the English girl that she was in blissful ignorance of the fact that the strange-looking men with tall wickerwork hats belonged to that

class who daily torture and kill their victims in pursuance of what is known in China as justice.

"Bring in the prisoner," called out the Magistrate, and instantly two or three executioners hurried off amid a buzz of excitement among the crowd.

"Haiyah," they muttered presently as Kynnersley appeared in charge of the two myrmidons.

Diana shrank back, and a queer trembling took possession of her as she saw her lover, chained, fettered, and dishevelled; but though a blinding, dizzy mist rose before her eyes, she could not help recognising that the man she loved looked at that moment like a god among the miserable creatures who surrounded him.

"Kweihsia" (Kneel down), said the Magistrate, addressing Kynnersley in a hard voice.

He had folded his arms, and stood facing his judge with that courageous nonchalance which is common to Britons in moments of danger. Kynnersley understood enough Chinese to know the meaning of these words, but he was unaccustomed to kneel before any person but his Sovereign, and by no means intended to bend the knee before so flimsy a potentate as Tseng. He remained standing, therefore, and showed no inclination to obey the command.

"Haiyah," muttered the crowd, "the foreign devil is going to insult his Honour again."

Hearing this murmur, the Magistrate looked up, and an ill-omened scowl came over his features as he recognised the cause of it. Without saying a word, he nodded to his executioners, who advanced in a body and forced Kynnersley, helpless as he was in his chains, upon his knees.

"What is your name," demanded the Magistrate for the benefit of the executioners, who were waiting with

pencils dipped in ink on the ink-stones, ready to take down a record of the trial.

Kynnersley made due answer to this inquiry, as he did also to questions as to his nationality, age, and business. His replies were quiet and distinctly uttered.

These preliminaries over, the Magistrate addressed the prisoner in the following words :

“ You are charged with the murder of his Excellency the Prefect of this district, and I hold in my hand a memorial from the son of the deceased, in which are stated all the circumstances connected with the death of his father. He says that at the conclusion of the dinner in my Yamun you handed the Prefect a cup of tea, immediately after drinking which he was seized with violent pains, and soon died. The doctor who was called in examined the dregs in the teacup and found the presence of strychnine. I ask you now, Are you guilty, or are you not guilty ?”

“ I am not guilty,” replied Kynnersley. “ I have never had strychnine in my possession, and I did not put anything into the cup which was given me by Sung.”

On hearing this bold reply the Magistrate hesitated. If Kynnersley had been a Chinaman he would have at once ordered the lictors to bamboo him, but he dared not enter on this course with a European. He therefore turned to a tingchai and told him to bring Sung before him. Being well used to such ordeals, Sung at once fell on his knees before his judge, who, desiring in the presence of a European prisoner to act with all formality, desired an attendant to bring a cock, that the oath might be duly administered to the witness. The cock was brought in, and in the presence of everyone a blow from one of the executioner's knives sent its head rolling on the stones of the courtyard.

"Repeat the oath after me," said one of the secretaries.

At his dictation Sung solemnly affirmed that if he did not tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, he hoped that his head might be cut off like that of the cock.

"Now tell me what you know of the matter," said the Magistrate.

"On the night of the Feast of Lanterns," replied Sung, "this little one was in attendance at your Honour's Yamun, when his Excellency the Prefect and the English barbarian dined with your Honour. After dinner some dispute arose between his Excellency the Prefect and this Englishman, in the course of which the Englishman pushed the Prefect down. Shortly after I brought in tea, and the Englishman took a cup from me and presented it to the Prefect. After drinking it the Prefect cried out with pain, and died at once. That is all I know about it."

"You may go," said the Magistrate.

He turned to a tingchai, and desired him to bring the doctor before him. This learned man was dressed in a long robe of silk, and wore large spectacles to give himself the air of a scholar. Like Sung, he at once fell on his knees before the tribunal, and being asked after what form he would like to be sworn, he said :

"With a candle, please your Excellency."

Upon which a lighted candle was brought and handed to the witness, who straightway blew it out, saying :

"May my vital spark be thus blown out if I do not speak the truth."

"Now tell me what you know of the death of his Excellency the Prefect," called out the Magistrate.

"On the evening of the Feast of Lanterns," replied the doctor, "I was called suddenly to your Honour's Yamun, and found his Excellency the Prefect lying on the divan in

great agony. Before I could administer a remedy he fell back dead."

"Have you any idea what was the cause of his death?"

"He was poisoned with strychnine."

"Did you examine the cup out of which he had drunk his tea?"

"Yes."

"What did you find in it?"

"Strychnine."

To Diana, who was listening breathlessly at the back of the court, there came now a sickening feeling of dread at what she considered the awful omnipotence of the Magistrate.

"Bryce," she whispered, in a low voice, "is there no way, no possible way, by which we can show how false and how dreadful this charge is?"

"We can do nothing, miss," was the sad reply. "There is no hope whatever unless Mr. Maitland arrives. If he comes, well and good; if not——" But here Bryce's pallid face and his averted eyes told Diana the words which he could not bring himself to speak.

Meanwhile, the Magistrate had asked the doctor whether he had made a post-mortem examination of the body.

"I have," said the doctor.

"And what did you find?"

"I found a reddish exfoliation on the surface of the skull. The upper and lower bones of the mouth, and the hands and feet, were of a reddish colour. When I pierced the body with a silver probing needle, a green stain was observable. When I washed the needle with a decoction of *gleditschia*, it failed to obliterate the stain. All these symptoms point to poisoning by strychnine, and I have no hesitation in saying that poisoning by that drug was the cause of death."

At this moment a commotion appeared amongst the crowd, and Diana looked up eagerly in the faint hope that Maitland might be arriving; but, alas! no such good fortune had happened.

"What is the matter, Bryce?" she whispered.

"I don't know, miss; but a young Chinaman is trying to force his way through the crowd."

The noise was so pronounced that the Magistrate looked up.

"Who is this," he cried, "who dares to force his way into the court at this moment?"

Bryce noticed that Sung had been conspicuous in his efforts to keep the stranger back, but he saw also that the new arrival was determined to force his way in.

"A wrong—a wrong—a cruel wrong!" said the man, as he pushed through and fell on his knees before the Magistrate, who regarded him with an angry scowl.

Matters had been going on smoothly, and Tseng resented any introduction of discordant matter. So far the evidence had been conclusive enough, and if no contradictory testimony were introduced, he would have no difficulty in presenting an eminently satisfactory report to his superior.

"What wrong do you proclaim?" said the Magistrate in an angry voice.

"His Honour the Englishman did not commit the murder."

"How do you know?"

"I was in attendance on him; he had engaged me as his servant while in Lung-hsien, and I know that he had no poison with him, and I saw that he did not put anything into the cup."

"What is your name?" asked the Magistrate.



"My insignificant surname is Ting," answered the man, "and my mean personal name is Pinglung."

"And who told you to come here?"

"No one; I came of my own accord."

"Have you heard the evidence?"

"I only heard the last part of what the doctor said."

"But the doctor and Sung have said that his Excellency the Prefect died of poisoning, and that the Englishman administered it in a cup of tea. How can you, therefore, say that he did not? You must have been sent here by someone to pervert justice."

"I am speaking the truth, your Honour."

"We will see about that," said the Magistrate with an angry frown. He turned to the executioners and uttered the ominous syllable "Ta."

Without a moment's delay the executioners advanced, and laid Ting face downwards on the stones of the courtyard. One man sat on his shoulders, another held his ankles, while a third squatted by him holding in his hand a split bamboo.

"What is the meaning of this, Bryce?" cried Diana. "Oh, surely they are not going to flog him?"

"Indeed, miss, I am afraid they are," was the reply.

"But cannot we stop it?"

"Impossible, Miss Pemberton; anything that we could do would only make matters worse."

Diana gave a low, suppressed cry and covered her face with her hands.

She could not look at the victim. The blows fell gently but persistently, and the torture was evidently intense. The man writhed and groaned, while a secretary crouched at his head, pen and paper in hand, ready to record any admissions he might make. But Ting was

firm, and after two hundred blows had fallen on his lacerated limbs the Magistrate called on the executioner to stop. By that time the wretched man had fainted, and was carried out in a lifeless heap by his torturers. Ting's obduracy had placed the Magistrate in a difficulty. By the law of the land it is necessary that all the witnesses, as well as the prisoner himself, should agree on the facts of the case. As, however, the latter was a foreigner, his denial of guilt was not so important; but it was plainly necessary that Ting should be induced to recall the evidence which he had given. It was also plain that even after the use of restoratives the tortured man would be unable to answer further questions for some hours to come. Tseng therefore adjourned the court, and Kynnersley was led back to prison. The torture inflicted on Ting had filled Diana with unspeakable horror. The sight of such an atrocity was almost more than she could bear, and at the end of the first part of the trial she felt so faint and sick that Bryce had the greatest difficulty in conveying her from the court. As soon as she was sufficiently recovered he called the chair coolies, and, lifting her more than leading her to her sedan-chair, carried her off.

"Remember, Bryce," said the poor girl, as she entered the Inn of Benevolence and Virtue, "that I must be back, whatever happens, when the trial recommences."

"Yes, miss, by all means," answered Bryce. He was beginning to understand Diana's character by this time, and knew that it was useless to oppose her.

"You will have something to eat and drink now at once, miss," he continued, "or you will never be able to get through the afternoon."

"Yes, I will do anything," said Diana; "and I know

I must husband my strength," she added. "Afterwards—but I dare not think of that!"

"If Mr. Maitland can only arrive before the trial is over, I am convinced that all will be well," said Bryce.

"Oh, if he only would, Bryce! But we have no means of hastening him."

"That is true, miss," said the servant; "and now you will have your tiffin, which I have already ordered for you. You can take it with an easy mind, for I have arranged with one of the tinguais to send me notice of the sitting."

At three o'clock this man arrived to say that Ting had so far revived as to be able to be examined again. Diana once more found herself in the court, and saw on her entrance that the Magistrate, with coarse brutality, was trying by threats and abuse to induce Ting to make the necessary admissions.

The wretched witness was deadly pale, and was scarcely conscious of Tseng's words. Fortunately, the nerves of Chinamen are duller than those of Europeans. There is little doubt that pain is not so acute with them, and, terribly as Ting had suffered, it was not the agony to him that it would have been to an Englishman, nor, as a matter of fact, could an Englishman have recovered so rapidly from the fearful punishment inflicted on Ting that morning. But Diana, who knew nothing of this, marked his ashen face with intense pity, and a burning desire rose in her heart to save him from his tormentors. But it was not to be.

"I will give you one more chance," cried the Magistrate. "Will you retract your evidence, or will you not?"

Ting shook his head. At a nod from Tseng the executioners again advanced. This time they stretched a chain

on the ground, and, lifting Ting up, placed him in a kneeling position on the iron links. Two men then put a board on the calves of his legs, and stood one on each end. The cold beads of perspiration poured from the poor man's face. His agony was extreme, and it was plain that he could not long endure the torture. The sight of this anguish was more than Kynnersley could bear, and he made a frantic effort to struggle to his feet in order to rescue him. But the gaolers had taken precautions to prevent any such outbreak, and had so loaded him with chains that they were quite able to overmaster him. Without much difficulty they forced him again on his knees, and, in answer to a look of encouragement from the Magistrate, bowed his face to the ground in the performance of what is called the Kotow. Diana gave a low, suppressed scream as she witnessed the struggle, and would have rushed to the front if Bryce had not held her forcibly back. Again the secretary took his place by Ting, but with only similar results, for, though barely conscious, not a word of retraction crossed the man's lips. His obstinacy evidently angered the Magistrate excessively. He railed at his wretched victim, and called down all the curses of heaven on his parents and ancestors. When this proved unavailing, he nodded to two more executioners, who at once stepped on the board, one standing by each of the other two. The additional weight tortured Ting beyond endurance. He moaned, swayed backwards and forwards, and then fell forward, to all appearance lifeless. At a sign from his judge, his torturers got off the board and carried off their victim as before.

Just at this crucial moment a commotion was observable amongst the audience, and Tseng, who was about to rise from the tribunal, was arrested by the unwelcome sounds :

“Ying-kwo Ling-shih-kwan lailo” (The English Consul has come).

Bryce heard the words, and eagerly translated them.

“Mr. Maitland has come,” he said, turning to Diana.

“Mr. Kynnersley is saved. All will be well.”

The words had scarcely passed his lips, when Maitland, pushing his way eagerly through the crowd, ascended the tribunal. The Magistrate scowled on his visitor with no friendly welcome, and the bow he made him had none of that humble and obsequious air which commonly distinguishes Chinese obeisances.

“I have just arrived from Peking,” said Maitland, addressing Tseng in a courteous manner, “and I have brought the copy of a despatch which has been addressed by the Tsungli Yamun to his Excellency the Viceroy on the subject of the case now before your Honour. I am glad that I have come at the crucial moment, and I beg that you will immediately deign to cast your glance upon this paper.”

The frown on the Magistrate's face had now changed to a look of intense and angry anxiety. He was forced to invite the Consul to take a seat, and took the paper presented to him by Maitland with every outward token of deference; but in reality his heart was quaking within him, and his feelings were shared more or less by the crowd of people who were watching the trial. With the cruelty which belongs to the Chinese character, they had enjoyed the sight of the tortures inflicted on Ting. They had laughed at his writhings and groanings, and were very angry at the prospect of being balked of other scenes of a similar kind. Above all, they had hoped to have taken part in the ultimate execution of Kynnersley, for the idea of a foreigner's head rolling in the dust filled them with

delight. Though these people could not fully understand the nature of the Consul's interference, they felt that there was a hitch in the proceedings from their point of view. As to Kynnersley, he gave one glance at Maitland, and felt immediately that his salvation had arrived. A look of perfect calm now spread over his features.

Meanwhile, the Magistrate read the despatch from the Tsungli Yamun, which ran as follows :

“It appears, from a despatch received from the English Minister, that on the 15th of the 1st month of the twenty-second year of the reign of the Emperor Kwangshü, an Englishman, named Kynnersley, dined with the Magistrate of Lung-hsien in company with the Prefect of the district. At the close of the dinner some disagreement arose, which was, however, smoothed over. Later on the Englishman presented a cup of tea to the Prefect, who had no sooner drunk it than he was seized with violent pains, and died before remedies could be applied. Traces of poison were found in the cup, and as the Englishman had handed the cup to the Prefect, he had been arrested and charged with the murder. Now, according to the ancient laws of the Empire, a man charged with murder must be tried, and if found guilty must be punished in accordance with the Criminal Code ; but whereas in this case the prisoner is an Englishman, and as the laws of the two countries are not identical, it is necessary that the least suspicion of a miscarriage of justice should be avoided. We therefore desire that, in accordance with the recently-revised treaty, so soon as the English Consul, Maitland, can arrive at Lung-hsien, the Magistrate shall put the Englishman on his trial in the presence of the said Consul, who shall be entitled to call any witnesses he may think necessary.”

As the Magistrate read on through this epistle his face

grew longer and longer, and the power conferred on Maitland by the last sentence filled him with terror. Maitland, on the other hand, was perfectly calm and eminently polite.

"May I ask your Honour," he said, "the nature of the evidence you have already heard?"

In a few words Tseng recapitulated what had passed, laying great stress on the high character of Sung, and describing Ting as a notorious ruffian. He further carefully omitted all mention of the punishment inflicted upon the last witness.

"It would be more satisfactory to me," said Maitland, "if I might hear the witnesses repeat their evidence, for I need not remind a man of your Honour's judicial experience that much depends on the way in which a witness gives his testimony."

"Certainly," replied the Magistrate, "if you wish it. Call Sung," he added, turning to a tingchai.

Sung immediately appeared, but by no means with the same easy indifference with which he presented himself on the first occasion, nor did he repeat his evidence with the same assurance.

"Will you allow me to ask this man a question or two?" demanded Maitland.

"By all means," replied the Magistrate; but he scowled and moved uneasily in his seat.

"You say," continued Maitland, addressing Sung, "that the Englishman presented the tea to the Prefect?"

"He did," said Sung.

"Who gave the tea to the Englishman?" asked Maitland.

"This little one did," replied Sung.

"And who made it?" asked Maitland.

“His Honour’s cook.”

“Then you see, your Honour,” said Maitland, turning to the Magistrate, “the tea was made in the kitchen, brought into the room by the witness, and only handed to the Prefect by the Englishman, and that in the eyes of all present. It would appear to be much more likely that the poison was in the cup *before* it was brought into the room, when there might have been no one there to observe, than that it was put into it, when an act of such a sort would certainly have been seen.”

“There is certainly something in what you say,” remarked the Magistrate; “but at the same time there was a quarrel between the Englishman and the Prefect, and that supplies a motive for the murder. Have you anything further to ask this witness?”

“No,” answered Maitland; “but with your leave I should like to put some questions to the doctor.”

“Certainly,” answered the Magistrate.

He bade a tingchai summon this functionary, who quickly appeared on the scene.

With facile glibness the man repeated his evidence, and when he had finished, Maitland, who had listened very carefully, remarked:

“You quote the evidence on the subject of poison from the ‘Coroner’s Guide,’ I think?”

“Yes, I do,” said the doctor.

“But, according to that book, the symptoms you have just described are those of arsenic poisoning, are they not?”

“Yes.”

“But arsenic and strychnine are very different in their effects. How, then, can the symptoms be identical?”

“The learned doctors of all ages have said they are,” replied the doctor.



"Have you ever seen a case of poisoning by strychnine before?"

"No."

"That is all I have to ask him, your Honour," said Maitland, turning to the Magistrate; "but now I should wish to see the witness Ting, of whom your Honour spoke."

"I regret to say he is unwell," replied the Magistrate.

"In that case," said Maitland, after a brief pause, "I would ask you to produce a girl of the name of Jasmine, whom I am creditably informed can throw considerable light upon this matter."

If Maitland had presented a pistol in the Magistrate's face, he could not have been more taken aback than he was by this demand.

"I don't know what you mean," he ejaculated.

"I mean the Lady Hyacinth's attendant, Jasmine," replied Maitland.

An uneasy movement among the tingschais showed that their perturbation was now scarcely less than that of their master. When Maitland repeated his demand, the strain in court was so intense that a pin could have been heard drop. The assembled crowd waited eagerly for the next words which would drop from the lips of Tseng.

"I know nothing about her," replied the Magistrate, who began to recover his self-possession, and who saw in strenuous denial his only chance of safety.

"Then, that simplifies matters," said Maitland; "for of course, if your Honour is ignorant of this girl having been detained in prison, her capture and confinement must have been the work of some subordinate. With your leave, however, I will at once go to the prison and present her before your Honour."

“But the thing is impossible,” said the Magistrate angrily. “Jasmine is not in any prison, I assure you.”

“The letter from the Yamun,” said Maitland, “authorizes me, your Honour will observe, to call any witnesses I please. I beg to call for Jasmine, wherever she is. Let her be produced immediately.”

“But I tell you she is not in prison,” said the Magistrate.

“Then, where is she?”

“I neither know nor care.”

“In that case,” said Maitland calmly, “I will remain where I am until your tingchais have discovered her.”

So saying, he took out a tobacco-pouch and cigarette-papers, and with great deliberation rolled a cigarette, and, having done so, lighted it with care. The Magistrate very nearly lost his presence of mind. He rose from his seat and, stamping up and down the hall, inveighed against foreigners in no measured terms. Maitland watched him calmly, leaning back in his chair. To all appearance he was deriving exquisite pleasure from the fumes of his tobacco.

“Oh, Bryce,” cried Diana, “how splendidly he manages! There is no one like him in all the world. He is sure to make the Magistrate give in.”

“I would back Mr. Maitland against any mandarin ever born,” was Bryce’s enthusiastic reply.

Meanwhile the Magistrate, having gradually exhausted his violence, returned to his chair, where he sank tired out by the side of the Consul.

“I tell you,” he said, “I don’t know where the woman is; but I’ll do this: I’ll try and find her. Come here again to-morrow at noon. I’ll produce her then, if I can.”

“I fear, your Honour, that will hardly do,” said Maitland, “for I have important business at the Port, which I

must attend to to-morrow morning; and I have also promised to telegraph to Peking the result of to-day's trial."

The Magistrate, seeing this last attempt to escape had failed, now showed signs of giving in.

"Call the head-gaoler," he said. In answer to this summons that official soon appeared before him. "Do you know anything of the maid Jasmine?" asked the Magistrate.

The man cast a hasty glance at his master, and, not being quite sure of his intention, thought a negative his safest answer. But Maitland, who had taken full note of the inquiring glance, now whispered to the Magistrate:

"That man evidently knows more than he is disposed to say, and I would suggest that a flogging might bring out the truth, which is doubtless what your Honour really wishes to arrive at."

The Magistrate gave Maitland a look of sly rage, which told its own story. He had no alternative, however, and at a word the executioners placed the gaoler in the position lately occupied by Ting. This man was by no means so patient a sufferer. He roared lustily as the blows descended on him.

"I will confess," he screamed as he writhed with pain. "One of the gaolers did bring Jasmine into the prison without my leave, and I do not know now whether she is there or not."

"Go and see immediately," said the Magistrate; and the man limped off to obey the behest.

Maitland smiled quietly as he lit another cigarette. He felt certain that the game was in his hands.

In a few minutes the gaoler returned, leading Jasmine, who entered the court swaying this way and that in the

willow-like fashion much admired by Chinese mankind. As she fell on her knees, the Magistrate inquired :

“What do you know of the circumstances connected with the murder of his Excellency the Prefect?”

Jasmine looked up in a frightened manner, but presently her eyes fixed themselves on Maitland's face. In some extraordinary way he seemed to give her unexpected strength, and she spoke glibly.

“On the evening of the Feast of Lanterns,” she began, addressing the Magistrate, “I heard that your Honour was entertaining an Englishman, and, as I had never seen a foreigner at a meal before, I hid myself in the gallery of the dining-room to see him. After dinner, when Sung brought in tea, the Englishman suddenly left the room, and I then saw Sung take the Prefect's cup and shake some powder which he had in his sleeve into it. He then put it back on the table, and when the Englishman returned he handed the cup to the Prefect.”

“This puts a very new complexion on the matter, your Honour,” said Maitland. “Will you be so kind as to recall Sung?”

This summons disturbed Sung not a little. When he appeared, he fell on his knees in trepidation.

“You have heard,” said the Magistrate, “what Jasmine has said. Is it true or false?”

“False, your Honour,” said the man uneasily.

“I do not like to suggest another flogging,” said Maitland; “but I see by Sung's manner that he is concealing something, and perhaps it might enable us to get at the true story.”

Maitland was right. Sung took fifty blows without uttering a word, but at that stage his fortitude gave way, and, feeling secure in the protection of Tseng, he cried :

"I did put the poison into the cup, but it was by mistake ; I thought it was sugar."

"This confession," said Maitland, turning to the Magistrate, "makes the case complete, and I congratulate your Honour on having brought it to such a satisfactory conclusion."

"It is true there is no rebutting evidence," replied Tseng, "and it only remains for me now to report the case to his Excellency the Viceroy of the province, who, if he is satisfied, will pass sentence on the murderer ; but, at the same time, I must warn you that it is possible he may wish to rehear the case."

"I quite understand," replied Maitland, rising from his seat as he spoke ; "and I will now beg your Honour to order the release of Kynnersley, Jasmine, and Ting, all three of whom I propose to take with me to the Port, where I will undertake, on behalf of my Government, to keep them in case the Viceroy should require their presence for re-examination."

"On that understanding," replied Tseng, "I am willing to do as you desire."

He uttered a word to a tingchai, who at once gave orders that the three prisoners should be released.

"Take me to the inn at once, Bryce," said Diana, rising from her seat ; "I cannot meet Mr. Kynnersley here in the presence of those wretches."

Meanwhile Maitland went forward to meet Kynnersley, who advanced to his side with a look of inexplicable joy and gratitude.

"Thank God you are safe and I was in time!" said Maitland, as the two men shook hands with that grip which is so peculiarly British.

"Yes, and I owe my life to you," said Kynnersley.

“That is all right, old chap,” replied Maitland; “but come now at once to the inn: Diana is there, and is longing to see you.”

“Diana! you cannot mean it!”

“I do mean it, and, what is more, she has been in court the whole time.”

“How thankful I am I did not know it!” was Kynnersley’s response. “It would have added another horror to my misery. I don’t know how she had strength to bear it.”

“Kynnersley, I believe she is quite the noblest and bravest girl in the world. But come now, she is all impatience to see you.”

So saying, the two men hurried off, and on arriving at the inn Maitland took Kynnersley to the door of Diana’s sitting-room, opened it, and closed it behind him. Through that portal the faithful chronicler of these events makes no attempt to peer.



A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT







## A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT

### CHAPTER I.

#### *THE SACRIFICE.*

**E**VERYONE who saw her said that Mary Blunt must have known trouble. She was young, tall, fair, and stately-looking, but there was an expression in her eyes and a droop about her lips which ought not to have been noticed on so young a face. She lived with her uncle, Sir John Mackworth, at Lamington Manor, in the pretty little village of Lamington, situated about sixty miles from London, in the county of Sussex. Sir John Mackworth had a large family of his own, and Mary had only come to take up her residence in his house about a year before her tragic story begins. She was much liked by all who knew her, and the shadow on her face but increased the interest which people felt about her. They wondered what her early life had been, but no one knew anything of her history beyond the fact that Sir John introduced her to his neighbours as his niece; where she had spent her early days, and what her bringing up had been, were all involved in mystery.

Sir John Mackworth kept an open house, and entertained his neighbours a good deal. In the summer of 1894 he gave a garden-party on a larger scale than was his wont, and amongst the invited guests was a certain Li Chung, a friend of one of the members of the Chinese Embassy. Li Chung was good-looking for a Chinaman, being tall and of a portly presence. In his rich Oriental dress, and with his intellectual face, he made a striking contrast to the other guests. When he wandered about the grounds, all eyes were turned in his direction; but the only one he took special notice of was the young girl Mary Blunt. He talked to her whenever he could get a chance, and, to the amazement of the gossiping little place, came down again to stay at Lamington Manor on the following Saturday. Li Chung put in an appearance at Lamington on several occasions, and soon the village rose to a perfect *furor* of excitement when it was announced that Mary Blunt was engaged to marry him. The feeling all over the place was one of absolute horror; that a young, handsome English girl should consent to unite herself to a Chinaman was perfectly abhorrent to the public mind. The ladies of the village met to consult over the matter, the men talked of it in their local club, on the golf-course Mary's name was passed from mouth to mouth, and finally it was decided that one or two of Lady Mackworth's most intimate friends should call at Lamington Manor to sound her on the subject. If possible, Mary must be delivered from such an awful fate.

These ladies were a certain Mrs. Southwark and a Mrs. Campbell. They did not at all like the mission entrusted to them, but, strong in the cause of duty, they each determined not to leave a stone unturned to rescue Mary.

“The best thing would be to see the girl herself, for,

after all, she must be her own mistress," said Mrs. Southwark.

"I am firmly persuaded that she has been coerced into such a disastrous thing," said Mrs. Campbell. "But Lady Mackworth must have her eyes opened; it will be a scandal if that nice girl goes off to China with such an odious person as Li Chung!"

"You must not forget," said Mrs. Southwark, "that Li Chung looks both stately and dignified. He is a scholar, and holds a high position in his native land."

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it. If he were the Emperor himself, he is still a Chinaman; and it is a disgrace for an English girl to become his wife."

The two ladies arrived at Lamington Manor to find Li Chung walking up and down the lawn in company with Mary Blunt. Mary was in white; there were natural roses in her cheeks, her eyes were full of sparkles, and her lips of smiles.

"Do look!" said Mrs. Southwark to Mrs. Campbell; "the girl from her appearance might be in love with that man."

"Stranger things have happened," said Mrs. Campbell; "but, in love or not, she will have a rude awakening, and we should not be doing our duty by our countrywoman if we did not expostulate."

"After all, we know the Mackworths very slightly," said Mrs. Southwark, who rather shrank from the task committed to her.

Mrs. Campbell, however, was made of sterner metal, and the two ladies were shown into the drawing-room, where, after a short delay, Lady Mackworth joined them. They talked for a few moments on indifferent matters, and then Mrs. Campbell introduced the subject of their visit.

"We have heard the report," she said, "but it cannot possibly be true."

"And why cannot it be true?" asked Lady Mackworth.

"Such a very, very extraordinary thing! I have never heard of an English girl marrying a Chinaman."

"A few English girls have married Chinamen, nevertheless," replied Lady Mackworth.

"Then, you really consent to the engagement?"

The lady was seen to shudder; it was a very quick movement, repressed almost as soon as it came.

"My consent was not asked," she said; "Mary is Sir John's niece. But I don't think we could prevent it even if we would. She has made up her mind, and she is of age, as perhaps you know."

"And you can do nothing?"

"Nothing whatever."

"But did you try?"

"I certainly expostulated with Mary, but she has a way of avoiding issues. Her mind is fully determined, so she informed me, and after that there was no more to be said."

"Well, it seems quite shocking—quite shocking!" said Mrs. Southwark.

"The wedding takes place in a month," said Lady Mackworth after a pause.

"So soon!" exclaimed Mrs. Campbell. "Is not the unfortunate girl to be allowed time to change her mind?"

"I don't think Li Chung would permit her to change it even if she had the inclination," was Lady Mackworth's answer.

"Well, it is all terrible—terrible!" cried Mrs. Campbell,

rising as she spoke. "You will forgive our speaking so plainly, I trust, dear Lady Mackworth."

"Certainly; I am obliged to you," said Lady Mackworth. "I may as well confess—although I trust you will not allow it to go any further—that your sentiments are precisely mine. I am truly sorry for Mary. She is a peculiar girl, very amiable, very sweet in every way, but with an extraordinary obstinacy in her character."

"She always seemed to us so sad-looking," said Mrs. Southwark eagerly.

"Yes, poor child!"

"And nobody in the village knows her previous history."

"Oh, she was brought up as a governess; her people are very poor. Sir John discovered her when she was ill, and brought her here, and then he told her that she was to make our house her home. We did all we could for her, and we love her much. I shall miss her when she goes. She is a kind companion to me, and an affectionate, well-principled girl."

"And you allow her to go out to China. If she were my daughter, I should forbid it."

"I cannot do so, Mary being of age and completely her own mistress."

"May I ask if Li Chung has been converted to Christianity?" asked Mrs. Campbell after a pause.

"I believe not; but Mary will not allow us to talk on the subject."

"And does she really go to China with him, or will they remain in London? He has been living in England for some time, has he not?"

"Yes; but he returns to China in September, and Mary goes with him. I am told that he is a wealthy man;

but, really, I know little about him, except that he seems devoted to Mary, and, as far as I can tell, she to him."

As there was nothing further to be gained by remaining, the ladies soon afterwards took their leave. In the avenue they came face to face with Mary Blunt. Li Chung was not with her at the moment, and Mrs. Campbell felt certain that it was her duty to accost the young girl.

"Well, Mary, I have heard the news," she said; "but I cannot congratulate you."

"And why not?" asked Mary, smiling, and showing even rows of pearly-white teeth.

"Because, my dear child, I cannot help feeling that you are doing a very shocking thing."

"Most of my neighbours agree with you," answered Mary, pausing before she spoke; "but, really, Mr. Li Chung does not deserve all the opprobrium you are bestowing upon him. He is a most agreeable companion. I wish I had half his information."

"Oh, what does that matter?" said Mrs. Southwark after a pause. "He is not an Englishman; he is a Chinaman. Think of the horror of living in his country and abiding by his customs. It will kill you, my poor child—it will kill you!"

A peculiar look lit up Mary's face. There was a smile on her lips which could only be designated as lofty; her eyes looked past the two ladies as if she saw something which was not perceptible to them. Then she held out her hand.

"I am very much obliged to you for taking an interest in me," she said.

"And you won't be persuaded—you will not break it off?"

"I will not break it off."

Then they left her, shaking their heads, but all the same feeling puzzled.

"I don't believe she loves him," said Mrs. Campbell.

"Nor do I," said Mrs. Southwark.

"Mark my words," said the other lady, "there is a reason for this which we know nothing about."

And there was a simple enough reason, only Mary Blunt would not tell anyone except the one who was to be benefited. She had a good-for-nothing brother, who was at once the terror and joy of her life. She loved him so blindly that she could not even see his faults. He was unscrupulous, without honour or principle of any sort. Just at the time when Li Chung appeared on the scene Edward Blunt had got into a serious scrape in the City. He was in financial difficulties, and had embezzled money to a large amount. Li Chung, who had a way of worming the secrets out of those whom he wished to influence, had discovered Mary's state of despair, and had learned the truth. He promised to put Edward Blunt on his legs, to pay off his debts—in short, to save him from penal servitude—on condition that Mary became his wife.

Mary went up to town, had an interview with Edward, and decided to make the sacrifice. She would marry Li Chung, and keep her brother's secret; hence her engagement. But in the first flush of excitement she scarcely guessed that she was suffering. There was an Englishman whom she knew, and who had once or twice said things to her which had caused her heart to beat and a joyous, tumultuous feeling of bliss to visit her; but he was far away at the time, and he had never said anything definite. She thought that she might be happy with Li Chung, and

at the worst Edward would be saved. It was the thought of Edward which had caused that expression to flit across her face which had puzzled the good ladies of Lamington village.

Preparations for the wedding went quickly forward. There was no hitch of any sort, and on a certain day in the middle of August the villagers at Lamington were able to witness a marriage of strange races.

Mary was dressed in the conventional white robes of a young English bride. Li Chung wore the embroidered dress and the rich insignia of his lofty rank in his native land. For a Chinaman he was remarkably good-looking; his features were long and aquiline, his sallow face was thin. He had a scholarly expression of face, full of marked intelligence, and a dignified manner. One or two girls in the church said, as they looked at him, that they were scarcely surprised at Mary. She was certainly doing a daring thing, and they admired her courage; but they thought that she had just a chance of happiness, and at the worst it was exciting—most exciting. The bride had colour in her cheeks and a light in her eyes.

Edward Blunt was present at the wedding, and more than one person remarked the peculiar glance which his sister gave to him. Like other good-for-nothings, he had not the least idea of the extent of her sacrifice. On the contrary, he thought her lucky. In the future she would be rich; she would have more money than she knew what to do with.

“Remember me now and then, Mary, when you are rolling in wealth,” he whispered to her at parting.

She could not help shuddering a little inwardly as he uttered the words. Was it for him she was throwing away her life? But then she also glanced at Li Chung, and



thought that one so dignified, so scholarly, so gentle, could not make her unhappy. So she kissed her uncle and aunt, bade her cousins adieu, saw the last of the eager, curious villagers, and that afternoon left England for Paris in Li Chung's company. She was his, wife for better, for worse.





## CHAPTER II.

### *THE AWAKENING.*

**L**I took his bride to Paris. He had plenty of money, and he did his utmost to give her a pleasant time. Mary had never seen Paris before, and she contrived to enjoy herself, notwithstanding her queer position. The pair put up at the Grand Hotel, and the luxuries and strangeness of the way of living were quite enough to turn Mary's attention from herself. She could not fail to notice, however, that whenever she entered a room or a place of public amusement she and her companion excited a good deal of attention. At first she rather shuddered when she encountered the curious glances of so many strangers, but by-and-by she got accustomed to them, and soon they ceased to trouble her. After a week of this sort of thing Li told his wife that it was time for them to start on their journey to China. They were seated at the moment in the courtyard of the hotel. The fountain was playing softly, a band was making sweet music, and crowds of people of all nationalities were standing or sitting about.

Nothing would induce Li to wear anything but the robes of his country, and perhaps he was right in this, as no other style of dress could suit him so well. For a

Chinaman he was both dignified and handsome, and the contrast he made to the extremely fair girl by his side but enhanced her beauty.

"It is a relief to be on the way home," he said now, with a sigh. "We will take the first train to Marseilles to-morrow morning."

"You are glad? You love your home?" asked Mary.

"What Chinaman does not?" was the answer. "I have been absent now for two years. I go back with my bride. Mary, you don't regret that you have married me?"

"No, I don't regret it," she replied.

She smothered an inward sigh, and tried to talk cheerfully. After a time Li left her to go up to his bedroom, and Mary sat on in the courtyard. She was just preparing to follow her husband upstairs, when a voice, strange, and yet too familiar, sounded in her ears. She started, coloured violently, and glanced round.

"Forgive me; I have come to learn the truth from your own lips."

"Oh, I wish you had not come," said Mary, starting to her feet.

Her lips trembled, her voice shook.

"I wished to find out the truth from yourself," said Arthur Steward.

He was a tall young Englishman, with a fair face and a frank and pleasant expression. But now his own lips were white and his voice shook.

"Sit down for a moment. I won't keep you long. Just tell me that you are happy."

"Yes, yes, of course I am. I wish you would go. I——"

"You don't want your husband to see me?"

"It would be better not; it would do no good. Oh go, Arthur, and try—try to forget me!"

"You had no right to do what you did."

"I cannot speak of it now; it is done. Did you really come here on purpose?"

"Yes, I followed you; your brother gave me your address. I know why you did it, and yet, Mary, I cannot forgive you."

"You must not speak of it now."

"Tell me at least that you are happy."

"Yes," said Mary, as she lowered her eyes.

Just then Li re-entered the courtyard. He frowned when he saw Mary talking to a strange Englishman. This was by no means etiquette according to his ideas. Arthur held out his hand, grasped Mary's, and the next moment had left the hotel. Li came up hurriedly.

"Who was that person you were talking to?" he asked.

"Arthur Steward; he is an old friend of mine."

"Why did he come? Why did you not introduce him to me? Why did he leave in such a hurry?"

"I cannot tell you; he was in Paris, and came here."

"But how did he get your address?"

"My brother gave it to him."

"Your brother? Mary," said her husband, looking fixedly at her, "you look troubled; are you concealing anything from me?"

"No, Chung; it startled me to see an old friend, that is all."

She made an effort to overcome her confusion, and roused herself to talk to her husband as she had never talked before. For the remainder of that evening she was absolutely brilliant, and Li, who was very much in love

with her, tried to dispel any suspicions which he had hastily formed, and for the present to say nothing more. By nature he was a kindly man, and was proud of his beautiful young English wife. He was certainly as fond of Mary as it was possible for one of his nation to be fond of an Englishwoman. His experiences in Europe had taught him many lessons, but so far the impressions gained had only penetrated skin-deep. He had learned to conform to Western habits, but at bottom he was as thorough a Chinaman as ever. The breezes of civilization had stirred the surface of the pool, but its lower depths remained unmoved.

Since their marriage Mary had on several occasions caught glimpses of this fact. She perceived already that there were prejudices and contrarities in his nature which would require great patience and tact on her part, but she was willing to do her best, and was not unhopeful as regarded the result. But on this her last night in Paris, as she laid her head on her pillow, wild emotion, and almost despair, for the first time took possession of her. Why had Arthur Steward come too late? It was impossible for her to mistake the look in his eyes. Why had she sacrificed herself? Perhaps Arthur could have saved her brother, and she—she would then have been one of the happiest women in the world. She dared not probe her own feelings to their depths; she only knew that she must think of Arthur no more. If Li discovered those feelings which she could not but fear that she possessed, good-bye indeed to all peace and happiness. She was certain that he could be intensely jealous; she perceived already that rooted down deep in his nature there was a contempt for her sex and an overweening pride in his country's greatness.

The journey to Marseilles, notwithstanding all poor Mary's efforts, was a dismal one. Li did not care to listen to her chatter, and she soon lapsed into gloomy silence. Now and then his eye caught hers, and he seemed to Mary to be reading her through and through. He was a very clever man, and already she was beginning to fear him. She hoped, however, that matters would revive when they embarked on board the *Peru*. But instead of this being the case, a most unlooked-for discomfort awaited her. Stay-at-home Europeans always take an amused curiosity in Easterns, and the more fantastic their dress and customs, the greater the interest they absorb; but to people who have lived in the East, who have had experience of the pig-tailed or turbaned Orientals in their cities and villages, who understand the motives which guide their actions, and who are thus able to rate them at their real value, curiosity is apt to give way to contempt, and interest to disgust. It so happened that the *Peru* on this particular voyage was carrying out a more than usually large number of civilians and military officers and their families who were returning to India and China. By these travellers Li's presence would under any circumstances have been considered disagreeable, but that the Chinaman should bring with him an English wife was looked upon as most objectionable. Poor Mary was made equally to recognise the force of this feeling towards her husband, and by implication towards herself. She soon found that the majority of the passengers avoided her. She had only to seat herself upon a bench, and instantly the other occupants, more especially if they were ladies, whose pale and yellow faces bore testimony to a residence in the East, deserted it. This treatment cut the English girl to the quick. Her loneliness was oppressive, her

thoughts became of the saddest ; she more and more doubted the wisdom of the step she had taken, and only the thought of her brother, and the knowledge that she had saved him from prison and disgrace, supported her. She dared not think of Arthur Steward ; the passionate pleading in his eyes was more than she could bear to remember, and yet, try as she would, the thought of his face as she last saw it kept returning to her again and again. There was no one on board to whom she could unburden herself. It would never do to tell Li about the strange treatment of her fellow-passengers. There was nothing for it but to long for the time when the voyage would be over, and when her tormentors should have reached their different destinations at Calcutta, Madras, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

When at last the ship anchored at Shanghai, Mary felt a wonderful sense of relief. The place was all fresh and new to her ; she could not help being delighted with the splendid houses which lined the Bund, and the look of European comfort which surrounded the place.

“How beautiful everything looks, Chung !” she cried. “If the whole of China is like this, we shall live in palaces all our lives.”

“But the whole of China is not like this,” replied Li, who showed signs of some irritability at Mary’s remark. “These are the houses which your countrymen have built, and they are not nearly so convenient as our houses.”

Mary perceived his annoyance, and turned the conversation by asking where they were to stay on shore.

“At my uncle’s,” replied Li. “He has lived here for a great many years, and always expects me to stay with him when I pass through Shanghai.”

“Then, my first introduction to Chinese life is about to begin,” said Mary.

Li stared at her, but made no reply. In due course the pair were borne in two jinrikshas to the house of the elder Li. It was in the native city, and Mary's senses were considerably disturbed by the sights and odours which forced themselves upon her attention. The outward appearance of the house was also disappointing. A blank wall overshadowed by roofs surrounded it, and the only visible signs of life were two or three hangers-on in very *dégagé* attire, who stood staring on the doorstep. At Li's command one of these, hastily putting on his outer robe, which served the useful purpose of covering a multitude of imperfections, hastened in to announce the new arrival to his master.

As their host came forward to meet them, Mary instinctively advanced, but, to her surprise, her husband pushed past her and bowed low before his uncle, with his hands clasped in front of him. The two men exchanged compliments and expressed pleasure at meeting, without paying the slightest attention to the English girl who stood by.

Having exhausted his vocabulary of pretty sayings, Li turned to Mary, and said to his uncle in Chinese :

“This is my insignificant dull thorn (wife). Deign to cast a glance upon her.”

When thus introduced, his uncle could not refrain from bowing towards Mary ; but his inclinations were quite of a different kind from those with which he had greeted his nephew.

“What made you marry a foreigner ?” said the uncle in Chinese. “I have just been opening negotiations with a young lady near here on your behalf, and it would have been an excellent match for you in every respect.”



“I was thrown into her society a good deal in England, and fell in love with her,” said Li.

“Ah! that comes of going to unorthodox countries, where women are ignorant of the laws of Confucius, and appear in public instead of staying at home.”

While this, to Mary, inexplicable conversation had been going on, she remained perfectly silent, indignation overcoming her sense of discomfort.

“Cannot you take me to my room?” she said suddenly to Li.

“Yes,” he answered; “but I must first of all send you to be introduced to my aunt and lady cousins.”

“Won’t you come with me?” she asked, aghast at the idea of entering the presence of a number of strange Chinese ladies by herself.

“It would be contrary to our customs,” was the cold reply; “but they will entertain you very well, and we shall meet to-night.”

So saying, Li summoned a maid, and told her to convey Mary to the ladies’ apartments. It was with difficulty the poor girl could refrain from bitter tears. If this first introduction to her husband’s relatives was so bad, what might she expect when she knew them better?

She followed the Chinese girl, and as she did so turned round to wave an adieu to Li; but that gentleman had already turned away, and was following in the wake of his uncle, on the way to the latter’s study.

The ordeal of introduction was fully as trying to Mary as she had expected. Her new aunt was elderly, highly painted, and obviously possessed only her countrymen’s idea of cleanliness. She received Li’s English wife with sundry bows, and when that young lady held out her hand did not know what to do with it. She repeated some

words of welcome in a high falsetto voice, but as Mary was able neither to understand her nor to make suitable replies, she quickly assumed an air of contempt towards her. The younger ladies now appeared, and, without taking more notice of Mary than if she had been a lay figure, amused themselves by feeling her dress and gloves and fingering her jewellery.

"Oh, I have had such a dreadful time!" said poor Mary to Li as he entered her room that night. "I longed for you to come and help me out of my difficulties."

She tried to speak as cheerfully as she could, and not to make too much of her discomfort.

"It is contrary to custom for a man to enter the ladies' apartments," replied her husband in a grave voice; "but I hope," he added, as he saw how disturbed she had been, "that they were kind and cordial to you."

"I dare say they meant to be kind," said Mary; "but I am afraid that they despise me for not being able to speak Chinese."

"You must learn it as quickly as possible," said Li. "I have no doubt that you will soon speak it as well as I do. And now cheer up; you will soon get accustomed to us and our ways."

His tone became a little kinder, for Mary's pale face and the weary expression touched him in spite of himself.

The next morning passed a little better, for Mrs. Li had brought several letters of introduction with her, and she took the opportunity to pay some visits in the "foreign settlement," in order to deliver them. In this way she escaped the society of the Li family until evening, when she was obliged again to face the ladies of the household.

Meanwhile Li had been busy engaging a house-boat to

take him in the direction of Haifêng, for within the walls of that city stood the family mansion of the Lis. The next morning the pair started off, and during the journey Li instructed his wife in several points of native etiquette.

"And now," he continued, "there is one other important matter on which I wish to speak to you. You have been in the habit of calling me by my personal name Chung, after the English custom, but that is not according to Chinese usage. A Chinese wife calls her husband 'Ye' or 'Changfu,' and people will think it strange if you do not do as they do."

"But what do 'Ye' and 'Changfu' mean?"

"'Ye' means 'Sir,'" was the reply, "and 'Changfu' 'My respected husband.'"

"In England no wife would dream of speaking in that manner to her husband," said Mary in some indignation.

"No; but you are in China now, and that makes all the difference. Don't you remember telling me when you were in your English home that it would be your pleasure to fall in with our ways?"

Full well poor Mary did remember saying so in the height of her enthusiasm, and at the same moment there came back to her recollection the warning words of Mrs. Campbell and other ladies of her uncle's parish, who had foretold with perhaps unnecessary bluntness the disillusionment which she was already experiencing.

"And so it will still be my pleasure," she said, after a moment. "In all matters which do not entail a loss of self-respect, I will endeavour to do as you wish; but it seems to me that you Chinamen despise women because they are women, and since we have been in China you have not been quite the same to me that you were in England."

"I do not know what you have to complain of," said Li crossly.

"I do not complain; only when one is in a foreign country, thousands of miles away from one's home, it makes one long for greater sympathy and love, and, instead, your country's habits and customs seem to come between us. I am more and more cut off from you, and it is this that makes me feel so lonely at times."

The grief which had been gnawing at the poor girl's heart now burst out in tears, and Li was distressed to see his wife cover her face with her handkerchief and weep bitterly. He was sorry for her, but he was also annoyed. He felt that if these were her feelings in the green tree of her comparatively roseate experiences, they would be likely to be very bitter in the dry tree of everyday life, and he also remembered warning voices which had advised him to hesitate before he took an English wife into a Chinese house. A friend of his in London had been strong on the point, and several other friends had pointed out to him the inconvenience of such an arrangement.

"You must not cry," he said, trying to put as much sympathy into his voice as was possible. "I will be with you as often as I can, and if you will only make friends with my mother I think you will be happy."

"God knows I will do my best," said poor Mary. "But tell me now what your mother is like."

She wiped away her tears as she spoke, and endeavoured to put on a cheerful air.

Li hesitated. He was aware that his mother, who was Chinese to the backbone, entirely disapproved of his marriage, and he was fully conscious that, when displeased, her temper was violent and bitter.

"My mother," he said slowly, "has had no experience

of any country but her own, so you must expect to find her prejudiced ; but I have no doubt you will be able to overcome that, and then everything will go well."

He added these words with an air of pretended conviction.

"Now I must go and have a pipe," he said, rising slowly. "Do not cry any more, and after dinner we will sit out on the bows and talk about England."

But this promise was never fulfilled, for disappointment brought on a violent headache, and Mary was obliged to lie down, leaving Li in solitary grandeur to meditate on the mistake he had made.

The next morning she was better, and tried to show a brave front to the difficulties which appeared to be closing round her. She persuaded Li to let her land and walk along the bank of the river to relieve the monotony of being cooped up in the boat, but she failed utterly to induce him to bear her company. The idea, even in a country district, of being seen walking with his wife was so repugnant to Li's ideas of propriety that he refused to listen to her suggestion for a moment. The exercise, however, did her good, and as she repeated the experiment each day, her spirits rose again, and when she arrived at the walls of Haifêng she was almost inclined to look once more hopefully on her future in China.





### CHAPTER III.

#### *A CHINESE MOTHER-IN-LAW.*

**I**T was with renewed cheerfulness that Mary entered the portals of the Li household. Notice of the arrival of the bride and bridegroom had been sent on in advance, and Mrs. Li was ready to receive them. She was seated in the reception hall surrounded by her household, and had made what preparations she thought right to welcome her son and his companion. The moment was a trying one, more especially for Li, who knew that his mother would expect his bride to kneel with him before her in token of respect, while he was at the same time quite certain that Mary would not perform any such obeisance. True to native usage, Li marched into the hall in front of his wife, and, advancing with many bows, prostrated himself at the feet of his mother. Mary followed close behind him, but instead of imitating his genuflexions she held out her hand to the old lady, who, like her sister-in-law, was quite at a loss to understand this strange form of salutation.

“Kwei hsia, kwei hsia (Kneel down, kneel down),” said an attendant maiden.

“Pu ancho womênti kwei chü (It is not according to our

custom),” answered Mary, who was quite determined not to yield to any derogatory forms.

Mrs. Li looked at her in blank astonishment. She was the very first foreigner she had ever seen, and her refusal to fall on her knees struck the old lady with indignant surprise.

Li had not yet risen to his feet, but he was now invited by his mother to take a chair on her right hand. As no such invitation was addressed to Mary, to the consternation of her hostess and companions, she calmly took possession of a seat opposite her husband. Li looked annoyed, but said nothing, and as the conversation was carried on between Li and his mother, poor Mary, who was the cynosure of all eyes, felt her cheeks burn and her heart grow hot and heavy within her. The arrival of tea brought some relief, but afforded only temporary mitigation of her discomfort, for at the conclusion of the repast she was led off to the ladies’ apartments, while Li sauntered into the garden, where, in the company of his brother and in the enjoyment of many pipes of tobacco, he forgot his annoyance at what he considered to be the wilfulness of his wife.

“So I hear,” said the brother, “that you have brought home an English wife?”

“Yes; in that country men and women mix together at feasts and entertainments, and I so often met my wife, that from a friendship it became a strong liking, and eventually I married her.”

“Well, I suppose this alliance will not prevent your marrying one of your own countrywomen?”

“I have no wish to do so now, at all events,” replied Li. “My principal anxiety is to know what to do with my present wife. I must, as you are aware, be looking out

for some employment, and I cannot take Mali" (he had not been able to overcome the national way of pronouncing initial and medial *r*'s like *l*'s) "with me. But I am not sure that my mother would like me to leave her here."

"Oh yes, she would," said the brother; "but you know what mother's temper is, and unless your wife—Mali, as you call her—is more yielding than she was in the hall this afternoon, I fear there will be friction."

"I propose having a good talk with Mali to-night, and I think I shall induce her to be more complaisant."

In pursuance of this laudable object, Li betook himself to Mary's room rather earlier than usual. He found her in anything but a receptive frame of mind. She told him that the ladies had been grossly rude to her, and his mother in especial was stern and ungracious. Li quickly perceived that his task would be a difficult one. He begged Mary to remember that, being now in China, she was bound to try and accommodate herself to her surroundings.

"Remember, when I was in England," he added, "I took care to adopt many of your English ways, and always sought as far as possible to conform to your customs."

"Yes, that is quite true," replied Mary; "but please remember also that you were everywhere treated as an honoured guest, and everything was made smooth for you; whereas I—and I am sorry to say it to you—have met with the reverse of courtesy and consideration."

"It is better that I should speak quite plainly to you, Mali. According to our custom, a wife should obey her husband's parents in all things, should consult their wishes, and be at their beck and call."

Mary bit her lip. The memory of the indignity she



had suffered was too vivid to enable her to receive these words of admonition in a genial manner. Her temper was up, and though usually of an equable temperament, she was, it must be confessed, somewhat implacable when deeply stirred.

"It is well that I also should speak plainly to you," she replied. "I am willing to pay all the respect which a wife should to your mother, but there should be some return on her part. You cannot expect me to submit to such conduct as that to which I have been subjected this evening. Let her behave courteously to me, and she will find me an obedient daughter-in-law. How long shall we have to stay here?"

"That is a point on which I also wish to talk to you. You know that on leaving England I resigned my office, and I must now look about for some fresh employment. The Viceroy of Sŭch'uan was a great friend of my father's, and I propose going to him to ask him for some post in his capital. Meanwhile I must leave you here."

"Oh, not here!" said Mary.

"Yes, it must be so; I cannot take you with me. But I will be back as quickly as my mules will carry me, and will take you to whatever place I may be sent to. So now do make up your mind to make the best of things, and I will see my mother and talk to her about you."

Li was as good as his word, but he found his mother very much exasperated against Mary.

"Why did you marry an English wife?" she said. "Are not Chinese ladies good enough for you, that you should bring this foreign devil to me, with her uncivilized manners? But if she is to stay here, I will teach her to behave becomingly to me. Why, a maid out of the kitchen would have known that when introduced to her

mother-in-law she ought not to have sat down without being specially invited to do so. And last evening, instead of handing things to me at dinner, she expected to be waited on; and then, with the excuse that she was tired, she went off to bed without waiting to be told that she might go."

"But please remember, mother, that at present she knows nothing of our manners and customs, and she behaves exactly as she would in the house of an English mother-in-law. She is very anxious to conform to our usages, and all I would ask is that you would be kind and considerate towards her. I am obliged to start for Chengtu to-morrow, and I would ask your permission to leave Mali here until my return."

"She is welcome to stay here on one condition, and that is, that she obeys me implicitly. You have made a great mistake in marrying a foreigner and bringing her to the Middle Kingdom, and I am not going to have my household upset by her, and so I tell you plainly."

This was by no means hopeful, and Li went back to his wife's room in anything but a happy frame of mind. He was vexed with his mother, but in his heart of hearts he secretly agreed with her. He had until lately only seen the gracious and kindly side of Mary's character, and he had no idea that she could put her foot down so positively as she had done in these matters of etiquette. Her opposition bored him. He was eminently self-indulgent by nature, and hated scenes of all kinds. He saw plainly that Mary's firmness would develop into scenes, and he could not help congratulating himself that for a time at least he was to be beyond the echoes of the domestic strife which he saw impending.

With the true instinct of a woman, Mary perceived

something of this, and felt that she was being deserted just at a time when she required support. She was too proud, however, to let Li see what she felt, and took leave of him the next morning with affection, it is true, but also with an absence of warmth which had never before been apparent in her manner.

Mrs. Li was one of those women who, having once determined on a course of action, carry it out at whatever cost. No sooner was Li's back turned, though, to do her credit, his presence would have made no difference, than she determined to begin the training of his English wife in the way in which she thought she should go. She accordingly sent her a very peremptory message, desiring her to come to her presence at once. Mary obeyed it without a moment's hesitation, and went straight to the old lady's suite of rooms.

By constant practice she had made considerable progress in the language, and could understand, and also employ, short and simple sentences. The moment Mrs. Li saw her she called out in a loud, harsh voice :

“Come here ; I want to speak to you.”

Mary advanced and stood before her.

“I notice,” continued her mother-in-law, “that you do not understand our customs, but if you are to live here, you must acquaint yourself with them. I have allowed you to remain during my son's absence on the distinct condition that you obey me in everything.”

“I will certainly obey you in everything I can,” replied Mary ; “but there are some things which as an English-woman I cannot do, such, for example, as kneeling before you, or acting the part of a servant.”

A forbidding scowl came over Mrs. Li's face at these words, and with a voice of anger she replied :

“I do not know what you mean by ‘as an Englishwoman.’ You outer barbarians give yourselves airs, as though you were the equals of the subjects of the Son of Heaven. Be pleased to remember that you are my daughter-in-law, and as such it is your duty to do as you are told. Now go and fetch me a cup of tea.”

“I will tell Wild Rose to fetch you a cup,” replied Mary in a calm voice. Her temper was rapidly giving way, but she was determined to control it if possible.

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said the old lady, who was now white with anger. “You will fetch it from the kitchen yourself. Go at once.”

Mary merely bowed and left the room. Having summoned Wild Rose, who had been appointed her waiting-maid-in-chief, she told that young woman to take a cup of tea to Mrs. Li.

“Did she tell you to take it to her?” asked the maid, with a puzzled look on her face.

“Yes; but I am not accustomed to such orders, and I wish you to take her the tea.”

“I will do anything you tell me,” said Wild Rose, who had taken a great fancy to Mary; “but,” she added, “I wish you would do it yourself. It is the custom here for a bride to obey her mother-in-law, and Mrs. Li will be angry—very angry indeed. It is not that I do not wish to serve you, but I cannot bear that you should get into a scrape.”

Mary sat down on the nearest chair.

“I cannot do it,” she said, with passion in her voice; “it is impossible! I have told her what to expect, and I will stick to it.”

Wild Rose went away without another word. She was right, however, in her prophecy. The Li household had

been tossed by many a storm of anger, but seldom had the tempest raged so furiously as it did that morning. The old lady knocked the tea out of Wild Rose's hand, and ordered her to send Mary to her at once.

"You must go," said the girl, almost crying as she spoke. "Oh, I knew it would happen! I wish I could have persuaded you to see matters in a different light."

"I am not afraid," said Mary, but her cheek was pale and her eyes blazed as she walked into her mother-in-law's presence.

"How dare you disobey my direct order!" began Mrs. Li, as Mary entered the room. "I will have you know that you are my slave. I have never been accustomed to have my words flouted, and I will not permit it now. Go to your room until I send for you again."

Only too glad to escape, poor Mary hurried to her own apartments, where she found Wild Rose awaiting her. The pretty little Chinese maiden was in great distress on Mary's behalf.

"Oh, I knew what would happen!" she cried, wringing her hands. "The old lady is perfectly terrible. She persecuted your brother-in-law's wife so terribly that the poor thing drowned herself in the well in the yard."

"And does the girl's husband remain in the house after such cruel and wicked conduct?" asked Mary.

"Oh yes. You see, Chinese husbands seldom have much affection for their wives, and young Mr. Li was rather glad than otherwise to be relieved of his bride. They had not been married long, and she was a timid little thing, not the least like you. She could not bear up under Mrs. Li's treatment."

"Well, I shan't drown myself in the well; but I must take some precautions to resist Mrs. Li's attacks," said

Mary. "Do you happen to know if there are any European missionaries in the town?"

"Yes; there is a married missionary. I think he is English; he lives somewhere outside the west gate. I could find out exactly where his house is, if you like."

"I should like you to do so," answered Mary. "Inquire also his name. I may have to write to him."

This first day of poor Mary's new life was but a specimen of many more which were to follow on its heels. As time went on, things did not improve. Mrs. Li invariably treated Mary whenever they met with the greatest harshness. She summoned her into her presence at all hours of the day, and once or twice even at night, and found fault with everything she did and everything she left undone.

Mary had now learned to meet her mother-in-law's conduct with composure. She had made up her mind how she would act, and she acted accordingly; but as days and weeks went by the strain began to tell upon her health. She had never liked the native food, and Mrs. Li so provided that the cook always sent her distasteful meals, which were very often as short in quantity as in quality. Wild Rose was poor Mary's great support. She tended her carefully, nursed her when she was ill with the greatest solicitude, and smuggled forbidden food into her room to tempt her appetite when it revolted against the greasy saucers full of messy compounds which were allotted to her.

Mary cheered up under this kindness, and began to teach her attentive little maid to cook sundry English dishes, and persuaded her to share the meals so provided, and to accept a knife and fork instead of chopsticks.

With her affection for Mary came a desire on the girl's part to know something of England and English men and

women. Many were the long talks that the two had, one listening with all her might, and the other discoursing of her English home, her relatives and friends. Once or twice in the warmth of her narratives poor Mary broke down and, covering her face with her hands, burst into bitter tears. On such occasions Wild Rose would seize her hand, cover it with kisses, and employ every artifice to cheer up her young mistress. She was generally successful, and for a time, at least, the affection and devotion of the little girl made Mary forget the cruel and savage temper of Mrs. Li.

But, alas! these lulls were short, and the persecution was perpetual. There came a morning when the English girl felt so weak and ill that she was obliged to disregard the usual summons to present herself before her mother-in-law. The message that she was to do so was brought, as usual, by an elderly, ill-favoured woman, who constantly attended on the old lady, and who from long contact with that termagant had become as frightful and ill-tempered as her mistress.

"Tell my lady," said Mary, "that I cannot go to her this morning. I am very sorry, but I am really extremely unwell. Pray ask her to excuse my attendance."

"I will tell her what you *say*," replied the woman, as she banged the door after her.

Mary's head ached, her pulses throbbed quickly, she had every symptom of fever coming on. Before she could settle down again on her couch, the old hag returned.

"My lady says that you must go to her at once," she cried, "or she will have you dragged to her room. She does not believe in your illness; you are only pretending."

Seeing that there was nothing to be done but to go, Mary wearily rose, put on her clothes, and made her way to Mrs. Li's room.

“How dared you send me such a lying message just now!” shrieked out the old woman. “I knew that you were malingering. And now I will tell you plainly that if ever I receive such a message from you again I will have you beaten. There is nothing like the bamboo for you foreign devils!”

“If I should be ill again, I shall send you word again; and as to beating me, you know you dare not. I defy you!” said Mary, losing all patience.

“You defy me, do you!” screamed the old harridan; and before the English girl knew what her opponent was about, she had raised her stick and dealt her a vigorous stroke across her shoulders.







## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE WAY OUT.*

**S**HOCKED and horrified at the indignity which had been perpetrated upon her, poor Mary ran out of Mrs. Li's room and returned to her own apartments. For a time she could scarcely speak, and found it difficult to think coherently. Her position was truly dreadful—nay, more, it was intolerable. She felt quite certain, when she calmed down a little, that she would find it impossible to submit to it any longer. She saw clearly, as the evening advanced, that there was only one course for her to pursue, and that was to leave the house at once. For some time now she had felt, for better or for worse, she must act on her own responsibility. She had repeatedly written to Li long letters full of kindly feeling, for, although she could not pretend to love him, her strongest desire was to do her duty by him in every way. To these he replied at considerable intervals, sending short notes which told the unhappy wife only too plainly that he had ceased to love her. She felt, therefore, now under no obligation to consult him, and determined in the present emergency to act for herself. Had she ventured to write to Li before doing what she determined to do, six weeks must have elapsed

before she could receive an answer, and another six weeks in the Li household was more than Mary could endure.

She lay down for a time, and when the throbbing in her head grew less, and the pain in her shoulder more bearable, she summoned Wild Rose.

"Wild Rose," she said, "I want you to pack all my things at once, and then you are to engage coolies to carry my luggage to the house of Mr. Pryce, the English missionary."

Wild Rose started, the colour flushed into her face, leaving it the next moment pale; she looked in great consternation at Mary.

"But you do not even know Mr. Pryce," she said. "It is true that I got you some particulars about him, but to go there with all your boxes and all your things—— Do you intend to leave your husband's house, madam?"

"Yes, I do," replied Mary. "It is no fit place for me, and I have made up my mind not to spend another night under this roof."

"But what has happened?" asked Wild Rose. She looked with intense anxiety into Mary's face as she spoke. "Has Mrs. Li been more than usually cruel?" she added.

"She has insulted me in a way which I shall never forgive," said Mary. "I shall leave this house at once. Do what I tell you, Wild Rose: pack my boxes, and then engage coolies to carry the luggage away."

"If you are going, may I go with you?" pleaded Wild Rose. "I shall be treated very cruelly by Mrs. Li if I stay, for she already perceives that I favour you in every particular, and she was told yesterday by Snap-dragon that I bring you nice dishes to eat. I should not dare to stay here after you have gone; and, besides, I love you so much. There is nothing I should like better

than to wait on you and attend to you wherever you may be, even if it were in your own country," she added with some hesitation.

"Well, I intend to go to-night to Mr. Pryce's house," said Mary, "outside the West Gate, and when I am there I will ask him if he will allow you to stay with me for a little, until I can hear from the English Consul at Shanghai. I do not know, Wild Rose, whether they will have a room for you, and also whether they would be willing to receive you; but if they can take you in, I shall be very glad to have you with me."

"That is all right, then," answered Wild Rose; "I am quite certain they can take me in; they know that a Chinese girl can sleep anywhere. I do not need comfort; I only want to be with you."

The affectionate girl then began to do what Mary had asked her, and soon the boxes were packed and coolies and two sedan-chairs were hired by Wild Rose.

Mary and her attendant left the building without any adieus, or without even leaving a note to say where they were going.

Mr. and Mrs. Pryce lived in a rather ugly house just outside the native city. They were a hard-working pair, doing what little they could in the furtherance of the Christian religion. They had a school for native children, and were busy from morning till night. Such an extraordinary event as an English girl becoming the wife of a Chinaman, and going to live with him and his mother in the native city, had naturally reached their ears; they were curious about Mary, and deeply sorry for her, although they had never yet met her. Some of the difficulties with which she had to contend had already been told to them. When she arrived therefore on the evening of that eventful day, they

were naturally surprised, but at the same time not at all dismayed. Distance from home throws people of the same nationality more closely together than those who always live in the old country have any notion of, and the Pryces welcomed Mary with effusion, and took in Wild Rose as a matter of course.

The relief of being once more with her own country-people was greater than the poor girl could express. She slept peacefully that night for the first time for long weeks, and, forgetting her recent sorrows, dreamt of the old home, her brother, whom she still passionately loved, and also of Arthur Steward. She awoke from a vivid dream, in which both Arthur and her brother were with her, and in which all her late troubles occupied no place, to find Wild Rose standing by her bedside.

"Where am I?" said Mary, looking with surprise at the Chinese girl.

"You are here, madam," said Wild Rose. "Mrs. Pryce is more than kind. See, here is a real English breakfast, such as you have described to me—tea and toast and an egg. Do sit up and take it, you look so white and weary."

Mary uttered a profound sigh. To awake from her happy dreams to the dreadful reality of her present position almost overpowered her for a moment; then she resolved to make the best of things.

"Thank God, I have at least left my mother-in-law's house," she inwardly murmured. She raised herself on her elbow, smiled at Wild Rose, and ate with appetite the breakfast which the affectionate girl had provided.

Later during that day Mary wrote a long letter to her husband, explaining the step she had taken. This letter reached Li at an inconvenient moment. His visit to

Ch'êngtu had, from a professional point of view, been a success. The Viceroy had appointed him his private secretary, and from that coign of vantage he had been able to enjoy himself to the full.

By nature self-indulgent, he soon began to feel the relief of being without the ties and inconveniences imposed upon him by Mary's presence. It so happened that, soon after his arrival at Ch'êngtu, there had been a great change of officials. The Taotai, Prefect, and District Magistrate had all left for other posts, and, as is usual on such occasions, there had been much festivity, in order to speed the parting and welcome the coming guests.

To all these entertainments Li had been invited, and in the society of friends, scholars, and Chinese Geishas he had spent a most enjoyable time. There was one Geisha, Golden Lily by name, who had repeatedly sung for his delectation, and it was in the midst of a dinner given in honour of this young lady that poor Mary's letter was brought to him. Without opening the envelope, he put the epistle up his sleeve, for Golden Lily was just going to begin one of her choicest songs on her gay guitar. While he listened to the melody which flowed from her pretty lips, he tried to forget his English wife, to whose complaints he had grown callous, and about whose fate he had become almost indifferent.

It was not, therefore, until the next morning that he became aware of the fracas that had occurred at Haifeng. The affair vexed him. He had a Chinaman's respect for his mother, and the regard he had once felt for Mary had degenerated under the influence of his surroundings to almost dislike. He blamed her in his mind for not submitting to his mother's crutch, and congratulated himself that he was six hundred miles away from the angry

tongue of his mother and the reproachful eyes of his wife.

In his vexation he sat down and wrote a testy note, which was so genuine that it made quite plain his feelings towards his lawful spouse. The matter had disturbed him, however, and Golden Lily found him a dull companion in the evening when he again entertained her at his favourite restaurant.

The other letter which Mary despatched the same night met with a more sympathetic reception.

In the course of promotion, Richard Maitland had been removed to Shanghai, and to him Mary now wrote, describing what had happened, and saying that, whether he advised it or otherwise, she intended to go at once to his port.

Maitland was one of those to whom Mary had brought letters of introduction, and having seen her at Shanghai, he had taken that kind of interest in her that a straightforward, honest man takes in a brave and genuine woman. Without loss of a moment, therefore, he sent her an invitation to make his house her home, until matters could be arranged, as he had no doubt might yet be done. Having written this letter, he urged Mary's messenger to return with all speed to his mistress.

The receipt of this note was a great relief to Mary, who at once took leave of the Pryces with many expressions of gratitude. In company with the faithful Wild Rose, she now started on her journey. The way to Shanghai was long and tedious in the extreme, and both carters and boatmen, seeing the unprotected condition of the travellers, neglected their comfort, and imposed on them as only Orientals can.

The excitement and hardships she had undergone began

now to tell seriously on the unhappy English girl, and when she reached the Yang-tsze Kiang she was prostrated with an attack of fever. Wild Rose nursed her with the greatest assiduity, and at Mary's urgent request, for she was longing for the society and protection of her countrymen, hired the most comfortable boat she could procure, and instead of halting at an inn, as she had at first proposed to herself, carried her almost delirious mistress to Shanghai and to the British Consulate.

Maitland was more than kind to the unhappy English wife. He placed the best that he had at her service, and, seeing that she was seriously ill, sent for a trained nurse to look after her. A young Englishwoman happened to be at the hospital. She came at once on receiving the Consul's summons, and Mary from that moment did not want for attention and care. But the iron had eaten too deeply into her soul; she grew worse and worse, and at last one evening begged of her English nurse to send Maitland to her. He came, and, bending over her, asked her how she was.

"I believe I am dying," said Mary. "I am not sorry; it is the best way out of my difficulties."

"My poor girl, you must not speak so dismally," said the Consul; "we shall have you about and quite well yet."

"And if such a thing should happen, what would be the use of my living?" replied Mary. "I am tied to Li; I can never get away from that hideous fact. I would rather die; I think God will forgive me; I did what I did for the best."

Now, the English doctor who was attending Mary had spoken most seriously of her case that day to Maitland. He feared therefore that there was truth in her words,

and, drawing a chair forward, asked her if there was anything he could do for her.

"I want you to write to my husband and tell him everything," was the low reply. "He did wrong to marry me, and I did wrong to marry him. I should like English girls to know all my experiences; it might prevent anyone else acting so madly."

She paused between each word; her weakness was extreme.

"I will do all that you say," replied Maitland, taking out a pocket-book as he spoke and entering some notes. "But I cannot give you up yet; you have only to wish to live, and I am persuaded all will be well."

"But that is just what I cannot do," said Mary with a gentle sigh. "I have sacrificed my life. There are two men in England to whom I should like to send messages. One is my brother; his name is Edward Blunt; you will find his address in my diary, which lies upon that table. There is also another man——"

Here her breath came fast and fluttering, although there was no added colour in her white cheeks.

"I loved him," she said, looking sadly into Maitland's kind eyes; "I ought never to have married Li Chung, for I loved Arthur Steward; but—well, there were reasons: perhaps it was all for the best. I think my brother will understand."

"And what message have you for him?" asked Maitland.

"Tell him that I died thinking of him, and that I am truly sorry for the pain I have given him. He will know, and so will Edward. I have not strength for more."

She lay with her eyes closed, looking already like death. Maitland left her, and that day wrote a long letter to Li.



Now, it so happened that Li's affairs were not going quite so brilliantly at Ch'êngtu as he had hoped. It is true that his official appointment was secure, but his love affairs were the reverse of flourishing. After the manner of the Chinese, his fickle affections had long been estranged from his unhappy little English wife, and now every desire was centred round Golden Lily. This young lady, who was in truth a lovely specimen of her countrywomen, had favoured her suitor for a time; but as just about now a richer and more powerful man appeared upon the scenes, she did not hesitate for a moment in giving Li the cold shoulder, and soon made him plainly understand that she would have nothing more to do with him.

For a time he was almost inconsolable; then his fickle mind reverted once more to Mary. He was quite certain that Mary would not have forsaken him nor treated him so badly. He began to feel some twinges of remorse for the neglect he had shown her; he reproached himself, and once more he wished for her society. While he was in this humble and propitious state of mind, Maitland's letter reached him. He described the sufferings of the unhappy English girl in no measured terms, accused Li of wanton neglect and cruelty, and begged of him to return to his obvious duties without a moment's delay.

As this letter happened precisely to fit in with the wishes of that worthy, he asked and obtained leave of absence, and started for Shanghai. His intention was to take Mary back with him to Ch'êngtu, to spend a great deal of money on her dress and adornments, and, if possible, to let Golden Lily see what a beautiful wife he already possessed. If he could excite Golden Lily's jealousy and anger, he felt that his revenge would be complete. Accordingly, once again Mary became of im-

portance to him. He arrived at Shanghai on a certain hot afternoon, and paused in a shop to buy some handkerchiefs on his way to the Consulate. He had not the smallest doubt that Mary would receive him with open arms, that she would forgive him his past neglect, and once more be as affectionate and pleasant as she had been during the early days of their married life in Paris. The more he thought of her, the more charming did her gentle memory become, and once again he believed himself in love with his lawful wife.

He was just leaving the door of the shop, when a funeral passed by on its way to the cemetery. Struck by the procession, he asked the shopman who stood near if he knew who it was who was being carried to the grave.

"Yes," was the instant reply. "I know all about it, and it is a sad story. The lady whose funeral you see is a certain Mrs. Li. She is an English lady who was unwise enough to marry a Chinaman. He neglected her shamefully, and they say she has died of a broken heart. Small wonder! These foreign devils have no right to ally themselves with us of the Middle Kingdom. We are the subjects of the Son of Heaven, and are justly punished when we marry outsiders."

Li did not make any reply, but, callous as his heart was, it was now cut to the quick. He hastily paid for the handkerchiefs, and made his way to Maitland's house. There the Consul and the Chinaman had a long interview, and late that day Li might have been seen wending his way alone to the cemetery. He knelt for a short time by the grave which contained all that was left of the pretty, gentle, generous-hearted girl who had united her fortunes with his.

If a Chinaman can feel remorse, he certainly did feel it

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at that moment. But with the keener and nobler feelings of humanity Li could not possibly long be troubled. The next day he started for his home. His mother met him on the threshold, and when he told her of the death of his wife, she had no hesitation in congratulating him in unmeasured terms on his fortunate release.

THE END.



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