She Was Evil

Female Dominance from the East

The Complete Four-Parts

By
Maurice Huysman

FDC

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“She Was Evil”

(The Complete Four-Parts

A tribute to the exotic fiction of Sax Rohmer

By
Maurice Huysman

PART-ONE

PROLOGUE

He was fighting for his life.

Not his life as a living and breathing sentient human being, but his life as a man.

Already he was exhausted and near defeat while his opponent was as fresh as she had been from the moment the contest had commenced.

He was sweating profusely as he did his best to resist but knew in his heart he was only prolonging the inevitable – along with the simply unbelievable.

His humiliation made all the more potent by their respective clothing.

She in a skin-tight leotard he had formerly associated with women upon the circus tightrope; while he was completely and utterly naked.

They were alone in the room, her absent bodyguards yet another indication of the confidence she felt in her ability to master him, and if he had needed motivation to veer from the gentlemanly conduct of his comfortable Parisian upbringing to fight a woman the consequences of losing were more than sufficient.

But then, had he not lost already? Thousands of miles from home without the means to escape or leave her country if he did. Surely, he thought to himself through the bone crushing weariness threatening to send him to his knees, a woman such as she, the psychological mirror-image of her brilliant but warped father, would be unlikely to honour her wager even if he were to lose it.

And that, he knew, was not about to happen.

A slender yellow foot, planted into his unprotected midriff, drove him across the room and slammed him against a plain and unforgiving wall as the fight remaining in him vanished with the air from his lungs.

But it was not until he slid to the floor and while trying to suck in air that his submission became complete.

The same bare and yellow foot that had just deprived him of oxygen came down upon his unprotected manhood and pressed it into the room's cement floor as if intending to drive it through to the room below.

He screamed, a detached part of him finding it difficult to believe enough air remained in his lungs to form such sounds.

“Are you beaten?” a hateful Chinese voice reached his ears, the accented English in which she chose to communicate with him possessing nothing of the ‘exotic’ qualities normally to be found in it by his easily won over Western counterparts and, instead, seemed only… evil.

The pressure on his manhood increased and the pathetic sound of his own scream multiplied his humiliation.

As he nodded his head in capitulation, unable to believe that he did not prefer death or emasculation to the shame of submission, he was not to see the smile of pure and vindictive triumph that spread across the oval and deceptively kittenish features above.

He did, however, feel the hand that took a grip of his thick and silver streaked brown hair as his head was pulled back and the lips of his younger Chinese conqueror found his; tongue finding its way into his unwelcoming mouth to explore it in such a fashion as it had yet to be explored before.

He tried to fight the invasion but the woman was far too strong for his feeble attempts to dislodge her.

When she suddenly pulled back and stared into his beaten eyes, another disgrace awaited him.

Taking him by the throat with one slender and long-fingered hand, she spat down into his upturned face before asking:

"How does it feel to know you are now the property of a young Chinese woman?"

Her laughter tinkled into the room as if it were some infernal wind-chime.

"Just think what your friends and all those people who look up to you with such respect and reverence will say when we complete your training and I present you to them as my most obedient manservant."

Her sadistic laughter filled the room and he knew her minions would be listening to it in the room beyond, nodding their heads sagely as their mistress reduced yet another westerner to abject subjugation.

"I have had white men serve me before," she told him, looking deep into his eyes in such a way he could not mistake her… arousal. "Many of them have been only too willing to place themselves at the service of a woman such as I."

It was a reference to her womanly curves and the silky black hair framing a face that, while not beautiful, was certainly… compelling.

So much was fact.

That it was fact also that she was a warped and perverted example of her sex, be it wrapped in skin tones of any race, was not dwelt upon.

“There are,” she continued, “any number of men from your benighted land and those surrounding it who yearn for nothing more than the discipline and guidance of a strong Chinese mistress such as yours.”

She shrugged her shoulders, expression contemptuous.

“But where is the challenge when enslaving such pitiful examples of western manhood?”

Again her lips found his and he found himself without the necessary defences to prevent her tongue from invading his mouth once again.

“No,” she said with a proprietorial smile after breaking off her most unwelcome kiss. “You may be no more of a physical and mental challenge to me than the willing of your kind. But the fact that you will hate your captivity, even as you are forced to endure it, will provide me with much pleasure.”

Suddenly, taking his hair in both hands, she thrust forward with her hips and mashed his beaten features into her leotard covered womanhood, the scent of her arousal permeating the fabric as his nostrils filled with its pungency.

His outrage at such an action allowed him to summon up some last reserves of defiance and he attempted to push her away.

Only for her foot to fling him to his back and stamp his genitals into the unforgiving flooring that he may entertain no further thoughts of rebellion against her mastery.

At least for the time being.

Feeling as if the very life had been trampled from his body, he heard the clanking of metal from somewhere then felt his arms gathered behind his back and his wrists placed into handcuffs.

His hair was again taken in her hand and he was yanked to his feet.

"My father was right. You are of an inferior race awaiting only the controlling hand of your superiors."

Wanting to refute her and unable to find the strength of either body or will to do so, he felt her fasten a thin but sturdy chain around his waist to which she attached the handcuffs at his wrists.

She forced him back to his knees.

"And now you are exactly where nature and providence intended you to be."

He felt the sole of her foot between his shoulder blades and a second or two later felt the cool cement of the floor beneath his forehead as that same foot rested upon the back of his head to keep him humbled and powerless.

Benumbed and ashamed, her voice came down to him as if through a cloud:

"It is never less than a thrill to break a European male to my will and make him serve in the most abject of ways. And especially when I demand he show me his obedience before those of his own kind whose status he once shared. But with you the pleasure will be multiplied in the thousands; knowing that my father's formerly implacable enemy is now nothing more than my lackey and my property and has found the position in life to which he is most suited."

Again her laughter filled the room.

"At the feet of the Chinese master who is going to train you in the ways of domestic and sexual slavery."

As she emphasised her words by using her toes to massage the back of his trapped neck, her words triggered yet more terror in her victim.

She had not, he realised, preceded her reference to her putrid and demonic parent with the word "late!"

CORLISS

The question when it came was not entirely unexpected:

“When did you last hear from Estephe Bernard?”

I paused, reflecting for a moment, as I added ice to the Pastis favoured by my visitor.

“Going on three months now,” I told her, saying it aloud bringing all my worries for my old friend to the fore, even as I tried to make light of it. “He's not a recluse exactly but he is a tardy correspondent, be it by mail or telephone.”

“Have you fallen out?”

I placed the aniseed before Madame Elise Danton and gave her a slight scowl for her impertinence, knowing even as I did that it would have little if no effect upon her.

“Bernard and myself,” I responded, fighting back irritation, “are on the very best of terms. Though I must confess to a little concern of my own that I have yet to hear from him."

Not for the first time, it struck me that the strongly defined features of my guest in no way belied the

strength of her somewhat overpowering character; while her womanly curves were rendered more forbidding than enticing by the sharp cut of her somewhat mannish apparel. Lustrous black hair, cut short in the way of a choir boy, and when taken with the features below it, gave off the impression of a particularly no-nonsense educator. And as ever, despite the face I made of it, made me nervous in her presence.

Having only returned from China two years before, tis for a stint as a missionary during which she had met and become friendly with Bernard, I was only too willing to accept my friend's description of her as a woman who could find an argument in an empty room.

And now she was about to add to my knowledge of her in a way my straitlaced English background could not fail to find shocking.

"It will be a woman keeping him from you, no doubt," she offered, her eyes not leaving mine and showing an unabashed interest that made me colour - despite my own forty-one years that exceeded her thirty-seven.

"Meaning?" I asked, feeling a little hot at the neck as she continued to eye me in a way I could only describe as… *predatory*.

Her mocking smile did nothing to cool my Turnbull & Asser collar or ease my discomfort in her presence. In fact, as she raised the Pastis to full painted lips and allowed them to satin the rim of the glass, I felt like nothing else but a small rodent before one of the more predatory and merciless of reptiles.

“You English are so amusing,” she told me. “How you once managed to subdue three-quarters of our planet when the merest reference to sex has you scurrying behind a defence of bemused ignorance is quite beyond my reasoning.”

“I see no connection between wise and beneficent government and… and…”

Again she laughed, “Sex, Corliss. Do you run so scared of the subject it is impossible for even the word itself to pass your lips? And you a doctor, too.”

Her laughter became even more pronounced, more… mocking.

“Madame,” I protested. “You are in my rooms and where I come from it is not the done thing to insult one’s host.”

The look this fetched me was not what I would describe as contrite.

“As for the subject of *sex*,” I forced the word out, even if doing so discomfited me in just the way she described. “In my country it is not considered a suitable subject between a man and a woman who remain, to all intents and purposes, relative strangers.”

If I thought my rebuke would shame her then it soon became obvious a rethink was required:

“And what if I were to tell you that I do not intend for us to remain *‘relative strangers’*? What if I were to tell you that I find you… *interesting*. The kind of man, in fact, suited to be in a relationship with a woman strong enough to accept his weakness and give him disciplined guidance.”

I was aware of my cheeks colouring and, to my own amazement and embarrassment, a stirring at my groin at her preposterous suggestion.

“But that is a matter we can return to at a later date,” she saved me a problematical and infuriated reply. “For now I wish to discuss our mutual friend.”

I allowed her a curt nod, suddenly finding myself picturing her minus the mannish two-piece suit and steepling my hands over the disturbance at my waist that she not spot it and multiply the levels of my current discomfort. Had she been able to divine the

image playing itself out upon the back of my eyes she might well have given her observation some more thought. Especially when she noticed my head between her legs and my tongue working busily at her…

“Do you ever wonder if that abominable excuse for a human being could have survived the fire in your home city?” she interrupted my lustful imaginings.

My skin instantly chilled at mention of the nightmare that was Dr Fu-Manchu, depraved interior interlude fading rapidly as the goose-bumps making residence upon the back of my neck at least took my mind from the embarrassment at my lower extremities.

“In truth, Madame Danton, I…”

“Call me, Elise,” she interrupted with a look of intent. “I will tell you when you have earned the right to address me as *‘Madame’*.”

Bernard had warned me that his friend had… *“Eccentricities”*… though he had not been specific in regard of their nature and I had not gotten to know her well enough during the troubles in London to ascertain just what they might be, but this latest piece of nonsense at least confirmed such a description as true.

Deciding to ignore her, and having no idea as to what she was blathering about, I decided to humour my guest:

“As I was about to say… *Elise*…” I continued. “It would be inconceivable had that accursed Chinaman managed to escape the cellar in that burnt-out cottage in Dulwich Village. And even if he had, I find it somehow difficult to imagine how he could have managed to spirit himself away from under our very noses.”

Goose-bumps were fast becoming duck-eggs as I pondered the unthinkable under the eye of my, unsettling guest.

“Yet… I cannot help but wonder…”

A sense of dread made me leap to my feet and move to the window of my Bois de Vincennes apartment to take in the normality of the human traffic traversing the gaily lit street running the length of its western edge.

“I feel as you,” her voice carried across to me as I stood with my back to her and thought the unthinkable, her earlier… *eccentricity*… completely absent from her voice now. “With such a creature and his offspring one can never be entirely sure.”

I felt myself nodding, totally attuned to her misgivings as she enlarged upon her own fears.

“If I thought, Edgar… You do not mind me addressing you with such familiarity, I take it?”

After having taken me to task for addressing her as *“Madame”* and telling me I needed to *“earn”* such a right, it struck me that Elise Bernard was one of those women who needed to draw attention to herself by behaving… *differently*. I had met enough such egotists in my time to recognise the phenomena, after all. Even if, in this case, there would be an altogether more startling explanation for taking such an approach with me.

But we will come to that later.

“Anyway, Edgar,” she continued, taking my silence as agreement. “If I thought for one moment that Dr. Chao-Zhang lived still… If I seriously suspected that stupendous intellect and despicably evil genius survived, I would be afraid our civilised world might be threatened anew at any moment.”

To anyone without experience of the Chinaman in question, her words would have been regarded as the most outlandish hyperbole.

But we, Madame Elise Danton, and I, Dr. Edgar Corliss, knew as fact that there was no exaggeration whatsoever in either her words or her fears.

She was becoming agitated now, shooting out her jaw in the truculent manner of a person not afraid to face a challenge, yet terrified of the challenge she described at the same time.

A person, I was more and more certain, composed of some of the oddest complexities ever to be found beneath a female's stockings and basque.

"He may have got back to China, doctor!" she cried, eyes fairly sparkling with a fighting glint in them. "Have you thought of that? Could you rest in peace if you believed that he lived? Should you not fear for your life every time that a night-call took you out alone?"

It was something I considered on a regular basis but saw nought to be gained from confiding the fact to her.

Quite the opposite, if you must know.

In point of fact, her earlier description of me as a man weak enough to require the guiding hand of a strong woman made me chary of saying anything

that might cement her in this illogical and delusory perception of hers on my behalf.

Or so did I consider it delusory at the time.

I was becoming agitated myself now as the subject of the man who had near destroyed us all again came to the fore.

It was, after all, only two years since he was here amongst us; since we were searching every shadow for those awful, soul piercing green eyes! What became of his band of assassins? His stranglers and dacoits? The damnable poisons and insects and command of hypnotic mind-control that made him such an utterly dangerous and implacable enemy when taken with utter and complete lack of any conscience or moral compass?

A shiver of Arctic coldness flashed the length of my body as I recalled the days when this monster was amongst them.

It was not until her voice broke into my pained reminiscence that I was forced back to the present:

“You searched in Egypt with Estephe, did you not?”

I nodded.

“Correct me if I am wrong,” she continued; “but my impression is that you were searching for the girl – Guan-yin - I think she was called?”

“We found no trace of her,” I answered, sadness as profound as it was unmistakable.

“You were interested?”

“More than I knew,” I replied, the pain of loss fetching truth instantly to the fore, “until I realized that I had lost her.”

“I never met Guan-yin, but from your account, and from others, she was quite unusually…”

“She was very beautiful,” I said, turning back to the view from my window and anxious to terminate this phase of our conversation.

Elise Danton’s reflection regarded me sympathetically; she knew something of my search with Estephe Bernard for the dark-eyed Eastern girl who had brought romance into my drab life and I was sure she would have heard from Bernard just how much I treasured my memories of her – just as I loathed and abhorred those of the fiendish and brilliant Chinese doctor who had been her master.

It was her turn to stand now and begin to pace up and down upon the fireplace rug, deep in thought as I took in her form from the view afforded me by her reflection in the window and wondered how two women so different could react upon me in such a similar way.

As I watched her, you see, and despite the seriousness of our discussion, my erection had returned with a vengeance.

Forgive my vulgarity, but there it is.

She was a remarkable and utterly independent woman, that was for sure, but there was also something similar in her psychological make-up – at least the analytical side – that fetched my friend Bernard, the Burmese emissary, to mind.

After all, had not Bernard paced our rooms in London in just such a way as Elise Danton paced my Paris rooms now.

This before he had rung up the curtain upon the savage drama in which, though I little suspected it then, Fate had cast me for a leading rôle.

My thoughts – other than, I confess, less than gentlemanly lustful asides – were centred upon the unforgettable figure of the murderous and sadistic

Chinaman and I felt certain hers would be no more and no less than a mirror image of the same as I brought to mind Bernard's description of the threat facing us:

"Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull and long magnetic eyes of the true cat green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race accumulated in one giant intellect and with all the resources of science, past and present. Then you have a mental picture of Dr. Chao-Zhang, the 'Yellow Peril' incarnate in one man."

This visit of Elise Danton had undeniably brought back many unpleasant memories, for her as well as me, as she had played her own part in the drama of two years ago.

"I should like to see Bernard again," she said suddenly.

I could take no issue with her - on that subject at least.

"It seems a pity that a man of his quality should be buried in Burma, doctor. It is the kind of place capable of making a mess of the best of men."

Her eyes were serious.

“I take it he remains unmarried still?”

“To the best of my knowledge – as far as that goes at this point in time. When last we spoke he assured me he was never likely to be… *attached*… in such a way either.”

“And, of course,” he supplied you with no reason for his intention.”

“You know Estephe equally as well as me, Madame Dant… *Elise*. He is not the kind of man to talk much of such things.”

“That is no more than the simple truth, doctor. And, as he may well have told you when describing me, I can be quite tight-lipped myself on those rare occasions when discretion requires. But…”

“But, what?” I pressed with more than a little impatience when she hesitated.

“The thing is… I have a correspondent from my time in the interior of China, and…”

“And?” I echoed, impatience receding in the face of a certain… anticipation.

“Well, I would not desire to raise vain hopes nor to occasion, shall I say, empty fears; but…”

Again she hesitated and looked almost girlish in doing so.

“No. It was wrong of me to open this conversation. Perhaps, when I know more we will speak again, but for now let us...”

The bell introducing the phone rang and I could see she welcomed the interruption as I answered it.

“Is that Dr. Edgar Corliss?” inquired a woman's voice.

“Yes; who is speaking?”

“Madame Deschamps has been taken suddenly ill. I know the hour is late, but could you come at once?”

“Certainly,” I replied, for Mrs. Deschamps was not only a profitable patient but an estimable lady. “I shall be with you within the half-hour hour.”

I hung up the receiver and checking my timepiece saw that it had just passed one in the morning.

“Something urgent?” asked Elise Danton, draining her Pastis.

“Sounds like it. A patient. Fortunately, it is no more than a short stroll across the Bois from here. We had best hail you a taxi downstairs.”

“I should much prefer to walk over with you, if it would not be intruding. Our conversation has ill prepared me for sleep.”

I nodded my acquiescence, wondering as I did so why it was I welcomed the prospect of her company.

Three minutes later, me armed with my trusty valise and she with what I thought a somewhat possessive arm through mine, we were striding across the deserted bois towards its north-east tip and the residences to be found there. Unlike the still populated streets it was empty as well as moody. A thin mist intermingled with the foliage of the trees, and beneath the moonlight gave the impression of some diaphanous shroud put in place to protect the greenery from the elements.

Striking out for the north side, we walked in silence at the side of Lac Daumesnil; the Isle de Reuilly, with its Temple d’Amour and an artificial grotto, faintly visible at its middle.

It struck me that the presence of Elise Danton and the irritating recollection of her half-confidence were the responsible factors, but my mind

persistently dwelt upon the subject of Chao-Zhang and the atrocities he had committed during his sojourn in England. In fact, so actively was my imagination at work that I felt again the menace which so long had hung over me. A menace that still cast its murderous and barbarous yellow cloud over my beloved England and would until final proof of the evil doctor's passing from this mortal coil was proved beyond *any* reasonable doubt.

I also found myself longing for the reassuring company of Estephe Bernard and, though I cannot state with true accuracy the nature of Elise Danton's silent and concentrated thoughts, I felt the headstrong and imperious woman at my side was thinking along the same lines.

Though whether those two aforementioned qualities would have allowed her to confess as much was another matter.

It was only with a conscious effort that I shook myself out of this morbidly reflective mood, that and upon finding we had crossed the forest and were arrived at the abode of my patient.

"I shall take a little walk," she announced, impervious to my look of concern that a woman should be alone at such a time of night – even a

woman of her fortitude and in such an affluent and respectable area.

Then, a little to my irritation, and as if she had somehow been appointed my protector:

“I shall, of course, never be out of sight of the door.”

With a nod to hide my vexation, though I knew she meant well, and knowing that no words on my part would prevail upon her to change her mind and enter with me, I simply climbed the steps to a rather imposing front-door.

There were no lights to be seen in any of the windows, which circumstance rather surprised me, as my patient occupied, or had occupied when last I had visited her, a first-floor bedroom in the front of the house.

My knocking and ringing produced no response for three or four minutes; then, as I persisted, a scantily clothed and half-awake maid-servant unbarred the door and stared at me stupidly in the moonlight.

“Madame Deschamps requires me?” I asked abruptly.

The girl stared more stupidly than ever.

“No, monsieur,” she said: “she does not, monsieur; she is fast asleep!”

“But someone phoned me!” I insisted, but with growing irritation, I fear. My French, without being swollen-headed, was excellent and I knew we were not having a simple communication problem.

“Not from here, monsieur,” declared the now wide-eyed girl. “We do not have a telephone.”

For a few moments I stood there, staring as foolishly as she for my having forgotten that rather telling fact; then abruptly I turned and descended the steps. At the gate I stood looking up and down the road. The houses were all in darkness.

So what could be the meaning of the nocturnal summons?

I had made no mistake respecting the name of my patient; that was for sure. It had been twice repeated over the telephone and my hearing is as near to perfect as it can be. Yet that the call had not emanated from Madame Deschamps' house was now palpably evident.

Given my recent history, it would have been only natural for me to regard the episode as a prelude to some physical or medical outrage or some such, but

tonight I felt more disposed to ascribe it to a silly practical joke.

I heard the clack of female heels upon pavement and Elise Danton walked up briskly.

“You are in demand to-night, doctor,” she said. “A young person called for you almost directly you had left your house, and, learning where you were gone, followed you.”

“Indeed!” I said, a trifle incredulously, hackles rising. “There are plenty of other doctors if the case is an urgent one.”

“I have just spoken with her and it appears she thought it would save time as you were actually up and dressed,” she explained, pointing to an indeterminate area behind her. “The house is quite near to here, I understand. Number 22 Rue Fontaine.”

Familiar with the general area of the address, I nonetheless looked at her a little condescendingly for what I took to be her gullibility.

This had all the hallmarks of yet another prank by our as yet unknown jester.

“I have been fooled once,” I said. “That first 'phone call was a hoax.”

“Be that as it may,” she declared, unperturbed. “But the poor girl who approached me was either dreadfully agitated or a wonderful actress. Her employer has broken his leg and is lying helpless.”

The address she gave me was one with which I was already familiar in general terms.

“Where is the girl?” I asked sharply.

“She ran back directly she had given me her message.”

“Was she a servant?”

“I should imagine so: Spanish, I think – at least from her accented French. But she was so wrapped up I had little more than a glimpse of her.”

I allowed myself a deep and put upon sigh.

“Edgar, I am sorry to hear that someone has played a silly joke on you, but believe me this is no jest. The poor girl could scarcely speak for sobs when she asked if I knew your exact whereabouts.”

With another sigh I agreed to go, though not until I had explained that the splints and so forth that I would need were back at home.

“You may leave that to me,” said Elise Danton, thoroughly unperturbed at the prospect of being unaccompanied at such a time of night. “You can, no doubt, do something to alleviate the poor man's suffering immediately while I will head back to your rooms and re-join you at the address given.”

“But Madame – Elise – I do not…”

She held up her gloved hand.

“The call of suffering humanity, Edgar, is one which I may no more refuse to hear than you.”

I made no further protest after that, for her decision was made and I knew her at least well enough to know that once her mind had been made neither hell nor high water would deter her from the course she had chosen.

Not seconds later, she had been entrusted with my keys, informed where to find my surgical bag, and headed back into the forest in a westerly direction while I made my way to the east.

Some three hundred yards I had gone, I suppose, and my brain had been very active during that small progress, when something occurred to me which placed a new complexion upon this second summons.

I thought of the falsity of the first call for help, of the improbability of even the most hardened practical joker practising his wiles at one o'clock in the morning.

I also thought of our recent conversation and, above all, I thought of the girl who had delivered the message to Elise Danton, the girl whom she had described as a French-speaking but Spanish-looking maid.

A maid, moreover, whose personal charm had so completely enlisted her sympathies.

Now, to this train of thought came a new one, and, adding it, my suspicion became almost a certainty.

I remembered (as, knowing the district, I should have remembered before) that there was no number 22 Rue Fontaine.

Pulling up sharply, I stood looking about me. Not a living soul was in sight. Not even a gendarme.

Where the lamps marked the main paths through and across the Bois nothing moved, and in the shadows about me nothing stirred.

But something certainly stirred within me.

A warning voice which for long had lain dormant and one I had prayed not to hear again.

Something was afoot.

And the prickling at my chilled neck told me it was *not* benevolent in its nature.

Laugh if you will, but right at that moment I turned and began to run towards the south-west side of the common after Elise Danton and towards my rooms.

I had hoped to head her off, but came upon no sign of her.

As I approached the building housing my rooms, I saw that my windows were lit and that there was a light in the downstairs hall.

With a sigh of relief for Madame Danton's safety – and my own you can be sure, my key had not found the lock when my estimable housekeeper opened the door.

“There's a visitor in your rooms, doctor,” she began.

With a brief smile of gratitude for her diligence at so late an hour I raced up the stairs to my study.

My visitor was *not* Elise Danton

Standing by the writing-table was a tall thin man, his gaunt face brown as a coffee-berry and his steely grey eyes fixed upon me as my heart gave a great leap and seemed to stand still.

It was Estephe Bernard!

“Bernard!” I cried. “Bernard, old man, by God, I'm glad to see you!”

He wrung my hand hard, looking at me with his searching eyes; but there was little enough of gladness in his face and he was altogether greyer than when last I had seen him.

Greyer and sterner.

And something else I had never thought to observe in considering him.

He looked as if something had been taken from him.

Something important.

Though I refused to believe the evidence of my own senses at the time, my first impression was that he looked… *broken*.

“Where is Madame Danton?” I asked.

Bernard started back as though I had struck him.

“Elise?” he whispered, expression brightening and then becoming anxious. “Is Elise here?”

“I left her not ten minutes ago on the Bois.”

Bernard’s eyes gleamed wildly.

“My God, Corliss!” he said. “Am I fated always to come too late?”

My dreadful fears in that instant were confirmed. I seemed to feel my legs totter beneath me.

“Bernard, you surely don't mean…?”

“I do, Corliss!”

Suddenly his voice broke and he sounded very far away.

“Chao-Zhang is here.”

I slumped into a thankfully near wing-back as Bernard continued, eyes moistening with tears yet to be shed:

“And Elise, Lord save her… Elise is his first victim!”

MARKED

"I promised to bestow upon you something very precious and very special," she whispered into his ear as he knelt below her in all his naked glory save for the metal bars that criss-crossed his penis and held it captive and chaste by a solid metal ring around his scrotum to which the bars above were linked by a sturdy padlock. "And it is time to make good upon my promise."

His eyes widened, still unable to comprehend how a man such as could find himself in a situation surely no European before him could have known. Here he was, naked and chastised, on his knees before a Chinese woman young enough to be his daughter – should he have been so unfortunate to spawn such a creature. A collar was fastened about his neck and attached to sturdy metal bracelets locked upon his hands and ankles. Bracelets that were, in turn, fastened to a metal ring set in the concrete floor.

A brazier crackled at his back and he knew there were at least two of her minions attending it.

Much vaunted for his courage as he was, he had not, he realised, ever felt so afraid in his life until now.

Her grip in his hair tightened and she raised his eyes that he might see the delight she took in owning a man such as he.

"It is time to be marked as the obedient dog you are for your Chinese Master," she told him. "Time to mark you for all time as the property of a young woman who is your superior in all ways."

A familiar feeling of sickness began in his stomach and threatened to erupt into his oesophagus. It would be as she said, he knew. Thousands of miles from his own land and friendless, he knew there would be no rescue and that whatever she decided to do with her "white chattel" would be done.

As he felt her hand cup his balls and jiggle them gently as if they were no more than an amusing toy gifted a child, he almost prayed that death would take him and that the proscription his Roman beliefs insisted upon could be prevailed upon to allow him to do the job himself, so great was his shame for being too weak to prevent such humiliating usage of him.

"It is time to wear my mark, dog," she whispered into his ear, her deceptively sweet breath tickling at the canal while her tongue made contact with his lobe. "So all that see you in the biblical sense might know to whom you belong."

Sheer dread threatened to make him pass out and it was only a last reserve of manhood that kept him from giving the hell-hound the pleasure of reducing him to such a… female… response.

"Lower your forehead to the floor," she commands him, taking a step back.

Then, when he does not instantly obey:

"Test me on this and a painful marking will be made a thousand times more agonising. This I promise also. And you know I do not make promises lightly."

Knowing there was little point in resisting and that to do so will only cause him greater agonies, he places his forehead upon the cool concrete of the cellar floor. His legs feel as if they have been transformed to water by his fear and it is only by summoning up the last reserves of his diminished fortitude that he prevents his bowels from opening. A disgrace he cannot contemplate; despite the disgraces already heaped upon him.

Finally, after what seems like hours listening to her conversing in a strange dialect with her flunkeys, she addresses him:

"Very well, my obedient European dog. It is time."

No sooner have the words left her lips than the smell of burnt flesh reaches his nose.

This before his left buttock explodes with the most excruciating of agonies and his consciousness leaves him.

He has no idea of time when the freezing cold water brings him back to the present and the pain at his rear kicks in once again; though the fact he is in the same position as when consciousness left him assures him it has not been long.

The pain is bad but he knows it will subside at some point and he will not give the Chinese sadist the pleasure of hearing him whine and beg – no matter the burning at his left buttock is like no pain he has ever experienced.

His fortitude does not survive her next words:

"The Chinese symbols with which you are marked read: 'Property of Ai Zhang'," she told him.

But it was what she told him next that finally depleted the small reserves of manhood and resolve remaining to him.

“It remains now only for me to brand your other buttock with the same inscription in your mother tongue.”

His scream was indeed followed by the most piteous begging…

PURSUIT

“It was a trick to get you away from her,” cried Bernard after we had retraced my steps and made a frantic and futile search of the forest. “They meant no doubt to make some attempt at your house, but, as she came out with you, an alternative plan.”

Abreast of Lac Daumesnil, my companion slowed down, and finally stopped.

“Where did you last see her?” he asked, rapidly.

I took his arm, turning him slightly to the right, and pointed across the moon-bathed common.

“You see that clump of bushes on the other side of the road?” I said. “There's a path to the left of it. I took that path and she took this. We parted at the point where they meet.”

My expression betrayed me and Bernard was quick to supply comfort despite what I could see were his own inner agonies.

“Do not reproach yourself, Mon ami. Elise would not have been swayed to remain with you in spite of your most forceful efforts. And besides, it is action and not remorse that will help save her now.”

The suffix he supplied did not make either of us feel any better:

“Should she not already be beyond our help, that is.”

Suddenly all business and almost resembling the Bernard of old, he walked right down to the edge of the water and peered about over the surface.

What he hoped to find there I could not imagine and his face soon told me he was disappointed.

“Come on,” he jerked. “It may be amongst the trees.”

From the tone of his voice I knew that he was tensed up and his mood served only to add further apprehension to my own.

“What_ may be amongst the trees, Bernard?” I asked.

He walked on.

“God knows, Corliss; but I fear...”

Behind us, along the high-road, a taxi roared by, doubtless bearing a few inebriated revellers homeward and, somehow, the stark incongruity of this simple spectacle was appalling. How little those

happy mediocrities, hemmed about with all that was commonplace, suspected that almost within sight of the taxi bearing them to the relative safety of hearth and home two fellow souls moved upon the border of a territory that was nothing short of a horror-land!

Slowly we walked on.

At the edge of the little coppice we stopped again abruptly and Bernard turned and thrust his pistol into my hand while delving into his overcoat pocket with the other.

A white ray of light pierced the shadows from the electric torch Bernard produced and bathed the coppice in light.

But no trace of Elise Danton was discoverable.

There had been a heavy shower of rain during the evening, just before sunset, and although the open paths were dry again, under the trees the ground was still moist. Ten yards within the coppice we came upon tracks. The tracks of one running, if the deep imprints of the toes in the moist turf were not to be contradicted.

Abruptly the tracks terminated and other, softer, prints joined them,

Two sets converging from left and right.

The trail took us off to the west before becoming indistinct and invisible to our eyes upon the harder ground of a footpath.

We searched the area and found nothing.

The night seemed was profoundly still and yet charged with sadness and danger.

Suddenly Bernard stepped back into the shadows, and began slowly to turn his head from left to right, taking in the entire visible expanse of the forest.

Towards a point where the road bisected it he stared intently.

Then, with a bound, he set off!

“Come on, Corliss!” he cried. “There they are!”

Vaulting a railing he went away over a field like a madman before, recovering from the shock of surprise, I followed him towards vaguely seen objects moving against the lights of the roadway ahead.

A railing was vaulted, and the corner of a second, triangular grass patch crossed at a hot sprint. We

were twenty yards from the road when the sound of a starting motor broke the silence and we gained the gravelled footpath. Only to see the tail-light of the car dwindling to the north!

Bernard leant dizzily against a tree.

“Elise is in that car!” he gasped.

He beat his fist upon the tree, in a sort of tragic despair. The nearest cab-rank was no great distance away, but, given the late-hour and the possibility of no cab being there, it might, for all practicable purposes, as well have been on the moon.

Then, coming in an opposite direction, appeared the headlamp of another car, of a car that raced nearer and nearer to us, so that, within a few seconds of its first appearance, we found ourselves bathed in the beam of its headlights.

Bernard bounded out into the road, and stood, a weird silhouette, with upraised arms, fully in its course!

The brakes were applied hurriedly and curses could be heard aimed in our direction.

It was a big limousine, and its driver swerved perilously in avoiding Bernard and nearly ran into

me before it pulled up and an indignant man in evening clothes stuck his head out of the window to demand what was going on.

Hatless and dishevelled, Bernard stepped up to the door.

“My name is Estephe Bernard,” he said rapidly. “Burmese Emissary.”

He snatched a letter from his pocket and thrust it into the hands of the bewildered man. “Read that. It is signed by the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs and I wish to commandeer your car, monsieur, on a matter of life and death!”

The other returned the letter and, looking for all the world like a civil servant whose life is about to be enlivened by the prospect of an adventure, he was soon following our directions in pursuit of Elise Danton’s abductors.

Bernard was too highly excited for ordinary conversation during our pursuit, but he threw out short, staccato remarks as our recently enlisted driver concentrated upon the pursuit while trying to make sense of what he was hearing.

“I have followed Chao-Zhang from Hong-Kong,” he jerked. “Lost him at Suez. He got here a boat ahead

of me. Elise has been corresponding with some mandarin up-country. I knew this and came straight to you. Only got in this evening. He--Chao-Zhang--has been sent here to get Elise. The interior of China is imploding, Corliss! They had to stop the leakage of information and he is here for that purpose."

"They are making for the Twelth Arondissement," said our excited driver as we roared on. An area where the alleys and dead-ends of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine mingled with shop frontages housing the wares of carpenters and furniture makers whose dwellings resided above the scene of their livelihoods.

Suddenly, we found ourselves in a narrow alley-way where gates leading to back yards and a few lowly houses faced upon a prospect of high blank wall.

"The Seine is on our right," said Bernard, peering ahead. "His rat-hole is by the river as usual and…"

He clutched at the driver's overcoat collar.

"Stop! Stop!"

The limousine swung into the narrow sidewalk, and pulled up close by a yard gate. I, too, had seen our quarry--a long, low-bodied car, showing no inside

lights. It had turned the next corner, where a street lamp shone greenly not a hundred yards ahead.

Bernard leapt out, and I followed him.

“That must be a cul-de-sac,” he said, and turned to the eager-eyed driver. “Run back to that last turning,” he ordered, “and wait there, out of sight. Bring the car up when you hear a police-whistle.”

The man looked disappointed to be missing out on a crucial element of his unexpected adventure, but did not question the order.

As he began to back away, Bernard grasped me by the arm and drew me forward.

“We must get to that corner,” he said, “and see where the car stands without showing ourselves.”

WIRE JACKET

We were not more than a dozen paces from the lamp when we heard the thudding of the motor.

The car was backing out!

It was a desperate moment, for it seemed that we could not fail to be discovered and Estephe Bernard began to look about him for a hiding place - a quest which I seconded with equal anxiety.

And Fate was kind to us.

Doubly kind as after events revealed.

A wooden gate broke the expanse of wall hard upon the right, and, as the result of some recent accident, a ragged gap had been torn in the panels close to the top. The chain of the padlock hung loosely; and in a second Bernard was up with his foot in this as in a stirrup. He threw his arm over the top and drew himself upright. A second later he was astride the broken gate.

“Hurry, Corliss!” he said, and reached down his hand to aid me.

I was soon alongside him.

“There is a crossbar, on this side to stand on,” said Bernard as he climbed over and vanished in the darkness.

I was still astride the broken gate when the car turned the corner, slowly, for there was scant room; but I was standing upon the bar on the inside and had my head below the gap ensuring the driver could not possibly have seen me.

“Stay where you are until he passes,” hissed my companion, below. “There is a row of kegs under you.”

The sound of the motor passing outside grew louder and louder then began to die away. I felt about with my left foot, discerned the top of a keg, and dropped, panting, beside Bernard.

“A close thing! Bernard. But how do we know…?”

“That we have followed the right car?” he interrupted. “Ask yourself the question: what would any ordinary man be doing motoring in a place like this at such a time in the morning?”

“You are right, Bernard,” I agreed. “Shall we get out again?”

“Not yet. I have an idea. Look yonder.”

He grasped my arm, turning me in the desired direction.

Beyond a great expanse of unbroken darkness a ray of moonlight slanted into the place wherein we stood, spilling its cold radiance upon rows of kegs.

“That's another door,” continued my friend. I now began dimly to perceive him beside me. “If my calculations are not entirely wrong, it opens on a wharf gate--”

As if in answer to his conjecture, a steam siren hooted dismally, apparently from quite close at hand.

“I'm right!” snapped Bernard. “That turning leads down to the gate. Come on, Corliss!”

He directed the light of the electric torch upon a narrow path through the ranks of casks, and led the way to the farther door. A good two feet of moonlight showed along the top. I heard Bernard straining; then:

“These kegs are all loaded with grease,” he said, “and I want to reconnoitre over that door.”

“I am leaning on a crate which seems easy to move,” I reported. “Yes, it's empty. Lend a hand.”

We grasped the empty crate, and, between us, set it up on a solid pedestal of casks. Then Bernard mounted to this observation platform and I scrambled up beside him, and looked down upon the lane outside.

It terminated as Bernard had foreseen at a wharf gate some six feet to the right of our post.

Piled up in the lane beneath us, against the warehouse door, was a stack of empty casks. Beyond, over the way, was a kind of ramshackle building that had possibly been a dwelling-house at some time. Bills were stuck in the ground-floor windows indicating that the three floors were available for as offices; so much were things discernible in that reflected moonlight.

I could hear the tide lapping upon the wharf, could feel the chill from the near river and hear the vague noises which, night nor day, never cease upon the great waterway of the French capitol.

“Down!” whispered Bernard. “Make no noise! I suspected it. They heard the car following!”

I obeyed, clutching at him for support; for I was suddenly dizzy, and my heart was leaping wildly.

“You saw her?” he whispered.

Saw her! Yes, I had seen her! And my poor dream-world was toppling about me, its cities ashes and its fairness dust.

Peering from the window, her great eyes wondrous in the moonlight and her red lips parted, hair gleaming like burnished foam and her anxious gaze set upon the corner of the lane, was Guan-yin.

Guan-yin, whom once we had rescued from the house of this fiendish Chinese doctor.

Guan-yin who had been our ally in our fruitless quest to rid the world of her master when, too late, I realized how empty my life was become and that I had wasted what little of the world's goods I possessed.

Guan-yin!

“I am sorry, Mon ami,” murmured Bernard. “I knew, but I hadn't the heart to… He_ has her again--God knows by what chains he holds her. But she is a woman, and women are very much alike in their vulnerability to such as he.”

His voice dropped and his manner became reflective, as if dwelling upon some great sorrow of his own.

“And not just women.”

Collecting himself, he rested his hand on my shoulder for a moment; unable to have missed the fact that I was trembling; clenching my teeth with that mechanical physical effort which often accompanies a similar mental exercise as I swallowed the bitter draught of Estephe Bernard's philosophy.

He was raising himself, to peer, cautiously, over the top of the door and I did likewise.

The window from which the girl had looked was nearly on a level with our eyes, and as I raised my head above the woodwork, I quite distinctly saw her go out of the room. The door, as she opened it, admitted a dull light, against which her figure showed silhouetted for a moment. Then the door was reclosed.

“We must risk the other windows,” rapped Bernard.

Before I had grasped the nature of his plan, he was over and had dropped almost noiselessly upon the casks outside.

Again I followed his lead.

“You are not going to attempt anything, single-handed against him, surely?” I asked.

“Corliss, Elise is in that house. She has been brought here to be put to the question, in the medieval, and Chinese, sense! Is there time to summon assistance?”

I shuddered. This had been in my mind, certainly, but so expressed it was chilling.

“You have the pistol,” added Bernard; “follow closely, and quietly.”

He walked across the tops of the casks and leapt down, pointing to that nearest to the closed door of the house. I helped him place it under the open window. A second we set beside it, and, not without some noise, got a third on top as Bernard mounted.

His jaw muscles were very prominent and his eyes shone like steel; but he was as cool as though he were about to enter a theatre and not the den of the most stupendous genius who ever worked for evil.

At that moment he looked exactly the man of action and courage I had known before his departure to the East.

I could not have known that his return to former glory would not be permanent in duration.

I would forgive any man who, knowing Dr. Chao-Zhang, feared him.

I feared him.

Bernard himself feared him.

But, when Estephe Bernard hauled himself up on to the wooden ledge above the door and swung down into the darkened room, I followed and was close upon his heels.

He spoke close to my ear.

“Is your hand steady? We may have to shoot.”

I thought of Guan-yin, of lovely dark-eyed Guan-yin, the love of my life whom this evil product of secret China had stolen from me.

The possibility of vengeance fortified me.

“Rely upon it,” I assured him before further words froze upon my tongue.

It was only a groan; but, merciful God! I pray that it may never be my lot to listen to such a groan again.

Bernard drew a sibilant breath.

“It's Elise!” he whispered hoarsely, “they're torturing…”

“No, no!” screamed a woman's voice - a voice that instilled in me another emotion. “Not that, not…”

I distinctly heard the sound of a blow. Followed a sort of vague scuffling. A door somewhere at the back of the house opened and then shut again.

Someone was coming along the passage towards us!

“Stand back!” Bernard's voice was low, but perfectly steady. “Leave it to me!”

Nearer came the footsteps and nearer, footfall intermingling with the heartrending sound of suppressed sobbing.

The door opened, admitting again the faint light and Guan-yin entered.

The place was quite unfurnished, offering no possibility of hiding; but to hide was unnecessary.

Her slim figure had not crossed the threshold before Bernard had his arm about the girl's waist and one hand clapped to her mouth.

A stifled gasp escaped her lips before he lifted her into the room.

“Shut the door, Corliss,” he whispered.

I stepped forward and closed the door as a faint perfume stole to my nostrils; a vague, elusive breath of the East, reminiscent of strange days that, now, seemed to belong to a remote past.

Guan-yin!

Even the sound of her name in my head was magical to me.

“In my breast pocket,” rapped Bernard; “the light.”

I bent over the girl as he held her. She was quite still, but I could have wished that I had had more certain mastery of myself as I took the torch from Bernard's pocket and, mechanically, directed it upon the captive.

She was dressed very plainly, wearing a simple blue skirt, and white blouse and it was all too easy to divine that it was she whom Elise Danton had mistaken for a French-speaking but Spanish-looking maid.

A brooch set with a ruby was pinned at the point where the blouse opened, gleaming fierily and harshly against the soft and unblemished skin of perfectly formed breasts.

Her face was pale and her eyes wide with fear.

“There is some cord in my right-hand pocket,” said Bernard. “I came provided. Tie her wrists.”

I obeyed him, silently. The girl offered no resistance, but I think I never essayed a less congenial task than that of binding her slender wrists. The jewelled fingers lay quite listlessly in my own.

“Make a good job of it!” rapped Bernard significantly.

A flush rose to my cheeks, for I knew well enough what he meant.

“She is fastened,” I said, and I turned the ray of the torch upon her again.

Bernard removed his hand from her mouth but did not relax his grip of her. She looked up at me with eyes in which I could have sworn there was no recognition. But a flush momentarily swept over her face, and left it pale again.

“We shall have to gag her.”

“Bernard, I can't do it!”

The girl's eyes filled with tears and she looked up at my companion pitifully.

“Please do not be cruel to me,” she whispered, with that soft accent which always played havoc with my composure. “Everyone is cruel to me. I will promise - I will swear - to be quiet. Oh, believe me, if you can save her I will do nothing to hinder you.”

Her beautiful head drooped.

“Have some pity for me as well.”

“Guan-yin,” I said, “we would have believed you once. We cannot now.”

She started violently.

“You know my name!” Her voice was barely audible. “Yet I have never seen you in my life--”

“See if the door locks,” interrupted Bernard harshly.

Dazed by the apparent sincerity in the voice of our lovely captive I opened the door and felt for and found, a key.

We left Guan-yin crouching against the wall; her great eyes were turned towards me fascinatedly.

Bernard locked the door with much care and we began a tip-toed progress along the dimly-lighted passage.

From beneath a door on the left, and near the end, a brighter light shone. Beyond that again was another door. A voice was speaking in the lighted room; yet I could have sworn that Guan-yin had come, not from there but from the room beyond - from the far end of the passage.

But the voice!

Who, having once heard it, could ever mistake that singular voice, alternately guttural and sibilant.

Dr. Chao-Zhang was speaking!

“I have asked you,” came with ever-increasing clearness as Bernard began to turn the knob, “to reveal to me the name of your correspondent in Nan-Yang. I have suggested that he may be the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat, but you have declined to confirm me in my suspicion.”

Bernard had the door open a good three inches and was peering in.

“Yet I know that some official, some high official, is a traitor. Am I to resort again to the question to learn his name?”

Ice seemed to enter my veins at the unseen inquisitor's intonation of the words “*the question*.”

This was the twentieth century; yet there, in that damnable room....

Bernard threw the door open.

Through a sort of haze, born mostly of horror, but not entirely, I saw Elise Danton, stripped to the waist and tied, with her arms upstretched, to a rafter in the ceiling.

Behind her a dacoit in a collarless blue suit of oriental style held an open knife in his hand.

She was ghastly white and the appearance of her chest shocked me.

Not its nakedness, I’ll have you know, I am a doctor. No. What shocked – *sickened* – me, was the sight of her proud breasts covered in a sort of tourniquet of wire-netting. Wire-netting that was fastened so tightly to her that the flesh swelled out in knobs through the mesh.

There was much blood.

“God in heaven!” screamed Bernard frenziedly, “They have the wire-jacket on her! Shoot down that damned Chinaman, Corliss! Shoot! Shoot!”

Lithely as a cat the man with the knife leapt around the bloodied body of Elise but without an instant’s hesitation I raised the Browning, and deliberately and satisfyingly shot him through the head.

He was dead before his pig-tail hit the floor.

I handed the pistol to Bernard; I was perfectly cool, now; and I leapt forward, took up the bloody knife from the floor and cut Elise Danton's lashings.

She sank into my arms.

“Edgar,” she muttered, eyes fluttering open to meet mine. “What took you so long?”

It was almost enough to make me laugh and I think I realised for the first time just what an admirable and truly superior women was this friend of Bernard’s.

It was with no small difficulty that I got the screw to the accursed thing used to torture her loosened, but

the act of removing the jacket was too agonizing for her and, superior as she was, she fainted.

“Where is Chao-Zhang?” said Estephe Bernard, from just within the door, throwing out the query in a tone that did not bode well for either the Chinaman in question or any of his flunkeys were he to come across them.

Laying my overcoat over Elise Danton, I stood up, I could do nothing more for the poor woman at the moment and contented myself that her passing out was a mercy.

The room was innocent of furniture, save for heaps of rubbish on the floor and a tin oil-lamp hung on the wall. The dead Chinaman lay close beside Bernard. There was no second door and the one window was barred, yet from this very room we had heard the voice, the unmistakable and unforgettable voice, of Chao-Zhang.

The only problem being that he was not here!

Neither of us could accept the fact for a moment and we stood there looking from the dead man to the tortured woman who had passed out from the effects of her ordeal.

Then the explanation flashed upon us both simultaneously, and with a cry of baffled rage Bernard leapt along the passage to the second door.

It was wide open.

I stood at his elbow when he swept its emptiness with the ray of his pocket-lamp.

There was a speaking-tube fixed between the two rooms!

Bernard literally ground his teeth.

“Yet, Corliss,” he said, “we have learnt something. Chao-Zhang had evidently promised Elise Danton her life if she would divulge the name of her correspondent and he obviously meant to keep it. This is a sidelight on his character.”

“How so?”

“Elise Danton has never seen Dr. Chao-Zhang, but she does knows certain parts of China better than you know the Strand in your beloved London. Were she to see Chao-Zhang she would, without doubt, recognize him for whom he really is, and this, it seems, the Doctor is anxious to avoid.”

We ran back to where we had left Guan-yin.

The room was empty!

“Defeated, Corliss!” said Bernard bitterly. “London was bad. But the Yellow Devil is loosed on Paris now!”

The words chilled me but what followed made me no less comfortable.

“And this time he has an equally insidious and sadistic member of his own family to help him.”

My eyes widened; one member of such a family was enough, but two?

“And she is just as formidable, I promise you,” my friend finished.

With this sobering revelation, he leaned from the window and the skirl of a gendarme’s whistle split the stillness of the night.

PART-TWO

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

Such were the episodes that marked the return of Dr. Chao-Zhang to Europe. The knowledge it was Paris rather than my home city of London in which he was set upon perpetrating his own brand of sadism and criminality, in his constant search for power and influence, of absolutely no comfort to me. Nationality should know no borders in the fight against such evil after all.

My resolve and determination aside, however, I can only confess that awareness he was once again amongst us and with, Estephe Bernard insisted, a daughter in his support who was at least his equal in the dark arts of torture and mind control, awakened fears long dormant and reopened old wounds to pour fresh poison into them. The fact Bernard's face took on an expression of dread whenever he mentioned the Chinaman's offspring did not ease my anxieties any either. She must, I knew with certainty, be a prime example of humanity perverted for my friend, one of the most courageous men, perhaps *the*, to be affected in such a way simply from the mere mention of her name.

Ai Zhang!

Even hearing her name upon his own lips appeared to diminish him.

As I tried to imagine what kind of female monster the Chinaman's daughter could be to produce such an effect in such a man, I also strove desperately, by close attention to my professional duties, to banish the very memory of Guan-yin from my mind.

Desperately but vainly!

Peace was for me no more and joy was gone from my world with the realisation the woman of my dreams was once again near.

And with *him*.

The admirable Elise Danton we had placed in a nursing establishment, where her indescribable and barbaric wounds could be properly tended and throughout which treatment her uncomplaining fortitude not infrequently made me thoroughly ashamed of my self-pity for knowing my lovely Guan-yin was once again under the Chinaman's thrall.

Needless to say, Bernard had made arrangements such as were necessary to safeguard our badly used friend and these proved so successful that the malignant being whose plans they thwarted abandoned his designs upon the heroic woman and directed his attention elsewhere - as I must now proceed to relate.

*****

Dusk always brought with it a cloud of apprehension - for darkness must ever be the ally of crime - and it was one night, long after the clocks had struck the mystic hour, *"when churchyards yawn,"* that the hand of Dr. Chao-Zhang again stretched out to grasp a victim.

Stretch made as I was dismissing a chance patient:

"Bonsoir, Dr. Corliss," he said.

"And to you, Monsieur Blanc," I replied; and having conducted my late visitor to the door, I closed and bolted it, switched off the light, and went upstairs.

My patient was chief officer of one of the French-Line boats and he had cut his hand rather badly on the homeward run. Signs of poisoning having developed, he had called to have the wound treated, apologizing for troubling me at so late an hour, but explaining that he had only just come from the docks.

The hall clock announced the hour of one as I ascended the stairs and found myself wondering what there was in the man's appearance which excited some vague and elusive memory.

Coming to the top floor, I opened the door of a front bedroom and was surprised to find the interior in darkness.

“Bernard!” I called.

“Come here and watch!” was the terse response.

Estephe Bernard was sitting in the dark at the open window and peering out across the Bois. Even as I saw him, a dim silhouette, I could detect that tenseness of attitude which told of high-strung nerves.

I joined him.

“What is it?” I asked curiously.

“I don't know. Watch that clump of elms.”

His masterful voice had the dry tone in it betokening excitement and I leaned on the ledge beside him and looked out.

The blaze of stars almost compensated for the absence of the moon, and the night had a quality of stillness that made for awe. We were experiencing a tropical summer and the Bois, with its dancing lights dotted irregularly about it, had an unfamiliar look to-

night; the clump of elms to which my friend referred showed as a dense and irregular mass, lacking detail.

Such moods as that which now claimed Bernard are magnetic and I had no thought of the night's beauty, for it only served to remind me that somewhere amid London's millions was lurking an uncanny being whose life was a mystery and whose very existence was a scientific miracle.

A man whose continued existence was a threat to all the values our Western society held up a templates for the way civilised life should be lived – even if the masters of that Western civilisation sometimes found it hard to live up those values themselves.

And a man who was now aided and abetted by a daughter who could unman my noble and courageous friend by dint of simple reference,

“Where's your patient?” rapped Bernard.

His abrupt query diverted my thoughts into a new channel.

Why could no footfall be heard to disturb the silence of the high-road?

Where was my patient?

I craned from the window but Bernard grabbed my arm.

“Don't lean out,” he said.

I drew back and glanced at him with surprise.

“For Heaven's sake, why not?”

“I'll tell you presently, Corliss. Did you see him?”

“I did, and I can't make out what he is doing. He seems to have remained standing at the gate for some reason.”

“He has seen it!” snapped Bernard. “Watch those elms.”

His hand remained upon my arm, gripping it nervously. Shall I say that I was surprised? I can say it with truth. But I shall add that I was deeply thrilled, for this subdued excitement and alert watching of Bernard's could only mean one thing:

Chao-Zhang!

And that was enough to set me watching as keenly as he.

To set me listening, not only for sounds outside the house but for sounds within.

Doubts, suspicions and dreads heaped themselves up in my mind.

Why was the man I knew as Blanc standing there at the gate?

I had never seen him before, to my knowledge, yet there was something oddly reminiscent about the man. Could it be his visit formed part of a plot?

Yet his wound had been genuine enough.

Thus my mind worked, feverishly; such was the effect of an unspoken thought…

Chao-Zhang.

Estephe Bernard's grip tightened on my arm.

“There it is again, Corliss!” he whispered. “Look, look!”

His words were wholly unnecessary, for I, too, had seen it.

A wonderful and uncanny sight.

Out of the darkness under the elms, low down upon the ground, grew a vaporous blue light. It flared up, elfinish, then began to ascend. Like an igneous phantom, a witch flame, it rose, higher, higher, higher, to what I adjudged to be some twelve feet or more from the ground. Then, high in the air, it died away again as it had come!

“For God's sake, Bernard, what was it?”

“Don't ask me, Corliss. I have seen it twice. We…”

He paused as rapid footsteps sounded below.

Over Bernard's shoulder I saw Blanc cross the road, climb the low rail, and set out across the Bois.

Bernard sprang impetuously to his feet.

“We must stop him!” he said hoarsely; then, clapping a hand to my mouth as I was about to call out; “Not a sound, Corliss!”

He ran out of the room and went blundering downstairs in the dark, whispering:

“Out through the garden--the side entrance!”

I overtook him as he threw wide the door of my dispensing room.

Through he ran and opened the door at the other end as I followed and closed it behind me. The smell from some tobacco plants in a neighbouring flower-bed was faintly perceptible and no breeze stirred. In the great silence I could hear Bernard, in front of me, tugging at the bolt of the gate.

Then he had it open and I stepped out, close on his heels, and left the door ajar.

“We must not appear to have come from your house,” explained Bernard rapidly. “I will go along to the high-road and cross to the Bois a hundred yards up, where there is a pathway, as though homeward bound to the north side. Give me half a minute's start, then you proceed in an opposite direction and cross from the corner of the next road. Directly you are out of the light of the street lamps, get over the rails and run for the elms!”

He thrust a pistol into my hand and was off.

While he had been with me, speaking in that incisive impetuous way of his, his dark face close to mine, and his eyes gleaming like steel, I had been at one with him in his feverish mood, but now, when I stood alone in that staid and respectable by-way, holding a loaded pistol in my hand, the whole thing became utterly unreal.

And, though it pains my pride to admit it, utterly terrifying!

It was in this odd frame of mind that I walked to the next corner as directed, for I was thinking, not of Dr. Chao-Zhang, the great and evil man who dreamed of Europe and America under Chinese rule, not of the daughter who had managed somehow to get under the defences of my good and estimable friend, nor even of Estephe Bernard himself, who, once again it seemed, alone stood between the Chinaman and the realization of his monstrous schemes.

Not even of Guan-yin, the slave girl, whose glorious beauty was a weapon of might in Chao-Zhang's hand and whose charms held my heart in thrall.

No. All I could think of at this time, was of impression I might make upon a patient had I been unlikely enough to have encountered one at such a moment and in such a condition.

Such were my ideas up to the moment that I crossed to the Bois and vaulted into the field on my right.

As I began to run toward the elms I found myself wondering what it was all about, and for what we were come. Fifty yards west of the trees it occurred to me that if Bernard had counted on cutting Blanc

off we were too late, for it appeared to me that he must already be in the coppice.

I was right.

Twenty paces more I ran, and ahead of me, from the elms, came a sound.

Clearly it came through the still air.

The eerie hoot of a nighthawk.

I could not recall ever to have heard the cry of that bird on the Bois before, but oddly enough I attached little significance to it until, in the ensuing instant, a most dreadful scream - a scream in which fear and loathing and anger were hideously
Blended - thrilled me with horror.

After that I have no recollection of anything until I found myself standing by the southernmost elm.

“Bernard!” I cried breathlessly. “Bernard! My God! Where are you?”

As if in answer to my cry came an indescribable sound, a mingled sobbing and choking.

Out from the shadows staggered a ghastly figure.

That of a man whose face appeared to be streaked.

His eyes glared at me madly, and he moved the air with his hands like one blind and insane with fear.

I started back; words died upon my tongue. The figure reeled, and the man fell babbling and sobbing at my very feet.

Inert I stood, looking down at him. He writhed a moment and was still. The silence again became perfect.

Then, from somewhere beyond the elms, Estephe Bernard appeared. I did not move. Even when he stood beside me, I merely stared at him fatuously.

“I let him walk to his death, Corliss,” I heard dimly. “God forgive me. God forgive me!”

The words aroused me.

“Bernard”, my voice came as a whisper, “for one awful moment I thought…”

“So did someone else,” he rapped. “Our poor sailor has met the end designed for me, Corliss!”

At that I realized two things: I knew why Blanc's face had struck me as being familiar in some

puzzling way, and I knew why Blanc now lay dead upon the grass.

Save that he was a fair man and wore a slight moustache, he was, in features and build, the double of Estephe Bernard!

USED

He was hanging by a thread and knew it.

And it was not just his physical life that was in immediate danger of termination; nor, if he were truthful, would the loss of that corporeal existence trouble him over much under the present circumstances.

His mental condition, should he stay alive to be in possession of one, was the concern overriding all others at that moment.

How, given what had been done to him and remained ongoing, could he ever aspire to his former dignity – let alone the manhood that had once set him apart from his fellow travellers in the worlds within which he moved?

Assuming of course, and once again, that he was left alive at the end of his ordeal to return to those worlds.

His "Master" issued a command in Chinese and before he had a chance to even attempt divining what she was saying the cock of the huge Manchurian behind him thrust deeper into his anal passage and drove the breath from his lungs to join what remained of his self-respect in the indifferent

air between himself and the Chinese bitch-goddess instrumental in his sufferings.

Then, in his own native tongue:

"I wonder how those hero worshipping and so very sophisticated Parisian friends would react to see the object of their puerile idolatry being used by a superior Chinese man as if he were no more than a frightened young virgin being taken for the first time."

Feeling nothing but pain and discomfort to match his shame – anger long since driven from him and shown to be futile - his eyes fixed upon the woman who now claimed to own his very life and was making inroads towards taking ownership of his very soul.

All seeing eyes that were excited, hungry, and aroused, while remaining utterly devoid of fellow feeling for the creature she was currently in the process of torturing and debasing. Her exotic and undeniable beauty revealed for the deceitful mask it was by the pure delight she took in reducing a once-proud Westerner into a grovelling slave so powerless he had no choice but to accept the penis of another man into his virgin back-passage and then give his owner thanks of the most obsequious

kind if he did not wish far worse humiliations heaped upon him.

For the vindictively cruel Chinese woman was unmistakable as her father's daughter and that same fiendish cleverness assured her that the threat of death would be as nothing to such a man. A man who, despite his current predicament, she knew to be physically brave enough to face death with dignity. A man, in fact, who had faced such a terminal before and confronted the possibility with such resolute conviction the lowering of the scythe had been deferred.

And besides, she had no such desire to rid the world of such a man for whom she had feelings of the most… deviant… kind.

A man who would continue to hate and despise her, even as the ability to fight his enslavement was stripped from him and he became with every passing hour her true chattel.

This personal ascendancy, up close and utterly personal, she had always considered, was the most profound and arousing exercise of real power.

For if love was an emotion totally alien to a mindset that, in Bois with her father's, required only submission and delighted in conquest, be it physical

or emotional, then the pleasure she took from reducing a vibrant and powerful specimen of European manhood into a fawning and terrified chattel was, to her, a more than adequate compensation for the lack.

She gave an order in her own tongue, voice low and moderate, as if she were doing nothing more sinister than issuing a trusted flunky an order to clear away the tea things.

Suddenly, the lead attached to the leather collar encircling his throat, and held in the huge paw of the man pile-driving him was suddenly pulled tight and his head raised as the cock in his anus thrust him forward upon all fours to the feet of his seated owner whose eyes had not left his own for a single second and revelled in the sight of her newest acquisition being dehumanised in such a way he would never hold up his head as a man again.

At least this was her hope.

As the piledriver drove him to within inches of her knees and the bare golden legs revealed by the slit in her purple cheongsam, the pressure on the lead was reversed and, without any difference to the rhythm of the cock pounding his arse, he found his head being lowered towards a pair of unclad and shapely feet.

Then her voice, in French now:

“If my new French lackey is not enjoying the attentions of a real Chinese man’s cock and wishes them to cease,” he heard from above, “he might find his Master merciful if her were to show her his devotion by placing his unworthy white lips upon the very lowest part of her most superior body and acknowledging that he accepts not only the markings that tell the world he is her property, but that he is proud to be owned by such a considerate Master.”

Broken and abused as he was, the skin of his startlingly white buttocks still tender from the brand that marked him for all eternity as her creature, he chanted the mantra that had, barely, kept him sane over the weeks of his captivity:

“Bend, do not break… Bend, do not break…”

Taking his small hesitation as disobedience, his Master issued another command in Chinese and, almost instantly, the cock invading him drove in harder to force a strangled gasp from a throat deprived of air.

With a final "Bend, do not break," his lips travelled the short distance to her vermilion painted nails and rested upon them.

"That is my good and obedient dog," he heard from above.

He remained motionless as the cock continued to drill him from behind but with a little less force and concentrated upon the words of the woman intent upon breaking him as she spoke, first in Chinese and then in his beloved French:

"I have just told Qiáng that you have had enough of a lesson for now."

The cock slid from his anus and his breath rushed over the toes his lips were pressed upon as he felt the lead attached to his collar passed from his defiler to the Master who had first initiated it and just brought it to an end.

"Now you will take your lips from my feet and crawl behind me to my quarters where I will present you with something else to lick and worship…"

THE NET

We raised the poor victim and turned him over on his back.

I dropped upon my knees, and with unsteady fingers began to strike a match. A slight breeze was arising and sighing gently through the elms, but, screened by my hands, the flame of the match took life. It illuminated wanly the sun-baked face of Estephe Bernard, his eyes gleaming with unnatural brightness.

I bent forward, and the dying light of the match touched that other face.

“Oh, God!” whispered Bernard.

A faint puff of wind extinguished the match.

In all my surgical experience I had never met with anything quite so horrific.

Blanc's livid face was streaked with tiny streams of blood, which proceeded from a series of irregular wounds. One group of these clustered upon his left temple, another beneath his right eye, and others extended from the chin down to the throat. They were black, almost like tattoo marks, and the entire injured surface was bloated indescribably.

His fists were clenched and he was quite rigid.

Bernard's piercing eyes were set upon me eloquently as I knelt on the path and made my examination - an examination which that first glimpse when Blanc came staggering out from the trees had rendered useless and no more than a mere matter of form.

“He's quite dead, Bernard,” I said huskily. “It… It’s unnatural.”

Bernard began beating his fist into his left palm and taking little, short, nervous strides up and down beside the dead man. I could hear a car skirling along the high-road, but I remained there on my knees staring dully at the disfigured bloody face which but a matter of minutes since had been that of a clean-looking French merchant-seaman.

I found myself contrasting his neat, squarely trimmed moustache with the bloated face above it, and counting the little drops of blood which trembled upon its edge.

And now there were footsteps approaching and, as they quickened, I arose and turned as a gendarme ran up.

“What's this?” he demanded gruffly, and stood with his fists clenched, looking from Bernard to me and

down at that which lay between us. Then his hand flew to his breast; there was a silver gleam and…

“Drop that whistle!” snapped Bernard, and struck it from the man's hand. “Where is your lantern? Don't ask questions!”

The constable started back and was evidently debating upon his chances with the two of us, when my friend pulled a letter from his pocket and thrust it under the man's nose.

“Read that!” he directed harshly, “and then listen to my orders.”

There was something in his voice which changed the officer's opinion of the situation. He directed the light of his lantern upon the open letter, and seemed to be stricken with wonder.

“If you have any doubt,” continued Bernard, “you may not be familiar with the Commissioner's signature you have only to ring your superiors at the Sûreté nationale from Dr. Corliss's house, to which we shall now return it.”

He pointed to Blanc:

“Help us to carry him there. We must not be seen; this must be hushed up. You understand? It must not get into the Press.”

Obviously convinced, such was the power of Bernard’s presence, the man saluted respectfully, and the three of us addressed ourselves to the mournful task. By slow stages we bore the dead man to the edge of the Bois, carried him across the road and into my house, without exciting attention. Even on the part of those vagrants who nightly slept out in the neighbourhood.

We laid our burden upon the surgery table.

“You will want to make an examination, Corliss,” said Bernard in his decisive way, “and the officer here might phone for the ambulance before he checks our credentials. I have some investigations to make also. I must have the pocket lamp.”

He raced upstairs to his room, and an instant later came running down again.

The front door banged shut.

“The telephone is in the hall,” I said to the constable.

“Thank you, Monsieur.”

He went out of the surgery as I switched on the lamp over the table and began to examine the marks upon Blanc's skin. These, as I have said, were in groups and nearly all in the form of elongated punctures; a fairly deep incision with a pear-shaped and superficial scratch beneath it. One of the tiny wounds had penetrated the right eye.

The symptoms, or those which I had been enabled to observe as Blanc had first staggered into view from among the elms, were most puzzling however.

Clearly enough the muscles of articulation and the respiratory muscles had been affected; and now the livid face, dotted over with tiny wounds that could also be seen upon the throat, set me mentally groping for a clue to the manner of his death.

No clue presented itself; and my detailed examination of the body availed me nothing.

The grey herald of dawn was come when the police arrived with the ambulance to take Blanc away and I was just taking my cap from the rack when Estephe Bernard returned.

“Bernard!” I cried. “Have you found anything?”

He stood there in the grey light of the hall-way tugging at the lobe of his left ear.

The bronzed face that was at such odds with the pale skin I knew resided beneath his clothing, looked very gaunt, I thought, and his eyes were bright with that febrile glitter which once I had disliked, but which I had learned from experience to be due to tremendous nervous excitement.

At such times he could act with icy coolness, and his mental faculties seemed temporarily to acquire an abnormal keenness.

He made no direct reply and contented himself with a:

“Have you any milk?”

So wholly unexpected was the question that for a moment I failed to grasp it.

Then:

“Milk!” I began.

“Exactly, Corliss! If you can find me some milk, I shall be obliged.”

I turned to descend to the kitchen, when he added:

“The remains of the turbot from dinner, Corliss, would also be welcome, and I think I should like a trowel.”

I stopped at the stairhead and faced him.

“I cannot suppose that you are joking, Bernard,” I said, “but…”

He laughed dryly.

“Forgive me, old man,” he replied. “I was so preoccupied with my own train of thought that it never occurred to me how absurd my request must have sounded. I will explain my singular tastes later; at the moment, hustle is the watchword.”

Evidently he was in earnest, and I ran downstairs accordingly, returning with a garden trowel, a plate of cold fish, and a glass of milk.

“Thank you, Corliss,” said Bernard. “If you would just put the milk in a jug.”

I was past wondering, so I simply went and fetched a jug, into which he poured the milk.

Then, with the trowel in his pocket, the plate of cold turbot in one hand and the milk-jug in the other, he made for the door.

He had it open, when another idea evidently occurred to him.

“I'll trouble you for the pistol, Corliss.”

I handed him the pistol without a word.

“Do not assume that I want to mystify you,” he added, “but the presence of any one else might jeopardize my plan. I do not expect to be long.”

The cold light of dawn flooded the hall-way momentarily; then the door closed again and I went upstairs to my study, watching Estephe Bernard as he strode across the Bois in the early morning mist.

He was making for the Elms, but I lost sight of him before he reached them.

I sat there for some time, watching for the first glow of sunrise. A policeman tramped past the house, and, a while later, a belated reveller in evening clothes as a sense of unreality assailed me once again.

Out there in the grey mist a man who was vested with powers which rendered him a law unto himself, who had the French authorities behind him in all that he might choose to do, who had been suddenly appeared from nowhere and was immediately thrust into business of the most dangerous and life-

threatening kind, was employing himself with a plate of cold turbot, a jug of milk, and a trowel!

Away to the right, and just barely visible, a tramcar stopped by the Bois, then proceeded on its way, coming in a westerly direction. Its lights twinkled yellowly through the greyness, but I was less concerned with the approaching car than with the solitary traveller who had descended from it.

As the car went rocking by below me I strained my eyes in an endeavour to more clearly discern the figure, which, leaving the high-road, had struck-out across the Bois.

It was that of a woman, who seemingly carried a bulky bag or parcel.

One must be a gross materialist to doubt that there are latent powers in man which man, in modern times, neglects or knows not how to develop. Latent and unsourcable powers I became suddenly conscious of and which no doubt explained my sudden and burning curiosity respecting this lonely traveller who travelled at an hour so strange.

With no definite plan in mind, I went downstairs, took a cap from the rack and walked briskly out of the house and across the Bois in a direction which I thought would enable me to head off the woman.

I had slightly miscalculated the distance, as Fate would have it, and with a patch of gorse effectually screening my approach, I came upon her, kneeling on the damp grass and unfastening the bundle which had attracted my attention. I stopped and watched her.

She was dressed in bedraggled fashion in rusty black, wore a Bois black straw hat and a thick veil; but it seemed to me that the dexterous hands at work untying the bundle were slim and white, and I perceived a pair of hideous cotton gloves lying on the turf beside her. As she threw open the wrappings and lifted out something that looked like a small shrimping-net, I stepped around the bush, crossed silently the intervening patch of grass and stood beside her.

A faint breath of perfume reached me--of a perfume which, like the secret incense of Ancient Egypt, seemed to assail my soul. The glamour of the Orient was in that subtle essence, and I only knew one woman who used it. I bent over the kneeling figure.

“Good morning,” I said; “can I assist you in any way?”

She came to her feet like a startled deer, and flung away from me with the lithe movement of some Eastern dancing-girl.

Now came the sun, and its heralding rays struck sparks from the jewels upon the white fingers of this woman who wore the garments of a mendicant. My heart gave a great leap. It was with difficulty that I controlled my voice.

“There is no cause for alarm,” I added.

She stood watching me; even through the coarse veil I could see how her eyes glittered. I stooped and picked up the net.

“Oh!”

The whispered word was scarcely audible; but it was enough. I doubted no longer.

“This is a net for bird-snaring,” I said. “What strange bird are you seeking, Guan-yin?”

With a passionate gesture Guan-yin snatched off the veil, and with it the ugly black hat. The cloud of wonderful intractable hair came rumpling about her face, and her glorious eyes blazed out upon me. How beautiful they were, with the dark beauty of an Egyptian night; how often had they looked into mine in dreams!

To labour against a ceaseless yearning for a woman whom one knows, upon evidence that none but a

fool might reject, to be worthless and evil must surely be amongst the worst tortures to which the soul of man is subject.

And equally as pitiless?

Yet this was my lot, for what past sins assigned to me I was unable to conjecture; and this was the woman, this lovely slave of a monster, this creature of Dr. Chao-Zhang.

Even as my eyes drank her in a monstrous tenting at my groin bespoke of the physical infatuation I felt for her that was easily the math of its emotional counterpart and it was only an effort of will that prevented me from ravishing her in a public place.

“I suppose you will declare that you do not know me!” I said harshly, by way of hiding my sexual reaction.

Her lips trembled, but she made no reply.

“It is very convenient to forget, sometimes,” I ran on bitterly, then checked myself, for I knew that my words were also prompted by a feckless desire to hear her defence and, by a fool's hope that it might be an acceptable one, forgive her.

I looked again at the net contrivance in my hand; it had a strong spring fitted to it and a line attached.

Quite obviously it was intended for snaring.

“What were you about to do?” I demanded sharply; but in my heart, poor fool that I was, I found admiration for the exquisite arch of Guan-yin's lips, and reproach because they were so tremulous.

I was, in short, all but made powerless by a desire I hated to possess and had no idea how to overcome.

She spoke then, her musically accented French enchanting me as much as the delightfully inflected English had captivated me upon our first encounter.

“Dr. Corliss…?”

“Well?”

“You seem to be--angry with me, not so much because of what I do, as because I do not remember you. Yet…”

“Kindly do not revert to the matter,” I interrupted, struggling to maintain control over both my temper and my feelings. “You have chosen, very conveniently, to forget that once we were friends. Please yourself; but answer my question.”

She clasped her hands with a sort of wild abandon.

“Why do you treat me so?” she cried. As mentioned, she had the most fascinating accent imaginable. “Throw me into prison, kill me if you like for what I have done!”

She stamped her foot.

“For what I have done!” she repeated. “But do not torture me, try to drive me mad with your reproaches that I forget you! I tell you again, that until you came one night last week, to rescue someone from…”

There was the old trick of hesitating rather than use the name of Chao-Zhang.

“…from… *him*… I had never, never seen you!”

The dark eyes looked into mine, afire with a positive hunger for belief - or so I was sorely tempted to suppose.

But the facts were against her.

“Such a declaration is worthless,” I said, as coldly as I could. “You are a traitress; you betray those who are mad enough to trust you.”

“I am no traitress!” she blazed at me. Her eyes were magnificent.

“This is mere nonsense. You think that it will pay you better to serve Chao-Zhang than to remain true to your friends. Your *'slavery*' - for I take it you are posing as a slave again - is evidently not very harsh. You serve Chao-Zhang, lure men to their destruction, and in return he loads you with jewels and lavishes gifts upon your person.”

She sprang forward, raising flaming eyes to mine, her lips slightly parted, and with that wild abandon which betrayed the desert blood in her veins, she wrenched open the neck of her bodice and slipped a soft shoulder free of the garment. She twisted around, so that the white skin was but inches removed from me.

“*These* are some of the gifts that he lavishes upon me!”

I clenched my teeth.

Insane thoughts flooded my mind.

For that creamy skin was welted with the marks of the lash!

She turned, quickly rearranging her dress, and watching me the while.

I could not trust myself to speak for a moment, then: “If I am a stranger to you, as you claim, why do you give me your confidence?” I asked.

“I have known you long enough to trust you!” she said simply, and turned her head aside.

“Then why do you serve this inhuman monster?”

She snapped her fingers oddly, and looked up at me from under her lashes. “Why do you question me if you think that everything I say is a lie?”

It was a lesson in logic - from a woman!

I changed the subject.

“Tell me what you came here to do,” I demanded.

She pointed to the net in my hands.

“To catch birds; you have said so yourself.”

“What bird?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

And now a memory was born within my brain: it was that of the cry of the nighthawk which had harbingered the death of Blanc!

The net was a large and strong one; could it be that some horrible fowl of the air - some creature unknown to Western naturalists - had been released upon the Bois last night?

I thought of the marks upon Blanc's face and throat; I thought of the profound knowledge of obscure and dreadful things possessed by the Chinaman and, no doubt, his infernal daughter.

The wrapping in which the net had been lay at my feet. I stooped and took out from it a wicker basket. Guan-yin stood watching me and biting her lip. But she made no move to check me.

I opened the basket.

It contained a large phial, the contents of which possessed a pungent and peculiar smell.

I was utterly mystified.

“You will have to accompany me to my house,” I said sternly.

Guan-yin upturned her great eyes to mine. They were wide with fear. She was on the point of speaking when I extended my hand to grasp her.

At that, the look of fear was gone and one of rebellion held its place.

Ere I had time to realize her purpose, she flung back from me with that wild grace which I had met with in no other woman, turned and ran!

Fatuously, net and basket in hand, I stood looking after her. The idea of pursuit came to me certainly; but I doubted if I could outrun her. For Guan-yin ran, not like a girl used to town or even country life, but with the lightness and swiftness of a gazelle; ran like the daughter of the desert that she was.

Some two hundred yards she went, stopped, and looked back. It would seem that the sheer joy of physical effort had aroused the devil in her, the devil that must lie latent in every woman with eyes like the eyes of Guan-yin.

In the ever-brightening sunlight I could see the lithe figure swaying; no rags imaginable could mask its beauty. I could see the red lips and gleaming teeth. Then - and it was music good to hear, despite its taunt - she laughed defiantly, turned, and ran again!

I resigned myself to defeat; I blush to add, gladly! Some evidences of a world awakening were perceptible about me now. Feathered choirs hailed the new day joyously.

Carrying the mysterious contrivance which I had captured from the enemy, I set out in the direction of my house, my mind very busy with conjectures respecting the link between this bird-snare and the cry like that of a nighthawk which we had heard at the moment of Blanc's death.

The path that I had chosen led me around the border of the Pond with the islet in the centre. Lying at the margin of the pond I was amazed to see the plate and jug which Estephe Bernard had borrowed recently.

Dropping my burden, I walked down to the edge of the water and was filled with a sudden apprehension.

Then, as I bent to pick up the now empty jug, came a hail:

“All right, Corliss! I shall join you in a moment!”

I started up, looked to right and left; but, although the voice had been that of Estephe Bernard, no sign could I discern of his presence!

“Bernard!” I cried. “Bernard!”

“Coming, Mon frère!”

Seriously doubting my senses, I looked in the direction from which the voice had seemed to proceed.

There was Estephe Bernard.

He stood on the islet in the centre of the pond, and, as I perceived him, he walked down into the shallow water and waded across to me!

“Good heavens!” I began.

One of his rare laughs interrupted me.

“You must think me mad this morning, Corliss!” he said. “But I have made several discoveries. Do you know what that islet in the pond really is?”

“Merely an islet, I suppose.”

“Nothing of the kind; it is a burial mound, Corliss! It marks the site of one of the Pits where victims of Robespierre’s Great Terror were deposited after Madame Guillotine had completed his ill-considered work. You will observe that, although you, an English doctor, have seen it and been in its close proximity for some time, it remains for a Commissioner of the French government, recently

resident in the East, to acquaint you with its history and…”

The laughter was gone from his eyes suddenly, and they were steely hard again.

“What in the infernal blazes have we here?”

He picked up the net and gave me a questioning look.

“What! A bird-trap?”

“Exactly!” I said.

Bernard turned his searching gaze upon me. “Where did you find it, Corliss?”

“I did not exactly find it,” I replied; and I related to him the circumstances of my meeting with Guan-yin.

He directed that cold stare upon me throughout the narrative, and then, when with some embarrassment, I had told him of the girl's escape:

“Corliss,” he said succinctly, “you are an imbecile!”

I flushed with anger, for not even from Estephe Bernard, whom I esteemed above all other men,

could I accept such words uttered as he had uttered them. We glared at one another.

“Guan-yin,” he continued coldly, “is a beautiful toy, I grant you; but so is a cobra. Neither is suitable for playful purposes.”

“Bernard!” I cried hotly, “drop that! Adopt another tone or I cannot listen to you!”

“But listen you must,” he said, squaring his lean jaw truculently. “You are playing, not only with a pretty girl who is the favourite of a Chinese Nero, but with my life! And I object, Corliss, on purely personal grounds!”

I felt my anger oozing from me; for this was strictly just. I had nothing to say and Bernard continued:

“You know that she is utterly false, yet a glance or two from those dark eyes of hers can make a fool of you!”

He hesitated for a second and a look of what I can only describe as pure pain transformed his aquiline features.

As well as something… *else*... I could not quite determine but knew without knowledge was something shocking to his core.

“A… A woman made a… made a fool of me not so long ago, Mon frère, but… but I learned my lesson. You have failed to learn yours.”

He was uncharacteristically unsure of his words and I knew that whatever his experience at the hands of this mystery woman was it was of a drastic and far reaching kind.

“If… If you are determined to go to pieces on the rock that broke up Adam, do so! But do not involve me in the wreck, Corliss. Unless, that is, you have some heretofore disguised wish to experience a yellow emperor of the world!”

“Your words are unnecessarily brutal, Bernard,” I said, feeling very crestfallen as well as surprised to see my normally unflappable friend disturbed in such a… *mortal*… way, “but I concede that I fully deserve them all.”

“You _do!” he assured me angrily, though he relaxed immediately. “A murderous attempt is made upon my life, resulting in the death of a perfectly innocent man in no way concerned. Along you come and let an accomplice, perhaps a participant, escape, merely because she has a red mouth, or black lashes, or whatever it is that fascinates you so hopelessly!”

He opened the wicker basket, sniffing at the contents.

“Ah!” he snapped, “do you recognize this odour?”

“Certainly.”

“Then you have some idea respecting Guan-yin's quarry?”

“Nothing of the kind!”

Bernard shrugged his shoulders.

“Come along, Corliss,” he said, linking his arm in mine.

We proceeded. Many questions there were that I wanted to put to him. But one above all.

“Bernard,” I said, “what, in Heaven's name, were you doing on the mound? Digging something up?”

“No,” he replied, smiling dryly.

I waited.

“I was burying something!”

UNDER THE ELMS

Dusk found Estephe Bernard and me at the top bedroom window. We knew, now that poor Blanc's body had been properly examined, that he had died from poisoning. Bernard, declaring that I did not deserve his confidence, had refused to confide in me his theory of the origin of the peculiar marks upon the body.

“On the soft ground under the trees,” he said, “I found his tracks right up to the point where something happened. There were no other fresh tracks for several yards around. He was attacked as he stood close to the trunk of one of the elms. Six or seven feet away I found some other tracks, very much like this.”

He marked a series of dots upon the blotting-pad.

“Claws!” I cried. “That eerie call! Like the call of a nighthawk. Is it some unknown species?”

“We shall see, shortly; possibly to-night,” was his reply. “Since, probably owing to the absence of any moon, a mistake was made...”

His jaw hardened at the thought of poor Blanc.

“…another attempt along the same lines will almost certainly follow. You know Chao-Zhang's system in this respect as well as I.”

And so it was that we settled in to wait…

*****

In the darkness, expectant, we sat watching the group of elms fringing the Bois. Tonight the moon was come, raising her Aladdin's lamp up to the canopy of stars and summoning magic shadows into being. Eerie and fascinating at one and the same time.

By midnight the high-road showed deserted and the Bois was a place of mystery. Nothing stirred save for the periodical passage of an electric car or a lone reveller. It was a scene fit for a drama such as ours.

No notice of the tragedy had appeared in print; Estephe Bernard as vested with powers to silence the Press and was of the opinion that the publicity which had been given to the deeds of Dr. Chao-Zhang in the past, together with the sometimes clumsy co-operation of the police, had contributed not a little to the Chinaman's success.

“There is only one thing to fear,” he jerked suddenly as I waited for him to name it. “He may not be ready

for another attempt to-night. Since he has only been in Paris for a short time, his menagerie of venomous things may be a limited one at present.”

I shuddered. An earlier thunderstorm and downpour of rain had left clouds scudding across the blue between the atmosphere and the moon and lent the orb a greenish tint. A green that reminded me of the sadistic and pitiless eyes of Chao-Zhang himself.

The, shockingly:

“There it is, Corliss!” hissed Estephe Bernard.

A lambent light was born in the darkness; it rose slowly, unsteadily, to a great height, and died.

“It's under the trees, Bernard!”

But he was already making for the door, crying over his shoulder:

“Bring the pistol, Corliss!” he cried; “I have another. Give me at least twenty yards' start or no attempt may be made. But the instant I'm under the trees, join me.”

Out of the house we ran, and over on to the Bois.

The light did not appear again; and as Bernard plunged off toward the trees, I wondered if he knew what uncanny thing was hidden there.

I more than suspected that he had already solved the mystery.

His instructions to keep well in the rear I understood. Chao-Zhang, or the creature of Chao-Zhang, would attempt nothing in the presence of a witness. But we knew full well that the instrument of death which was hidden in the elms could do its ghastly work and leave no clue. For had not Blanc come to a dreadful end while Bernard and I were within twenty yards of him?

Not a breeze stirred, as Bernard came up level with the first tree. The moon sailed clear of the straggling cloud wisps which alone told of the recent storm; and I noted that an irregular patch of light lay silvery on the moist ground under the elms where otherwise lay shadow.

He passed on, slowly and I began to run again before, black against the silver patch, I saw him emerge and look up.

“Be careful, Bernard!” I cried and I was racing under the trees to join him.

Uttering a loud cry, he leaped away from the pool of light.

“Stand back, Corliss!” he screamed. “Back farther!”

He charged into me, shoulder lowered, and sent me reeling as I heard a loud splintering and sweeping of branches overhead; and now as we staggered into the shadows it seemed that one of the elms was reaching down to touch us!

So, at least, the phenomenon presented itself to my mind in that fleeting moment while Bernard, uttering his warning cry, was hurling me back.

Then the truth became apparent.

With an appalling crash, a huge bough fell from above. One piercing awful shriek there was, a crackling of broken branches, and a choking groan...

The crack of Bernard's pistol close beside me completed my confusion of mind.

“Missed!” he yelled. “Shoot it, Corliss! On your left! For God's sake don't miss it!”

I turned. A lithe black shape was streaking past me and I fired. Twice.

Another frightful cry made yet more hideous the nocturne and the next thing I recall Estephe Bernard was directing the ray of a pocket torch upon the fallen bough.

“Have you killed it, Corliss?” he cried.

“Yes, yes!”

I stood beside him, looking down. From the tangle of leaves and twigs an evil yellow face looked up at us. The features were contorted with agony, but the malignant eyes, wherein light was dying, regarded us with inflexible hatred.

The man was pinned beneath the heavy bough, back broken, and, as we watched, he expired, frothing slightly at the mouth, and quitted his corporeal tenement with glassy eyes set hideously upon us still.

“The pagan gods fight upon our side,” said Bernard strangely. “Elms have a dangerous habit of shedding boughs in still weather – particularly after a storm.”

“I don't understand. Where was this man…?”

“Up the tree, lying along the bough which fell, Corliss! That is why he left no footmarks. Last night no doubt he made his escape by swinging from

bough to bough, ape-fashion, and descending to the ground somewhere at the other side of the coppice."

He glanced at me.

"You are wondering, perhaps," he suggested, "what caused the mysterious light? I could have told you this morning, but I fear I was in a bad temper, Corliss. It's very simple; a length of tape soaked in spirit or something of the kind, and sheltered from the view of any one watching from your windows, behind the trunk of the tree; then, the end ignited, lowered, still behind the tree, to the ground. The operator swinging it around, the flame ascended, of course. I found the unburned fragment of the tape used last night, a few yards from here."

"He has some kind of leather bag beside him," I began.

"Exactly!" rapped Bernard. "In that he carried his dangerous instrument of death; from that he released it!"

"Released what?"

"What your fascinating friend came to recapture this morning."

“Don't taunt me, Bernard!” I said bitterly. “Is it some species of bird?”

“You saw the marks on Blanc's body, and I told you of those which I had traced upon the ground here. They were caused by claws, Corliss! The claws of a poisonous thing. I recaptured the one used last night and killed it - against my will - and buried it on the mound. I was afraid to throw it in the pond, lest some juvenile fisherman should pull it out and sustain a scratch. I don't know how long the claws would remain venomous.”

“No doubt I am hopelessly obtuse,” I offered, annoyed as always by his patronising air when imparting knowledge, “but perhaps you will tell me what this Chinaman carried in a leather bag and released upon Blanc. It was something which you recaptured, apparently with the aid of a plate of cold turbot and a jug of milk. It was something, also, which Guan-yin had been sent to recapture with the aid…”

I stopped.

“Go on,” said Estephe Bernard, turning the ray to the left; “what did she have in the basket?”

“Valerian,” I replied mechanically.

The ray rested upon the lithe creature that I had shot down.

It was a black cat!

“A cat will go through fire and water for valerian,” said Bernard; “but I elicited a similar result this morning with fish and milk! I had recognized the imprints under the trees for those of a cat, and I knew that if a cat had been released here it would still be hiding in the neighbourhood, probably in the bushes. I finally located a cat, sure enough, and laid my trap, for the animal was too frightened to be approachable. Then shot it; I had to.”

I nodded.

“That yellow fiend used the light as a decoy. The branch which killed him jutted out over the path at a spot where an opening in the foliage above allowed some moon rays to penetrate. Directly the victim stood beneath, the Chinaman uttered his bird-cry; the one below looked up, and the cat, previously held silent and helpless in the leather sack, was dropped accurately upon his head!”

“But…” I was growing confused.

Bernard stooped lower.

“The cat's claws are sheathed now,” he said; “but if you could examine them you would find that they are coated with a shining black substance. Only Chao-Zhang knows what that substance is, Corliss; but you and I know what it can do!”

ENTER MR. ABEL FONTAINE

“I don't blame you!” rapped Estephe Bernard. “Suppose we say, then, a thousand pounds if you show us the present hiding-place of Chao-Zhang, the payment to be in no way subject to whether we profit by your information or not?”

Abel Fontaine gave out a Gallic shrug of his shoulders and returned to the armchair which he had just quitted. He reseated himself, placing his hat and cane upon my writing-table.

“A little agreement in black and white?” he suggested smoothly.

Bernard raised himself up out of the white cane chair, and, bending forward over a corner of the table, scribbled busily upon a sheet of notepaper with my fountain-pen.

Fontaine was a big man, dark-haired and well-groomed, who toyed with a monocle most unsuitable to his type. During the preceding conversation, I had been vaguely surprised to note Mr. Abel Fontaine's marked American accent, given it was in direct contradiction of his Gallic mannerisms.

Sometimes, when Fontaine moved, a big diamond which he wore upon the third finger of his right hand glittered magnificently. There was a sort of bluish tint underlying the dusky skin, noticeable even in his hands but proclaiming itself significantly in his puffy face and especially under the eyes.

I diagnosed a labouring valve somewhere in the heart system as our visitor toyed with a cane of the most unusual workmanship, apparently Indian, being made of some kind of dark brown, mottled wood, bearing a marked resemblance to a snake's skin; its top carved in conformity, to represent the head of what I took to be a puff-adder. Fragments of stone, or beads, being inserted to represent the eyes, and the whole thing being finished with an artistic realism almost startling.

“You have a curio there,” I observed after he had pocketed Bernard’s agreement.

“It comes from Australia, doctor,” he replied; “it's aboriginal work, and was given to me by a client. You thought it was Indian? Everybody does. It's my mascot.”

“Really?”

“It is indeed. Its former owner ascribed magical powers to it! In fact, I believe he thought that it was one of those staffs mentioned in biblical history.”

“Aaron's rod?” suggested Bernard, glancing at the cane.

“Something of the sort,” said Fontaine, standing up and again preparing to depart.

“You will 'phone us, then?” asked my friend.

“You will hear from me to-morrow,” was the reply from over his shoulder as he left.

“Considering the importance of his proposal,” I began, as the door closed, “you hardly received our visitor with cordiality.”

“I hate to have any relations with him,” answered my friend; “but we must not be squeamish respecting our instruments in dealing with Chao-Zhang. Fontaine has a rotten reputation - even for a private inquiry agent. He is little better than a blackmailer.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I called on our friend Michalak at the Sûreté yesterday and looked up the man's record.”

“Whatever for?”

“I knew that he was concerning himself, for some reason, in the case. Beyond doubt he has established some sort of communication with the Chinese group; I am only wondering…”

“You mean…?”

He nodded.

“He is unscrupulous enough to stoop even to that.”

“You think he may have sunk so low as to become a creature of Chao-Zhang?” I asked, aghast.

“Exactly! If it paid him well I do not doubt that he would serve that master as readily as any other. His record is about as black as it well could be. Fontaine is, of course, an assumed name; he was known as Lieutenant Pepley when he belonged to the New York Police, and he was kicked out of the service for complicity in an unsavoury Chinatown case.”

“Chinatown!”

“Yes, Corliss, it made me wonder, too; and we must not forget that he is undeniably a clever scoundrel.”

“Shall you keep any appointment which he may suggest?”

“Undoubtedly. But I shall not wait until to-morrow.”

“What!”

“I propose to pay a little informal visit to Mr. Abel Fontaine to-night at his private residence. If, as I more than suspect, his object is to draw us into some trap, he will probably report his favourable progress to his employer to-night! To that end I have had two operatives from the Prefecture watching his house all night.”

This was entirely characteristic of my friend's farseeing methods.

“By the way,” I said, “you saw Elise Danton this morning. She will soon be convalescent, but where, in Heaven's name, can she be…?”

“Do not be alarmed on behalf of my dear Elise, Corliss,” interrupted Bernard. “Her life is no longer in danger.”

I stared, stupidly.

“No longer in danger!”

“She received, some time yesterday, a letter, written in Chinese, upon Chinese paper, and enclosed in an ordinary business envelope, having a typewritten address and bearing a Paris postmark.”

“Well?”

“As nearly as I can render the message into French it reads:

“Because you are a brave woman, you would not betray your correspondent in China. But he has been discovered. He was a mandarin, and as I cannot write the name of a traitor, I may not name him.

He was executed four days ago.

I salute you and pray for your speedy recovery.

CHAO-ZHANG.'“

“Chao-Zhang! But it is almost certainly a trap.”

“On the contrary, Corliss, Chao-Zhang would not have written in Chinese unless he were sincere; and, to clear all doubt, I received a cable this morning reporting that the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat was found dead in his own garden, in Nan-Yang, one day last week.”

“Was he…?” I began to ask before choking up, having met the man only before and found him wholly admirable.

“Tortured?”

I nodded.

“I am afraid to say he was, Corliss. And in ways it offends my lips to describe.”

His eyes took on a faraway and, for him, strangely beaten look as he finished:

“Tortures that would have been no less agonizing for him for having been mental as well as physical…”

KNOWING AI ZHANG

No stranger to physical commerce between man and woman, the nature of the commerce being insisted upon from his female Master was of a kind unlikely to restore to him the vestiges of the manhood held in his possession when the minions of the bitch-goddess had first taken him.

How could they?

It mattered not a jot that the unnatural obeisance she expected from him was not given willingly and more than once he toyed with the idea of taking his own life rather than endure the humiliations she so loved to make him endure.

Such as now.

Naked from the waist down – a sight he could do no less than admit would have enflamed the senses of any man; were she not the warped and poisonous abortion of oriental womanhood that she was – she sat upon a European style toilet with her glorious golden legs spread and gazed down upon him possessively as he knelt naked save for his leather collar between them.

"Look at your Master," she ordered.

Sick to his very soul, he looked, knowing he would see only gloating and pure perverse pleasure in the eyes that drank in what she had made of him. A proud Frenchman, reduced to serving a woman of colour as she made her evacuations. The unspoken thought threatened to make the metaphysical physical and he wondered that he did not empty the contents of his stomach – such as they were – over her muscled thighs that yet contrived to remain smooth and feminine.

As he thought, her eyes glittered with the unholy joy of personal mastery and even the cascades of silky black hair, now hanging free at the shoulders and framing a face that was both oval and feline at the same time, could do nothing to soften the sadism and cruelty he saw behind the façade of her womanhood.

Again, he wondered if the suicide he had always regarded as cowardice was not preferable to being treated in such a way. What was an acceptable price when it came to being able to live and breathe, after all? But he also knew, even as the thought suggested itself once again, that he would not act upon the impulse.

Even if the shame of the erection she inspired from him, despite such shameful and debasing treatment, took him as close to an intent as he could possibly come without actually committing the act.

What was becoming of him that he could react in such a way towards such a woman?

"My father would take great pleasure from seeing my newest chattel," she told him, voice a mixture of steely command and female sensuality that chilled his mind even as his manhood reacted to the womanly wiles still discernible within it.

His eyes flashed with a pleasure of his own now and she allowed him an evil chuckle, knowing the source of his reaction:

"I forgot. You still labour under the misapprehension that he was taken from me in the little explosion you so thoughtfully arranged in London."

Her laughter tinkled and echoed against the tiled walls of her toilet chamber and a feeling of nausea even greater than that reacting to his current indignity made him oblivious to all else.

Was she saying her father was alive?

"But that is a pleasure in his future, when he is less… preoccupied… with duties in your own beloved Paris."

His thoughts raged as he considered that once again her odious, brilliant, and utterly sociopathic father had escaped his net once again; the realisation that the threat the man posed to the world he held dear returning to him – if only fleetingly – the manhood the fiend's equally monstrous daughter was intent upon placing forever beyond his reach.

"For now we must content ourselves with ensuring you become the most pleasing and attentive of white body-servants for your new Chinese Master."

Still marvelling at how her father could possibly have escaped that London explosion, he was brought up sharp when she placed a bare foot between his legs and brought it up punish his unprotected scrotum.

"Pay attention to your Master, you cossetted European dog!" she hissed. "Unless you wish those pitiful items between your legs you consider to be manly jewels removed forever."

With an effort, he straightened himself up and returned his eyes to hers, hating the curl of the lip that told of the pleasure she took from wielding such power over a white Westerner – and especially him.

It was at this point that he realised just how pertinent his unvoiced mantra had been during the weeks of torment and debasement:

"Bend… do not break… Bend… do not break…"

For now he had a renewed purpose.

Her father was alive and he was one of the few Westerners to know of the fact.

There could be no succumbing now to the position of abject flunky and beaten possession the daughter had in mind for him.

He could reflect upon his shame in private when he had removed both poisonous father and evil daughter from the mortal coil and his world was in no future danger from them.

But until then…

The splash of her urine into the bowl beneath a shaved cunt he had trouble tearing his eyes from, despite his new resolve, brought him back to his current reality and, as the flow became a trickle and finally stopped altogether, the order leaving her lips was the first challenge to his renewed sense of purpose.

“Bend… do not break…” he thought to himself as he leaned in to do her disgusting bidding.

Then, as he cleaned his Chinese Master and tasted her urine for the first time, he continued in the same vein…

“Bend… do not break… Bend… do not break… Bend…”

PART THREE

CHAO-ZHANG STRIKES

Together we marched down the slope of the quiet, suburban avenue; to take pause before a small, stand alone, house displaying the hatchet boards declaring it was for-sale.

It was unkempt and in much need of tender loving care before it would again be habitable as a home.

Both of us still in a sober, not to mention vengeful, mood after having received the news concerning Yen-Sun-Yat, it was left to Bernard to open proceedings. With an alert glance to right and left, he pushed open the flimsy wooden that guarded the weed covered path leading to the house itself and drew me towards it.

Darkness mantled all, for the nearest street lamp was fully twenty yards beyond then, from the miniature jungle bordering the path, a soft whistle sounded.

“Is that Cartier?” called Bernard sharply.

A figure stepped from the shadows and vaguely I made it out for that of a man in the trim blue serge which is the undress uniform of the Parisian Gendarmerie.

“Well?” rapped my companion.

“Monsieur. Fontaine returned ten minutes ago, Monsieur Bernard,” reported the gendarme. “He came in a cab which he dismissed and…”

“He has not left again?”

“A few minutes after his return,” the man continued, “another cab came up, and a lady alighted.”

“A lady!”

“The same, Monsieur that has called upon him before.”

“Bernard!” I whispered, plucking at his arm, “is it…?”

He half turned, nodding his head; and my heart began to throb foolishly. For now the manner of Fontaine's campaign suddenly was revealed to me. In our operations against the Chinese murder-group two years before, we had had an ally in the enemy's camp.

Guan-yin.

The beautiful slave, whose presence in those happenings of the past had coloured the sometimes

sordid drama with the opulence of old Arabia and who had seemed a fitting figure for the romances of Bagdad during the Caliphate.

Guan-yin, whom I had thought sincere, whose inscrutable Eastern soul I had presumed, fatuously, to have laid bare and analysed.

Now once again she was plying her old trade of go-between; professing to reveal the secrets of the Chines devil she professed to be her master and - all the time, I could not doubt - inveigling men into the net of this awful fisher.

Yesterday, I had been her dupe.

Yesterday, I had rejoiced in my captivity.

To-day, however, I was not the favoured one.

To-day though, I had not been selected recipient of her sweet and seductive confidences.

Today, it appeared, it was Abel Fontaine, a plausible rogue, who, in justice, should be immured in Sing-Sing, who was chosen out to be enslaved by those lovely mysterious eyes, A rogue who, at this very moment, no doubt, was having his soul stolen from his ownership by the lies which fell from those perfect and succulent lips, the curl of which was

nothing less than the triumph of conquering yet another weak man. A rogue who, like your narrator before him, would soon find himself beguiled into believing that, for love of him, this pearl of the Orient was about to betray her master and resign herself a prize to the victor!

Companioned by these bitter reflections, I had lost the remainder of the conversation between Estephe Bernard and the police officer; now, casting off the succubus memory which threatened to obsess me, I put forth a giant mental effort to purge my mind of this uncleanness, and became again an active participant in the campaign against the Master.

The inhuman director of all things noxious.

Our plans being evidently complete, Bernard seized my arm, and I found myself again out upon the avenue and led me across the road and into the gate of a house almost opposite.

From the fact that two upper windows were illuminated, I adduced that the servants were retiring.

The other windows were in darkness, except for one on the ground floor to the extreme left of the building, through the lowered venetian blinds whereof streaks of light shone out.

“Fontaine's study,” whispered Bernard. “He does not anticipate surveillance, and you will note that the window is wide open!”

With that my friend crossed the strip of lawn, and, careless of the fact that his silhouette must have been visible to any one passing the gate, climbed carefully up the artificial rockery intervening, and crouched upon the window-ledge peering into the room.

A moment I hesitated, fearful that if I followed I should stumble or dislodge some of the lava blocks of which the rockery was composed.

Then I heard that which summoned me to the attempt, whatever the cost.

Through the open window came the sound of a musical voice.

A voice possessing a haunting accent which struck upon my heart and set it quivering as though it were a gong being beaten within my bosom.

Guan-yin was speaking.

Upon hands and knees, heedless of damage to my garments, I crawled up beside Bernard. One of the laths was slightly displaced and over this my friend

was peering in. Crouching close beside him, I peered in also.

I saw the study of a business man, with its files, and neatly arranged works of reference, roll-top desk, and Milner safe.

Before the desk, in a revolving chair, sat Fontaine; half-turned towards the window while leaning back and smiling; mouth open enough for me to note the gold crown which preserved the lower left molar.

In an armchair by the window, close, very close, and sitting with her back to me, was Guan-yin herself.

She, who, in my dreams, I always saw and was ever seeing, in an Eastern dress, with gold bands about her white ankles, with jewel-laden fingers and jewels in her hair.

For now, though, the tormentor of my emotional and lustful inner life wore a fashionable costume and a hat that could only have been produced in Paris.

Guan-yin was, in fact, the one Oriental woman I had ever known who could wear European clothes and, as I watched that exquisite profile, I thought that Delilah must have been just such another as this.

I considered, thoughts overstating, I confess, that excepting the Empress Poppæ history has yet to record of a woman who, looking so innocent, was yet so utterly and completely vile.

“Yes, my dear,” Fontaine was saying, and through his monocle ogling his beautiful visitor, “I shall be ready for you to-morrow night.”

I felt Bernard start at the words.

“There will be a sufficient number of men?”

Guan-yin put the question in a strangely listless way.

“My dear little girl,” replied Fontaine, rising and standing looking down at her, with his gold tooth twinkling in the lamplight, “there will be a whole division, if a whole division is necessary.”

He sought to take her white gloved hand, which rested upon the chair arm; but she evaded the attempt with seeming artlessness, and stood up.

Fontaine fixed his bold gaze upon her.

“So now, give me my orders,” he said.

“I am not prepared to do so, yet,” replied the girl composedly; “but now that I know you are ready, I can make my plans.”

She glided past him to the door, avoiding his outstretched arm with an artless art which made me writhe; for once I had been the all too willing victim of all these wiles.

“But…” began Fontaine.

“I will ring you up in less than half an hour,” said Guan-yin; and without further ceremony, she opened the door.

I still had my eyes glued to the aperture in the blind, when Bernard began tugging at my arm.

“Down, you fool!” he hissed sharply. “If she sees us, all is lost!”

Realizing this, and none too soon, I turned, and rather clumsily followed my friend. I dislodged a piece of granite in my descent; but, fortunately Fontaine had gone out into the hall and could not well have heard it.

We were crouching around an angle of the house, when a flood of light poured down the steps, and Guan-yin rapidly descended. I had a glimpse of a

dark-faced man who evidently had opened the door for her; then all my thoughts were centred upon that graceful figure receding from me in the direction of the avenue. She wore a loose cloak, and I saw this fluttering for a moment against the white gate-posts.

Then she was gone.

Yet Bernard did not move. Detaining me with his hand he crouched there against the concealing foliage; until, from a spot lower down the hill, we heard the start of the cab, which had been waiting.

Twenty seconds elapsed, and from some other distant spot a second cab started.

“That's Michalak!” snapped Bernard. “Should our fortune hold, we will know Chao-Zhang's hiding-place before Fontaine tells us.”

“Bu…?”

“Oh! As it happens he's apparently playing the game.” In the half-light, Bernard stared at me significantly. “Which makes it all the more important,” he concluded, “that we should not rely upon his aid!”

Those grim words were prophetic.

My companion made no attempt to communicate with the detectives who shared our vigil and we took up a position close under the lighted study window and waited.

And waited…

And…

Suddenly, breaking the silence that had enveloped us, words spoken within the study were clearly audible and we heard someone - presumably the man who had opened the door - inquire if his services would be wanted again that night.

Bernard inclined his head and hung over me in a tense attitude in order to catch Fontaine's reply.

“Yes, Deschamps,” it came, “I want you to sit up until I return; I shall be going out shortly.”

Evidently the man withdrew at that for a complete silence followed which prevailed for fully half an hour as. I sought cautiously to move my cramped limbs, unlike Bernard, who seeming to have sinews of piano-wire as he crouched beside me, immovable and untiring.

Then, loud upon the stillness, came the strident note of the telephone bell.

I started, nervously, clutching at Bernard's arm.

It felt hard as iron to my grip and, somehow, calmed my nerves.

“Hullo!” I heard Fontaine call. “Who is speaking?... Yes, yes! This is Monsieur. A. S.... I am to come at once?... I know where--yes!... You will meet me there?... Good! I shall be with you in half an hour.... Good-bye!”

Distinctly I heard the creak of the revolving office-chair as Fontaine rose; then Bernard had me by the arm, and we were flying swiftly away from the door to take up our former post around the angle of the building.

“He's going to his death!” rapped Bernard beside me. “Cartier has a cab from the Yard waiting in the nearest rank. We shall follow to see where he goes for it is possible that Michalak may have been thrown off the scent. Then, when we are sure of his destination, we can take a hand in the game! We…”

The end of the sentence was lost to me, drowned as it was in such a frightful wave of sound as I despair to describe.

It began with a high, thin scream, which was choked off staccato fashion; upon it followed a loud and

dreadful cry uttered with all the strength of Fontaine's lungs.

“Oh, God!” he cried, and again--”Oh, God!”

This in turn merged into a sort of hysterical sobbing.

I was on my feet now, and automatically making for the door. I had a vague impression of Estephe Bernard's face beside me, the eyes glassy with a fearful apprehension. Then the door was flung open, and, in the bright light of the hall-way. I saw Fontaine standing--swaying and seemingly fighting with the empty air.

“What is it? For God's sake, what has happened?” reached my ears dimly as the man Deschamps showed behind his master and Bernard and I raced up the steps.

Too late.

Fontaine, uttering another choking cry, pitched forward and lay half across the threshold.

We burst into the hall, where Deschamps stood with both his hands raised dazedly to his head and could hear the sound of running feet coming to join us.

Deschamps, a heavy man with a lowering, bull-dog type of face, collapsed on to his knees beside Fontaine, and began softly to laugh in little rising peals, manic with shock as Cartier came in out of the darkness to make us three of us standing there in the lighted hall looking down at Fontaine.

Between us we moved the body enough to be able to close and fasten the door. One look at the face below us was enough for me to ascertain Chao-Zhang's vengeance; a look and a touch confirming that Fontaine was but clay from which the spirit had fled!

“Dead, Corliss? Already?”

“Lightning could have done the work no better.”

Together we stooped and rolled the heavy body on its back and, as we did so, a flood of whispers came sibilantly from the stairway.

Bernard spun around rapidly and glared upon the group of half-dressed servants.

“Return to your rooms!” he rapped imperiously: “Let no one come into the hall without my orders.”

“I warned him, I warned him!” Deschamps mumbled monotonously when we were alone again. “I warned him!”

“Stand up!” shouted Bernard, “stand up and come here!”

The man, with his frightened eyes turning to right and left, and seeming to search for something in the shadows about him, advanced obediently.

“Have you a flask?” demanded Bernard of Cartier.

The detective silently administered to Deschamps a stiff restorative.

“Now,” continued Bernard, “you, Corliss, will want to examine him, I suppose?” He pointed to the body. “And in the meantime I have some questions to put to you, my man.”

He clapped his hand upon Deschamps’ shoulder.

“My God!” Deschamps broke out, “I was ten yards from him when it happened!”

“No one is accusing you,” said Bernard less harshly; “but since you were the only witness, it is by your aid that we hope to clear the matter up.”

Exerting a gigantic effort to regain control of himself, Deschamps nodded, watching my friend with a childlike eagerness. During the ensuing

conversation, I examined Fontaine for marks of violence; and of what I found, more anon.

“In the first place,” said Bernard, “you say that you warned him. When did you warn him, and of what?”

“I warned him, Monsieur, that it would come to this.”

“That what would come to this?”

“His dealings with the Chinamen!”

“He had dealings with Chinamen?”

“He accidentally met a Chinaman at gaming-house in the 11th Arrondisment, a man he had known in 'Frisco. A man called Singapore Charlie.”

“What! Singapore Charlie!”

“Yes, sir, the same man that had a dope-shop, two years ago, on the north bank.”

“There was a fire but Singapore Charlie escaped, Monsieur.”

“And he is one of the gang?”

“He is one of what we used to call, in New York, the Seven Group.”

Bernard began to tug at the lobe of his left ear, reflectively, as I saw out of the corner of my eye.

“The Seven Group!” he mused. “That is significant. I always suspected that Chao-Zhang and the notorious Seven Group were one and the same. Go on, Deschamps.”

“Well, Monsieur,” the man continued more calmly, “the lieutenant…”

“The lieutenant!” began Bernard; then: “Oh! Of course; Fontaine used to be a police lieutenant!”

“Well, Monsieur, he, Monsieur Fontaine, had a sort of hold on this Singapore Charlie, and two years ago, when he first met him in London, he thought that with his aid he was going to pull off the biggest thing of his life.”

“Forestall me, from dealing with Chou Zhang, in fact?”

“Yes, Monsieur; but you got in first with the big raid -and spoiled it.”

Bernard nodded grimly, glancing at the Surete man, who returned his nod with equal grimness.

“A couple of months ago,” resumed Deschamps, “he met Charlie again down East, and the Chinaman introduced him to a girl - some sort of an Egyptian girl.”

“Go on!” snapped Bernard. “I know her.”

“He saw her a good many times--and she came here once or twice. She made out that she and Singapore Charlie were prepared to give away the boss of the Yellow gang.”

“For a price, of course?”

“I suppose so,” said Deschamps; “but I don't know. I only know that I warned him. He had an appointment here with the girl and after she left he told me to wait up. I was dozing in the next room to the study - the dining-room - when the 'phone bell aroused me. I heard the lieutenant - Monsieur Fontaine - coming out, and I ran out too, but only in time to see him taking his hat from the rack.”

Bernard indicated the body:

“But he wears no hat!”

“He never got it off the peg! Just as he reached up to take it, he gave a most frightful scream, and turned around like lightning as though someone had attacked him from behind!”

“There was no one else in the hall?”

“No one at all. I was standing down there outside the dining-room just by the stairs, but he didn't turn in my direction, he turned and looked right behind him. But nobody was there! His cries were frightful.”

Deschamps' voice broke, and he shuddered feverishly.

“Then he made a rush for the front door. It seemed as though he had not seen me. He stood there screaming; but, before I could reach him, he fell....”

Estephe Bernard fixed a piercing gaze upon Deschamps.

“Is that all you know?” he demanded slowly.

“As God is my judge, Monsieur, that's all I know, and all I saw. There was no living thing near him when he met his death.”

“We shall see,” muttered Bernard.

He turned to me.

“What killed him, Corliss?” he asked shortly.

“Apparently something which occasioned a minute wound on the left wrist,” I replied, and, stooping, I raised the already cold hand in mine.

A tiny, inflamed wound showed on the wrist; and a certain puffiness was becoming observable in the injured hand and arm. Bernard bent down and drew a quick, sibilant breath.

“You know what this is, Corliss?” he cried.

“Certainly. It was too late to employ a ligature and useless to inject ammonia. Death was practically instantaneous. His heart....”

There came a loud knocking and ringing.

“Cartier!” cried Bernard, turning to the detective, “open that door to no-one. *No-one*. Explain who I am…”

“But if it is the inspector?”

“To *no-one* I said!” snapped Bernard. “Deschamps, stand exactly where you are! Cartier, you can speak to whoever knocks through the letter-box. Corliss,

don't move for your life! It may be here, in the hall way!”

THE CLIMBER

Our search of the house of Abel Fontaine ceased only with the coming of the dawn and yielded nothing but disappointment. Failure followed upon failure; for, in the grey light of the morning, our own quest concluded, Inspector Michalak returned to report that the girl, Guan-yin, had thrown him off the scent.

Again he stood before me, the big, burly friend of old and dreadful days: a little greyer above the temples, which I set down for a record of former horrors; but deliberate, stoical, thorough, as ever. His blue eyes melted in the old generous way as he saw me, and he gripped my hand in greeting.

“Once again,” he said, “your dark-eyed friend has been too clever for me, doctor. But the track, as far as I could follow, leads to the old spot. In fact,” he turned to Bernard, who, grim-faced and haggard, looked thoroughly ill in that grey light, “I believe Chao-Zhang's lair is somewhere near the former opium-den of Shen-Yan--'Singapore Charlie'!”

Bernard nodded.

“We will turn our attention in that direction,” he replied, “at a very early date.”

Inspector Michalak looked down at the body of Abel Fontaine.

“How was it done?” he asked softly.

“Clumsily for Chao-Zhang,” I replied. “A snake was introduced into the house by some means.”

“By Guan-yin!” rapped Bernard.

“Very possibly by Guan-yin,” I continued firmly. “The thing has escaped us.”

“My own idea,” said Bernard, “is that it was concealed about his clothing. When he fell by the open door it glided out of the house. We must have the garden searched thoroughly by daylight.”

“He,” Michalak glanced at that which lay upon the floor, “must be moved; but we can leave the place untouched, clear the servants, and lock up.”

“I have already given orders to that effect,” answered Bernard. He spoke wearily and with a note of conscious defeat in his voice. “Nothing has been disturbed,” he swept his arm around comprehensively, “papers and so forth you can examine at leisure.”

*****

I found Estephe Bernard in the same position in which I had left him upon returning to my house. As the day waned into evening and dusk fell he was still in a chair in the corner of the big room by the empty fireplace, his long, lean frame extended in the white cane chair.

My several initial attempts at conversation had elicited nothing but growls but now, as dusk descended and having dismissed my few patients, I busied myself collating my notes upon the renewed activity of the Yellow Doctor, and was thus engaged when the 'phone bell disturbed me.

It was Bernard who was wanted, however; and he went out to take the call eagerly, leaving me to my task.

At the end of a lengthy conversation, he returned from the 'phone and began a restless pacing of the room while I made a pretence of continuing my labours but covertly watched him.

He was twitching at the lobe of his left ear, and his face was a study in perplexity.

Signs with which I was familiar.

Abruptly he burst out:

“I shall throw the thing up, Corliss! Either I am growing too old to cope with such an adversary as Chao-Zhang, or else my intellect has become dull. I cannot seem to think clearly or consistently. For the Doctor, this crime, this removal of Fontaine, is clumsy and unfinished.”

He gave it more thought:

“There are two explanations. Either he, too, is losing his old cunning, or he has been interrupted!”

“Interrupted!”

“Take the facts, Corliss.” Bernard clapped his hands upon my table and bent down, peering into my eyes. “Is it characteristic of Chao-Zhang to kill a man by the direct agency of a snake and to implicate one of his own damnable servants in this way?”

“But we have found no snake!”

“Guan-yin introduced one in some way. Do you doubt it?”

“Certainly Guan-yin visited him on the evening of his death, but you must be perfectly well aware that even if she had been arrested, no jury could convict her.”

Bernard resumed his restless pacing up and down.

“You are very useful to me, Corliss,” he rapped; “as a counsel for the defence you constantly rectify my errors of prejudice. Yet I am convinced that our presence at Fontaine's house last night prevented Chao-Zhang from finishing off this little matter as he had designed to do.”

“What has given you this idea?”

“Michalak is responsible. He has rung me up from the Yard. The gendarme on duty at the house where the murder was committed, reports that someone, less than an hour ago, attempted to break in.”

“Break in!”

“Ah! You are interested? I thought the circumstance illuminating also!”

“Did the officer see this person?”

“No; he only heard him. It was someone who endeavoured to enter by the bath-room window, which, I am told, may be reached fairly easily by an agile climber.”

“The attempt did not succeed?”

“No; the gendarme interrupted, but failed to make a capture or even to secure a glimpse of the man.”

We were both silent for some moments; then:

“What do you propose to do?” I asked.

“We must not let Chao-Zhang's servants know,” replied Bernard, “but to-night I shall conceal myself in Fontaine's house and remain there for a week or a day - it matters not how long - until that attempt is repeated. Quite obviously, Corliss, we have overlooked something which implicates the murderer with the murder! In short, either by accident by reason of our superior vigilance, or by the clumsiness of his plans, Chao-Zhang for once in an otherwise blameless career has left a clue!”

CORLISS DREAMS

Kissing her olive skinned foot as she insisted, I looked up from my humble position on the multi-patterned carpet of the salon.

I was, also as she insisted, as naked as the day I had been delivered into the world and acutely self-conscious in regard of the fact.

And why on this or any other planet would I not have been, given I was not alone in her presence and my shame, together with overpowering need that was responsible for it, was being witnessed by Chou Zhang himself from his position on a high-backed and ornate wooden chair that served as his throne.

"I have permission from my true master," her musical, evil, and utterly thrilling voice sang in both my ears and my veins, "to accept you as my possession."

I was aware of the indignity her words bestowed upon me and that my manhood would be forever diminished should I bow to the undeniable force in them, my status as a professional man of morality and integrity lost for all time to be replaced by…

What?

Her next words were my answer:

“I desire you and I want you, Doctor,” she told me, the knowledge transforming my already fevered core to molten and heightening my sense of moral diminishment as my penis stood proud from my body with more urgency than I could have imagined, let alone recall. “But, as I serve my true master and supreme ruler, so should you see me in just such a light.”

In perfect synchronisation with her words, the twin columns of her bare and exquisitely shaped legs above me parted to reveal…

My senses overloaded at this point and the mixture of sound, vision, and the olfactory, would have surely seen me pass insensate to the floor as the flower of her womanhood revealed itself to eyes in all its hairless supremacy; only the level of my desire for this vision of femininity I knew to be as perfidious and treacherous on the inside as she appeared virgin and untouched upon the inner kept me in place.

Even the presence of the yellow fiend who owned her, in much the same way she intended to own me, could not deflect my thoughts from their one focus…

That of being allowed to feel the moist walls of her exotic womanhood stretching and clutching as they accommodated the entrance into her of my rampant, yet thoroughly conquered cock.

"Inhale the scent of your Arab master and replace your misdirected sense of English propriety and masculinity with the obedience, respect, and submission she requires if you are to remain at her side as both servant and pet."

Her words appalled and yet, at one and the same time, enflamed my senses with a desire to submit to her, that I may know only the responsibility of pleasing my new female master and forget, once and for all, those multitudinal duties obligations that were all that stood between me and a life service and sexual pleasure as her property.

"Place your tongue upon my superior Arab cunt and taste your owner for the first time," I heard the order leave her exotic painted lips; the outrage of such a proposition and the language in which it was couched from a female no match for the need I felt to do exactly as she had directed.

No!

Ordered.

“Then,” she went on, “when you have shown your willingness to both please and obey Guan yin, it will be time to pledge yourself to the man who is my Chinese master and will also be yours.”

The reality of what she was saying – myself as a slave to the man who would destroy my own country and the freedoms that went with it, acted upon me in the way of a bucket of arctic cold water.

Could my infatuation for his slave-girl truly be so great and irresistible I would slough off my love of country and the friends and family that went with it simply to know such a woman in the most base and loveless of carnal ways?

As my tongue snaked from my own lips and the pungent aroma of the arousal my imminent capitulation inspired in Guan yin bombarded my nostrils, I supplied my unspoken question its own answer.

The sigh above me as my tongue slid into the groove of her womanhood and made a slow progress upwards was one of both deep arousal and conquest.

It was only as her engorged clitoris entered my mouth and I began to suck upon it as if it were the agent chosen to deliver to me the nectar of the gods - just as her swift intake of breath and her tiny

bejewelled hand rested upon my toiling head as if I were nothing more to her than a well-trained domestic pet performing nothing less than the duties for which it had been trained – that the full horror of what I submitting myself to came home to me.

In a rage that was a mixture of lingering desire and sheer self-loathing for having allowed myself to fall so far, I screamed into the swamp that was her fetid and unworthy femininity.

And screamed…

And screamed…

And screamed…

THE CLIMBER RETURNS

In utter darkness we groped our way through into the hall of Fontaine's house, having entered, stealthily, from the rear; for Bernard had selected the study as a suitable base of operations.

So we commenced our ghostly business in the house of the murdered man, a house from which, but a few hours since, his body had been removed. This was such a vigil as I had endured once before, when, with Estephe Bernard and another, I had waited for the coming of one of Chao-Zhang's death agents.

The putrid dream I had experienced the previous night had plenty of contemplative silence in which to repeat itself in my mind and soon my skin prickled with scenes of debasement and service that were so vivid I could have been forgiven for believing they had actually occurred were it not for the fact I was their male principal and knew – *prayed* – I could never be forced to behave in so craven and servile a fashion towards *anyone*, let alone a member of the opposite sex.

By the light of street lamp, I caught Bernard staring at me for a few moments with a strange expression on his face.

An expression, had I not known it to be impossible, predicated upon knowledge of my unwanted internal thoughts and memories and, it seemed, sympathetic towards my response to them.

That response, to my eternal shame, a turbulence at my groin that refused to subside no matter how viciously my inner thoughts berated the source and attempted to channel its thoughts along a different, less demeaning path.

An endeavour with which I was eventually successful and found myself able to finally concentrate fully on the task at hand.

In the silence of the empty death house and of all the sounds which one by one now began to detach themselves from it, there was a particular sound, homely enough at another time, which spoke to me more dreadfully than the rest.

The simple ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece.

I thought how this same sound must have been familiar to Abel Fontaine and how it must have formed part and parcel of his daily life.

And now it was ticking for us.

Bernard and myself.

Whilst he for whom it had ticked lay unheeding and would never heed or need it again.

Many hours it seemed we sat in just such a fashion until there came vague creakings from within the house.

Sounds as though of stealthy footsteps upon the stairs, but Estephe Bernard gave no sign, and I knew it was my heightened imagination working upon me.

So wore on the night; and, when the ticking clock hollowly boomed the hour of one, I almost leapt out of my chair, so highly strung were my nerves, and so appallingly did the sudden clangour beat upon them, even though I had heard that same booming on a number of occasions already.

Bernard, like a man of stone, showed no sign. He was capable of so subduing his constitutionally high-strung temperament, at times, that temporarily he became immune from human dreads. On such occasion he would be icily cool amid universal panic; but, his object accomplished, I have seen him in such a state of collapse, that utter nervous exhaustion is the only term by which I can describe it.

Then, out from the confusion of minor noises, a new, arresting sound detached itself. I ceased my counting; no longer noting the ticking of the clock, nor the vague creakings, rustlings and whispers. I saw a shadowy Bernard raise his hand in needless warning – needless because by then I was almost holding my breath in an effort of acute listening.

From high up in the house this new sound came--from above the topmost rooms, it seemed, up under the roof; a regular squeaking, oddly familiar, yet elusive.

Upon it followed a very soft and muffled thud; then a metallic sound as of a rusty hinge in motion; then a new silence, pregnant with a thousand possibilities more eerie than any clamour.

My mind was rapidly at work and I knew our guest had decided to make entry through the glass loft trap I had noticed high upon the roof's exterior.

Another sound, louder and more intimate, confirmed my suspicion as the noise of that same trap being lifted above the stairhead – slowly and cautiously – drifted down to us.

Estephe Bernard waved to me to take a stand on the other side of the study's opened door - behind it, in

fact, where I should be concealed from the view of any one descending the stair.

I stood up and crossed the floor to my new post and had no sooner taken it than a groan of woodwork submitted to sudden strain, and the unmistakable pad of bare feet upon the linoleum of the top corridor, was confirmed by our hearing.

I knew now that one of Chao-Zhang's uncanny servants had gained the roof of the house by some means, had broken through the skylight and had descended by means of the trap beneath on to the landing.

Tensed and coiled, I waited for the creature's descent.

Then a vague shape became visible, no more than a blur upon the dim design of the wall-paper, and Estephe Bernard got his first sight of the stranger.

The clock on the mantelpiece boomed out the half-hour.

At that, such was my state (I blush to relate it), I uttered a faint cry even as I cursed my hysterical weakness that might have frustrated our hopes.

That it did not do so was in no measure due to me.

Bernard hesitated not one instant and with a panther-like leap he hurled himself into the hall.

“The lights, Corliss!” he cried, “the lights! The switch is near the street door!”

I clenched my fists in a swift effort to regain control of my treacherous nerves, and, bounding past Bernard, and past the foot of the stair, I reached out my hand to the switch, the situation of which, fortunately, I knew.

Around I came, in response to a shrill cry from behind me, an inhuman cry, less a cry than the shriek of some enraged animal.

With his left foot upon the first stair, Estephe Bernard stood, his lean body bent perilously backward, his arms rigidly thrust out, and his sinewy fingers gripping the throat of an almost naked man whose brown body glistened unctuously and whose shaven head was apish low with bloodshot eyes resembling nothing less than those of a mad dog!

His teeth, upper and lower, were bared; they glistened, they gnashed, and a froth was on his lips. With both his hands, he clutched a heavy stick, and twice he brought it down upon Estephe Bernard's head!

I leapt forward to my friend's aid; but as though the blows had been those of a feather, he stood like some figure of archaic statuary, nor for an instant relaxed the death-grip which he had upon his adversary's throat.

Thrusting my way up the stairs, I wrenched the stick from the hand of the dacoit, for in this glistening brown man I recognized one of that deadly brotherhood who hailed Dr. Chao-Zhang their Lord and Master.

*****

I cannot dwell upon the end of that encounter; I cannot hope to make acceptable to my readers an account of how Estephe Bernard, glassy-eyed, and with consciousness ebbing from him instant by instant, stood there, a realization of artistic and masculine heroism, arms rigid as iron bars even after Chao-Zhang's servant hung limply in that frightful grip.

In his last moment of consciousness, with the blood from his wounded head trickling down into his eyes, he pointed to the stick which I had torn from the grip of the dacoit, and which I still held in my hand.

“Not Aaron's rod, Corliss!” he gasped hoarsely,. “The rod of Fontaine!”

Even in upon my anxiety for my friend, amazement intruded.

“But,” I began--and turned to the rack in which Fontaine's favourite cane at that moment reposed--had reposed at the time of his death.

Yes! There stood Fontaine's cane; we had not moved it; we had disturbed nothing in that stricken house; there it stood, in company with an umbrella and a Malacca.

I glanced at the cane in my hand. Surely there could not be two such in the world?

Bernard collapsed on the floor at my feet.

“Examine the one in the rack, Corliss,” he whispered, almost inaudibly, “but do not touch it. It may not be yet....”

I propped him up against the foot of the stairs, and as the gendarme began knocking violently at the street door, crossed to the rack and lifted out the replica of the cane which I held in my hand.

A faint cry from Bernard and, as if it had been a leprous thing, I dropped the cane instantly.

“Merciful God!” I groaned.

Although, in every other particular, it corresponded with that which I held - which I had taken from the dacoit and which he had come to substitute for the cane now lying upon the floor – it differed in one dreadful particular.

Up to the snake's head it was an accurate copy.

But the head lived!

Either from pain, fear, or starvation, the thing confined in the hollow tube of this awful duplicate was become torpid.

Otherwise, no power on earth could have saved me from the fate of Abel Fontaine.

For the creature was an Australian death-adder.

THE WHITE PEACOCK

A recovered Estephe Bernard wasted no time in pursuing the plan of campaign which he had mentioned to Inspector Michalak.

Less than forty-eight hours after quitting the house of the murdered Fontaine I found myself bound by a taxi along a road in the 11th Arrondisement upon strange enough business.

Or progress had slowed as we now traversed a road of stalls of various produce flanked either side of me as, along with the areas shoppers, I listened through the taxi's open windows to hawkers, most of them Jewish, acclaim the rarity and unparalleled value of the bargains which they had to offer and, allowing for the difference of costume, these tireless Israelites, heedless of climatic conditions, might well have stood, not on a somewhat a squalid Parisian thoroughfare, but in an equally squalid market-street of the Orient.

Poles, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, Jews of Hungary, and displaced Italians mingled in the throng. Near East and Far East rubbed shoulders. Pidgin French contested with Yiddish for the ownership of some tawdry article offered by an auctioneer whose nationality defied conjecture, save

that always some branch of his ancestry had drawn nourishment from the soil of Eternal Judea.

Bedraggled women - more often than not burdened with muffled infants - crowded the pavements and the roadway, thronged about the stalls like white ants about some choicer carrion.

Sometimes a yellow face showed close to one of the streaming windows; sometimes a black-eyed, pallid face, but never a face wholly sane and healthy. This was an underworld where squalor and vice went hand in hand through streets possessing not one iota of beauty and was, in fact, little less than a melting-pot of the world's outcasts.

This was the shadowland which last night had swallowed up Estephe Bernard.

Ceaselessly I peered to right and left through the taxi windows, searching amid that company for any face known to me.

Whom I expected to find there, I know not, but I should have counted it no matter for surprise had I detected amid that ungracious ugliness the beautiful face of Guan-yin, the Eastern slave-girl, the leering yellow face of a Burmese dacoit and the gaunt, bronze features of Estephe Bernard.

A hundred times, in fact, I almost believed that I had seen the ruddy countenance of Inspector Michalak, and once (at what instant my heart seemed to stand still) I suffered from the singular delusion that the oblique green eyes of Dr. Chao-Zhang peered out from the shadows between two stalls.

It was mere phantasy, of course, the sick imaginings of a mind overwrought. I had not slept and had scarcely tasted food for more than thirty hours; for, following up a faint clue supplied by Deschamps, Fontaine's man, and, like his master, an ex-officer of New York Police, together with my friend, Estephe Bernard, had set out on the previous evening in quest of some obscene den where the man called Shen-Yan - former keeper of an opium shop - was now said to be in hiding.

Shen-Yan we knew to be a creature of the Chinese genius and sociopath and only a most urgent call had prevented me from joining Bernard upon this promising though hazardous expedition.

At any rate, Fate willing it so, he had gone without me; and now - although Inspector Michalak, assisted by a number of Surete men, was sweeping the district about me - to the time of my departure nothing whatever had been heard of Bernard. The ordeal of waiting finally had proved too great to be borne. With no definite idea of what I proposed to

do, I had thrown myself into the search, filled with such dreadful apprehensions as I hope never again to experience.

I did not know the exact situation of the place to which Bernard was gone, for owing to the urgent case which I have mentioned, I had been absent at the time of his departure; nor could any higher authority enlighten me upon this point. Michalak was in charge of the case - under Bernard's direction - and since the inspector had left the Yard, early that morning, he had disappeared as completely as Bernard, no report having been received from him.

As my driver turned into the black mouth of a narrow, ill-lighted street, and the glare and clamour of the greater thoroughfare died behind me, I sank into the corner of the cab burdened with such a sense of desolation as mercifully comes but rarely.

We were heading now for collection of tiny wharfs and warehouses denoting the north bank of the Seine, an area roughly comparable to London’s Chinatown or a miniature of that same ethnic settlement possessed by Liverpool further up in England’s north-east, and of the greater one in San Francisco.

Inspired with an idea, I raised the taxi’s speaking-tube:

“Take me first to the River Gendarmerie,” I directed.

The man, a seen-it-all-Parisian, turned and nodded comprehendingly through the glass separating us and presently we swerved to the right and into an even narrower street before exiting onto a wide thoroughfare along which passed brilliantly lighted electric trams. I had lost all sense of direction but, after swinging to the left and to the right again, I looked through the window and perceived that we were before the door of the local Gendarmerie with the river running behind it.

My driver had indeed seen-and-done-it-all.

In quite mechanical fashion I entered the depôt. Inspector Ricoult, our associate in one of the darkest episodes of the campaign with the Yellow Doctor two years before, received me in his office and was pleased by my entrance before my purpose made him grave.

“The ten o'clock ferry is co-operating with some of the Surete men who are dragging that district.”

I shuddered at the word “dragging”; Ricoult had not used it literally, but nevertheless it had conjured up a dread possibility - a possibility in accordance with the methods of Dr. Chao-Zhang.

All within space of an instant I saw the tide of the Seine lapping about the green-crusted timbers of a dock pier; and disclosing to the pallid light of my doom laden imagination a rigid hand, sometimes a horribly bloated face and, once, the body of Estephe Bernard at the mercy of those oily waters.

Ricoult continued:

“There is a launch out, too, patrolling the riverside from here to the estuary. Another lies at the breakwater.”

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

“Should you care to take a run down and see for yourself?”

“No, thanks,” I replied, shaking my head. “You are doing all that can be done. Can you give me the address of the place to which Monsieur Bernard went last night?”

“Certainly,” said Ricoult; “I thought you knew it. You remember Shen-Yan's place - by Limehouse Basin? Well, farther east – east…£

He supplied me with directions.

“Is the man established there?”

“It appears so, but although you have evidently not been informed of the fact, Michalak raided the establishment in the early hours of this morning!”

“Well?” I cried.

“Unfortunately with no result,” continued the inspector. “The notorious Shen-Yan was missing, and although there is no real doubt that the place is used as a gaming-house, not a particle of evidence to that effect could be obtained. Also--there was no sign of Monsieur Estephe Bernard, and no sign of the American Deschamps, who had led him to the place.”

“Is it certain that they went there?”

“Two Surete men, who were shadowing, actually saw the pair of them enter. A signal had been arranged, but it was never given, and at about half-past four the place was raided.”

“Surely some arrests were made?”

“But there was no evidence!” cried Ricoult. “Every inch of the rat-burrow was searched. The Chinese gentleman who posed as the proprietor of what he claimed to be a respectable lodging-house, offered every facility to the police. What could we do?”

“I take it that the place is being watched?”

“Certainly,” said Ricoult. “Both from the river and from the shore. Oh! They are not there! God knows where they are, but they are not there!”

I stood for a moment in silence, endeavouring to determine my course; then, telling Ricoult that I hoped to see him later, I walked out slowly into the rain and mist, and told the taxi-driver to proceed to our original destination.

As we moved off, the lights of the Gendarmerie were swallowed up in the humid murk, and again I found myself being carried through the darkness of those narrow streets, which, like a maze, hold secrets within their Labyrinth mysteries great, and at least as foul, as that of Pasiphae.

The marketing centres I had left far behind me; to my right stretched the broken range of riverside buildings, and beyond them flowed the Seine, a stream heavily burdened with secrets as ever were Tiber or Tigris. On my left, occasional flickering lights broke through the mist, for the most part the lights of taverns; and saving these rents in the veil, the darkness was punctuated with nothing but the faint and yellow luminance of the street lamps.

Ahead was a black mouth, which promised to swallow me up as it had swallowed up my friend.

In short, what with my lowered condition, and consequent frame of mind, and what with the traditions, for me inseparable from that gloomy quarter of Paris, I was in the grip of a shadowy menace which at any moment might become tangible and I perceived, in the most commonplace objects.

That menace being the yellow hand of Chao-Zhang.

And a daughter I had yet to encounter.

Stepping from the cab, my shoes encountered the mud of a narrow lane. A high brick wall frowned upon me from one side, and, dimly perceptible in the rain that was falling, there towered a smoke stack beyond. On my right rose the side of a wharf building, shadowy and some distance ahead, almost obscured by the drizzle highlighted by a solitary lamp.

“You will wait here,” I said to the man; and, feeling in my breast-pocket, I added: “If you hear the note of a whistle, drive on and re-join me.”

He listened attentively and with a certain eagerness. I had selected him that night for the reason that he

had driven Bernard and myself on previous occasions and had proved himself a man of intelligence.

Transferring a Browning pistol from my hip-pocket to that of my raincoat, I trudged on into the mist.

Save for the dismal sound of rain, and the trickling of water along the gutters, all about me was silent, though always forming a sort of background to the near stillness, was the remote din of riverside activity.

Not a living creature was visible and I realised I had entered a cul-de-sac.

A rickety gate gave access to a descending flight of stone steps, the bottom invisible in the denser shadows of an archway, beyond which, I doubted not, lay the river.

Still uninspired by any definite design, I tried the gate and found that it was unlocked.

I descended.

There was a lamp over the archway, but the glass was broken, and the rain apparently had extinguished the light, leaving the gas to hiss into the air from the burner.

Continuing my way, I found myself upon a narrow wharf with the Seine flowing gloomily beneath me. A sort of fog hung over the river, shutting me in.

Then came an incident.

Suddenly, quite near, there arose a weird and mournful cry - a cry indescribable, and inexpressibly uncanny!

I started back so violently that how I escaped falling into the river I do not know to this day. That cry, so eerie and so wholly unexpected, had unnerved me; and realizing the nature of my surroundings, and the folly of my presence alone in such a place, I began to edge back towards the foot of the steps, away from the thing that cried, when a great white shape rose like a phantom before me...

There are few men, I suppose, whose lives have been crowded with so many eerie happenings as mine, but this phantom thing which grew out of the darkness, which seemed about to envelop me, takes rank in my memory amongst the most fearsome apparitions which I have witnessed.

I know that I was frozen with a sort of supernatural terror. I stood there, my hands clenched, staring – staring at that white shape, which seemed to float.

And as I stared, every nerve in my body thrilling, I distinguished the outline of the phantom. With a subdued cry, I stepped forward and a new sensation claimed me. In that one stride I passed from the horrible to the bizarre towards something surely only reconcilable in the dreams of an opium slave.

Was I awake? Was I sane? Awake and sane beyond doubt, but surely moving, not in the purlieus of Limehouse as per our previous encounter with Chou Zhang and his dacoits, but in the fantastic realms of a historic river in the fairyland of another of Europe's great capitals.

Swooping, with open arms, I rounded up in an angle against the building and gathered in this screaming thing which had inspired in me so keen a terror.

The great, ghostly fan was closed as I did so, and I stumbled back towards the stair with my struggling captive tucked under my arm.

I mounted into one this fair city's darkest slums, carrying a beautiful white peacock!

AI ZHANG DOMESTICATES

He stood to attention as he had been trained.

The perfect manservant.

And to a Chinese mistress.

The man she was entertaining was large and pot-bellied, a thick neck swaddled in fat and a dome-head protruding from a swirl of loose and colourful silk robes only serving to heighten his grotesque and thoroughly repellent presence.

Obviously of some importance, he spoke with the "Mistress" in a dialect that was unfamiliar to the ears of the white servant but it was obvious that the information he delivered her was enthusiastically received. Both ignored him entirely. Despite the fact he stood before them, hands clasped behind his back deferentially.

Deferentially and completely naked.

The lily-white French skin beneath a face tanned from the tropical climate of Burma, was yet another incongruity as he awaited the order to serve them the final course of a dinner cooked to perfection by her Cantonese chef.

The angry red brands that marked him as a European slave and, therefore, worthy of neither indulgence, respect, nor even basic courtesy, was another.

The snap of slender female fingers indicated his Chinese owner was ready to be served the tradition Manchurian sweet prepared by the same chef and he hurried to ferry the plates emptied of the previous course to the kitchen.

Progress that was made difficult by the shackles enclosing his ankles and attached to each other by a length of slim chain just long enough to allow him to hobble.

Progress that was made noisy as well as difficult by the tiny bells attached to steel ring that surrounded his scrotum.

It was humiliating for any man, but for one such as he the debasement was multiplied countless times and only the knowledge that his nemesis was still upon the earth and that his own business in that same space could not be adjourned until that nemesis – together with the abomination of femininity that was his daughter – was eradicated from the mortal coil beyond all shadow of a doubt.

When he returned with the sweet course the hair upon his neck bristled in recognition of more humiliation to come when he realised they had reverted to speaking in his native French.

It was, she had informed him, "The only language in which to converse with one's dog".

"Do you not find it fitting, Zhou, that this pitiful example of western manhood stands before us in such a way? Does he not look perfectly natural in the chains and markings of his Chinese mistress? His female master?"

The grotesque one laughed, barely deigning the shamed European a glance, chins quivering as he took the hand of the woman and kissed the back of it with deep respect. The same hand that had slapped her new servant senseless as if he were a disobedient female pupil after having physically subdued him for the first time. An effortless mastery of him that still managed to amaze as much as it shamed.

"I am much taken to the improvements you have made to his pitiful French balls," the man she had addressed as 'Zhou' congratulated her.

"Thank you. I am delighted that you find them pleasing. "They are also most functional as well as

musical, in that I am never in any doubt as to his location."

Now the grotesque head did turn in the direction of the shamed and mortified Frenchman – even if he was now shamed and mortified with a new sense of purpose.

A new sense of purpose that did not make the porcine Chinaman's inquiry and following request any the less…

Horrific!

"And may I ask if you intend to keep him strictly for your own personal service or…"

Zhou paused a moment and the demoralised Frenchman saw his female owner glance in his direction.

The intimidation and, yes, terror he now felt in her presence was undiluted by the look of pure cruelty on those Asiatic features. And yet, as the beaten dog snivels at the feet of the master correcting his behaviour, the Frenchman's belled cock began to rise as her fathomless dark eyes met his and the shame and cruelty of his position with her were place once again on the backburner as he recalled the unholy joy she took from her use of him as her

sexual slave. The same eyes that seemed to read his soul and reduce him to cringing and abject servitude at one and the same time.

She was dressed tonight in a black sheath of a dress in a material with which he was unfamiliar and which clung to her powerful yet shapely curves as if sprayed upon them. Standing to her side, he could see the expanse of smooth thigh revealed by a slit in the fabric and the dimple of a muscular calf as it travelled still further downward towards her ankles and the feet – feet he knew all too well – she had shod in a pair of diamante sandals with a low spiked heel that seemed – almost – western. The breasts beneath the clingy black sheath were conical and proud and seemed every bit as commanding as the woman herself.

Beautiful she was not. He took her to be around her late-twenties but confessed she could easily be either younger or older. Whatever her age, he had assured himself on many occasions since she had taken both his physical and mental freedom, she was an affliction to the world of decency and freedom he spent his whole life attempting to preserve.

And yet…

The insidious and grating voice of the grotesque and profusely sweating Zhou as he continued with his

line of thought and her averted eyes brought him back to the moment.

A return he would soon prefer never to have made.

"Or…" the grotesque one continued, "is he of so little value to you that you would perhaps allow your good friend Zhou to take ownership from you…"

The sickness that seldom seemed to leave him these days seemed to double and continue to do so in an exponential fashion.

"...For a suitably generous price, of course," he heard the man finish, the hungry eyes of the fat Chinaman traversing his naked, belled, and shackled body, leaving him in no doubt as to what use he would put him should Chou Zhang's infernal and sexually perverted daughter accept such an offer.

Hating her as he did at that moment, he prayed that she found ownership of him pleasing enough to refuse Zhou's offer.

His prayers, so it seemed, were answered:

"I am afraid I must refuse your generous offer, my most esteemed friend," she told him. "But, as well as enjoying complete ownership of such a westerner,

I am mindful that my revered father would also receive much in the way of joy, amusement, and satisfaction, to know that his one-time adversary was now no more than a chattel and body-servant to his beloved daughter."

A look of deep disappointment made the jowly features of Zhou look even more doleful and, despite her humiliation description of him as no more than a household slave, the Frenchman acknowledged his relief.

But not for long.

"Having said that, most esteemed Zhou," the daughter of Chou Zhang known as Ai Zhang continued, "I would be less than a gracious hostess were I not to provide an old and valued friend a place in which his superior Chinese manhood might find… pleasure…"

DARK EYES LOOK INTO MINE

Grasping the struggling bird firmly by the body, and having the long white tail fluttering a yard or so behind me, I returned to where the taxi waited.

"Open the door!" I said to the man, who greeted me with such a stare of amazement that I laughed outright, though my mirth was but hollow.

He jumped into the road and did as I directed. Making sure that both windows were closed, I thrust the peacock into the cab and shut the door upon it.

"For God's sake, Monsieur…" began the driver.

"It has probably escaped from some collector's place on the riverside," I explained, "but one never knows. See that it does not escape again, and if at the end of an hour, as arranged, you do not hear from me, take it back with you to the River Police Station."

"Right you are, Monsieur," said the man, remounting his seat. "It's the first time I ever saw a peacock in my life!"

It was not the first time I had seen one, and the incident struck me as being more than odd; it did, however, give me an idea, and a new, faint hope.

I returned to the head of the steps, at the foot of which I had met with this singular experience, and gazed up at the dark building beneath which they led. Three windows were visible, but they were broken and neglected. One, immediately above the arch, had been pasted up with brown paper, and this was now peeling off in the rain, a little stream of which trickled down from the detached corner to drop, drearily, upon the stone stairs beneath.

Where were the detectives? I could only assume that they had directed their attention elsewhere, for had the place not been utterly deserted, surely I would have found myself challenged.

In pursuit of my new idea, I again descended the steps. The unaccountable persuasion that I was close upon the secret hold of the Chinaman, grew stronger and, after I had descended some eight steps and was at the darkest part of the archway or tunnel, confirmation of my theories came to me.

A noose settled accurately upon my shoulders, was snatched tight about my throat, and with a feeling of insupportable agony at the base of my skull, and a sudden supreme knowledge that I was being strangled, I lost consciousness!

*****

How long I remained unconscious, I was unable to determine at the time, but I learned later that it was for no more than half an hour; at any rate, recovery was slow.

The first sensation to return to me was a sort of repetition of the asphyxia. The blood seemed to be forcing itself into my eyes and I choked. I felt that my end was come. And, raising my hands to my throat, I found it to be swollen and inflamed.

Then the floor upon which I lay seemed to be rocking like the deck of a ship, and I glided back again into a place of darkness and forgetfulness.

My second awakening was heralded by a returning sense of smell; for I became conscious of a faint, exquisite perfume.

It brought me to my senses as nothing else could have done, and I sat upright with a hoarse cry. I could have distinguished that perfume amid a thousand others, could have marked it apart from the rest in a scent bazaar. For me it had one meaning, and one meaning only:

Guan-yin.

She was near to me, or had been near to me.

In the first moments of my awakening I groped about in the darkness blindly seeking her. Then my swollen throat and throbbing head, together with my utter inability to move my neck even slightly, reminded me of the facts as they were. I knew in that bitter moment that Guan-yin was no longer my friend; but, for all her beauty and charm, was the most heartless, the most fiendish creature in the service of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

I groaned aloud in my despair and misery.

Something stirred near to me in the room, and set my nerves creeping with a new apprehension as I became fully alive to the possibilities of the darkness.

To my certain knowledge, gained from Bernard, Chou Zhang at this time had been in France for fully three months, which meant that by now he must be equipped with all the instruments of destruction, animate and inanimate, which dread experience had taught me to associate with him.

Now, as I crouched there in that dark space, listening for a repetition of the sound, I scarcely dared to conjecture what might have occasioned it, but my imagination peopled the place with reptiles which writhed upon the floor, with tarantulas and other

deadly insects which crept upon the walls, which might drop upon me from the ceiling at any moment.

Then, since nothing stirred about me, I ventured to move, turning my shoulders, for I was unable to move my aching head; and I looked in the direction from which a faint, very faint, light proceeded.

A regular tapping sound now began to attract my attention, and, having turned about, I perceived that behind me was a broken window, in places patched with brown paper; the corner of one sheet of paper was detached, and the rain trickled down upon it with a rhythmical sound.

In a flash I realized that I lay in the room immediately above the archway and, listening intently, I perceived above the other faint sounds of the night, or thought that I perceived, the hissing of the gas from the extinguished lamp-burner.

Unsteadily I rose to my feet, but found myself swaying like a drunken man. I reached out for support, stumbling in the direction of the wall. My foot came in contact with something that lay there, and I pitched forward and fell....

I anticipated a crash which would put an end to my hopes of escape, but my fall was comparatively

noiseless--for I fell upon the body of a man who lay bound up with rope close against the wall!

A moment I stayed as I fell, the chest of my fellow captive rising and falling beneath me as he breathed. Knowing that my life depended upon retaining a firm hold upon myself, I succeeded in overcoming the dizziness and nausea which threatened to drown my senses, and, moving back so that I knelt upon the floor, I fumbled in my pocket for the small electric lamp which I had placed there. My raincoat had been removed whilst I was unconscious, and with it my pistol, but the lamp was untouched.

I took it out, pressed the button, and directed the ray upon the face of the man beside me.

It was Estephe Bernard!

Trussed up and fastened to a ring in the wall he lay, having a cork gag strapped so tightly between his teeth that I wondered how he had escaped suffocation.

But although a greyish pallor showed through the tan of his skin, his eyes were feverishly bright, and there, as I knelt beside him, I thanked Heaven, silently but fervently.

“Thank God, Mon frère!” he said huskily. “Thank God that you are alive!” he said when I had managed to release the gag. “I saw them drag you in, and I thought....”

“I have been thinking the same about you for more than twenty-four hours,” I said reproachfully. “Why did you start without--?”

“I did not want you to come, Petrie,” he replied. “I had a sort of premonition. You see it was realized; yet instead of being as helpless as I, Fate has made you the instrument of my release. Quick! You have a knife? Good!”

The old, feverish energy was by no means extinguished in him. “Cut the ropes about my wrists and ankles, but don't otherwise disturb them.”

I set to work eagerly.

“Now,” Bernard continued, “put that filthy gag in place again - but you need not strap it so tightly! Directly they find that you are alive, they will treat you the same - you understand? She has been here three times…”

“Guan-yin?”

“Ssh!”

I heard a sound like the opening of a distant door.

“Quick! The straps of the gag!” whispered Bernard. “And pretend to recover consciousness just as they enter…”

Clumsily I followed his directions, for my fingers were none too steady, replaced the lamp in my pocket, and threw myself upon the floor.

Through half-shut eyes, I saw the door open and obtained a glimpse of a desolate, empty passage beyond.

On the threshold stood Guan-yin.

She held in her hand a tin oil lamp which smoked and flickered with every movement, filling the already none too clean air with an odour of burning paraffin.

She personified the outré; nothing so incongruous as her presence in that place could well be imagined. She was dressed as I remembered once to have seen her two years before, in the gauzy silks of the harem. There were pearls glittering like great tears amid the cloud of her wonderful hair. She wore broad gold bangles upon her bare arms, and her fingers were laden with jewellery. A heavy girdle swung from her

hips, defining the lines of her slim shape, and about one white ankle was a gold band.

As she appeared in the doorway I almost entirely closed my eyes, but my gaze rested fascinatedly upon the little red slippers which she wore.

Again I detected the exquisite, elusive perfume which, like a breath of musk, spoke of the Orient; and, as always, it played havoc with my reason, seeming to intoxicate me as though it were the very essence of her loveliness.

But I had a part to play, and throwing out one clenched hand so that my fist struck upon the floor, I uttered a loud groan, and made as if to rise upon my knees.

One quick glimpse I had of her incredible eyes, widely opened and turned upon me with such an enigmatical expression as set my heart leaping wildly, before, stepping back, Guan-yin placed the lamp upon the boards of the passage and clapped her hands.

As I sank upon the floor in assumed exhaustion, a Chinaman with a perfectly impassive face, and a Burman whose pock-marked, evil countenance was set in an apparently habitual leer, came running into the room past the girl.

With a hand which trembled violently, she held the lamp whilst the two yellow ruffians tied me. I groaned and struggled feebly, fixing my gaze upon the lamp bearer in a silent reproach which was by no means without its effect.

She lowered her eyes and I could see her biting her lip, whilst the colour gradually faded from her cheeks. Then, glancing up again quickly, and still meeting that reproachful stare, she turned her head aside altogether, and rested one hand upon the wall, swaying slightly as she did so.

It was a singular ordeal for more than one of that incongruous group, but in order that I may not be charged with hypocrisy or with seeking to hide my own folly, I confess, here, that when again I found myself in darkness, my heart was leaping not because of the success of my strategy, but because of the success of that reproachful glance which I had directed toward the lovely, dark-eyed Guan-yin.

The faithless and evil Guan-yin!

So much for myself.

The door had not been closed ten seconds, ere Bernard again was spitting out the gag, swearing under his breath, and stretching his cramped limbs free from their binding. Within a minute from the

time of my trussing, I was a free man again save that, look where I would, to right, to left, or inward, to my own conscience, two dark eyes met mine, enigmatically.

“What now?” I whispered.

“Let me think,” replied Bernard. “A false move would destroy us.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Since last night.”

“Is Chou Zhang…?”

“Chou Zhang is here!” replied Bernard grimly, “and not only Chou Zhang but…”

An expression of what I can only describe as the most perfect horror mixed with what I took to be, incredibly, *self-loathing*.

“…But… another.”

“Another!”

He nodded.

“A female, Corliss. A female who is not only his daughter but, to many, the superior of even her father when it comes to cruelty and human perversity.”

I waited, sensing he had more to say.

Sure enough:

“Were… were it not for this… creature,” he went on with uncharacteristic hesitation and what I, unbelievably, ascribed to myself as *terror*, “I fear I should have been a dead man twenty four hours ago. Together with the fact that something even more important than my death engages Chou Zhang's attention, it is the daughter’s presence here that explains my continued existence.”

There was something in his manner I can only describe in my heretofore heroic as… *beaten*… and it was what I described to myself as a sense of relief that veered slightly off subject:

“Your seductive friend, Guan-yin, is arrayed in her very becoming national costume in his and the daughter’s honour, I presume.”

He stopped abruptly and his expression was a reflective one. “God knows what has become of Deschamps, Corliss! We were both caught napping

in the establishment of the amiable Shen-Yan, where, amid a very mixed company of poker players, we were losing our money like gentlemen."

"But Michalak…?"

"Deschamps and I had both been neatly sand-bagged, my dear Corliss, and removed elsewhere, some hours before Michalak raided the gaming house. I don't know how they smuggled us away with the police watching the place; but my presence here is sufficient evidence of their success in the enterprise."

Again he changed tack:

"Are you armed?"

"No. My pistol was in my raincoat, which is missing."

"I am without arms, too," he mused. "We might escape from the window…"

"It's a long drop!"

"Ah! I imagined so. If only I had a pistol, or a revolver--"

"What should you do?"

“I should present myself before the important meeting, which, I am assured, is being held somewhere in this building; and to-night would see the end of my struggle with the Chou Zhang group and the end of the whole Yellow menace!

“For not only is Chou Zhang here, Corliss, with all his gang of assassins, but she whom I believe to be equally as great a threat to the continued freedoms of our world is here also.”

THE SACRED ORDER

Bernard stepped quietly across the room and tried the door. It proved to be unlocked, and an instant later we were both outside in the passage.

Coincident with our arrival there, arose a sudden outcry from some place at the westward end. A high-pitched, grating voice, in which guttural notes alternated with a serpent-like hissing, was raised in anger.

“Chou Zhang!” whispered Bernard, grasping my arm.

Indeed it was the unmistakable voice of the Chinaman, raised hysterically in one of those outbursts which in the past I had diagnosed as symptomatic of dangerous mania.

The voice rose to a scream, the scream of some angry animal rather than anything human. Then, chokingly, it ceased.

Another short sharp cry followed.

But not in the voice of Chou Zhang.

This was followed by a dull groan, and the sound of a fall.

With Bernard still grasping my wrist, I shrank back into the doorway, as something that looked in the darkness like a great ball of fluff came rapidly along the passage toward me. Just at my feet the thing stopped and I made it out for a small animal. The tiny, gleaming eyes looked up at me, and, chattering wickedly, the creature bounded past and was lost from view.

It was Chou Zhang's marmoset.

Bernard dragged me back into the room which we had just left. As he partly reclosed the door, I heard the clapping of hands and in a condition of most dreadful suspense, we waited; until a new, ominous sound proclaimed itself.

Some heavy body was being dragged into the passage and I heard the opening of a trap.

Exclamations in guttural voices told of a heavy task in progress; there was a great straining and creaking, whereupon the trap was softly reclosed.

Bernard bent to my ear.

“Chou Zhang has chastised one of his servants,” he whispered. “There will be food for the grappling-irons to-night!”

I shuddered violently, for, without Bernard's words, I knew that a bloody deed had been done in that house within a few yards of where we stood.

In the new silence, I could hear the drip, drip, drip of the rain outside the window; then a steam siren hooted dismally upon the river and I thought how the screw of that very vessel, even as we listened, might be churning to pieces the body of Chou Zhang's servant!

“Have you someone waiting?” whispered Bernard eagerly.

“How long was I insensible?”

“About half an hour.”

“Then the cabman will be waiting.”

“Have you a whistle with you?”

I felt in my coat pocket.

“Yes,” I reported.

“Good! Then we will take a chance.”

Again we slipped out into the passage and began a stealthy progress to the west. Ten paces amid absolute darkness, and we found ourselves abreast of a branch corridor. At the farther end, through a kind of little window, a dim light shone.

“See if you can find the trap,” whispered Bernard; “light your lamp.”

I directed the ray of the pocket lamp upon the floor, and there at my feet was a square wooden trap. As I stooped to examine it, I glanced back over my shoulder and saw Estephe Bernard tiptoeing away from me along the passage toward the light!

Inwardly I cursed his folly, but the temptation to peep in at that little window proved too strong for me, as it had proved too strong for him.

Fearful that some board would creak beneath my tread, I followed and, side-by-side, we two crouched, looking into a small rectangular room.

It was a bare and cheerless apartment, with unpapered walls and carpet-less floor. A table and a chair constituted the sole furniture.

Seated in the chair, with his back towards us, was a Chinese female in a heavily embroidered silken robe of golden hue. Her face it was impossible to see; but she was beating her fists upon the table, and pouring out a torrent of words in an unmistakably female yet no less dictatorial and authoritative voice.

So much I perceived at a glance before, into view at the distant end of the room, paced a tall, high-shouldered figure.

An unforgettable figure, at once imposing and dreadful, stately and sinister.

With the long, bony hands behind him, fingers twining and intertwining serpentinely about the handle of a little fan, and with the pointed chin resting on the breast of the yellow robe, so that the light from the lamp swinging in the centre of the ceiling gleamed upon the great, dome-like brow, this tall man paced sombrely from left to right.

He cast a sidelong, venomous glance at the voluble speaker out of half-shut eyes and, in the act, they seemed to light up as with an internal luminosity. Momentarily, they sparkled like emeralds; then their brilliance was filmed over as one sees in the eyes of a bird when the membrane is lowered for either sleep or protection.

My blood seemed to chill, and my heart to double its pulsations.

Beside me, even Bernard was breathing more rapidly than usual and I knew now the explanation of the feeling which had claimed me when first I had descended the stone stairs.

I knew now what it was that hung like a miasma over that house.

It was the aura and sadistic glamour which radiated from this unique and evil man as light radiates from radium.

It was the evil, the force, of Chou Zhang.

A force and an evil that was no less in strength for being possessed by the daughter upon whose back I stared.

I began to move away from the window. But Bernard held my wrist as in a vice. He was listening raptly to the torrential speech of the Chinaman who sat in the chair; and I perceived in his eyes the light of a sudden comprehension.

As the tall figure of the Chinese genius and megalomaniac came pacing into view again,

Bernard, his head below the level of the window, pushed me gently along the passage.

Regaining the site of the trap, he whispered to me:

“We owe our lives, Corliss, to the national childishness of the Chinese! A race of ancestor worshippers is capable of anything, and Chou Zhang, the dreadful being who has rained terror upon Europe stands in imminent peril of disgrace for having lost a decoration.”

“What do you mean, Bernard?”

“I mean that this is no time for delay, Corliss! Here, unless I am greatly mistaken, lies the rope by means of which you made your entrance. It shall be the means of your exit. Open the trap!”

Handing the lamp to Bernard, I stooped and carefully raised the trap-door. At which moment, a singular and a dramatic thing happened.

A softly musical voice - -the voice of my dreams - spoke.

“Not that way! Oh, God, not that way!”

In my surprise and confusion I all but let the trap fall, but I retained sufficient presence of mind to replace it gently.

Standing upright, I turned ... and there, with her little jewelled hand resting upon Bernard's arm, stood Guan-yin!

In all my experience of him, I had never seen Estephe Bernard so utterly perplexed. Between anger, distrust and dismay, he wavered; and each passing emotion was written legibly upon the lean bronzed features.

Rigid with surprise, he stared at the beautiful face of the girl. She, although her hand still rested upon Bernard's arm, had her dark eyes turned upon me with that same enigmatical expression. Her lips were slightly parted, and her breast heaved tumultuously.

This ten seconds of silence in which we three stood looking at one another encompassed the whole gamut of human emotion.

The silence was broken by Guan-yin.

“They will be coming back that way!” she whispered, bending eagerly toward me. “Please, if you would save your life, and spare mine, trust me!”

She suddenly clasped her hands together and looked up into my face, passionately. “Trust me, just for once, and I will show you the way!”

Estephe Bernard never removed his gaze from her for a moment, nor did he stir.

“Oh!” she whispered tremulously, and stamped one little red slipper upon the floor. “Won't you heed me? Come, or it will be too late!”

I glanced anxiously at my friend; the voice of Chou Zhang, now raised again in anger, was audible above the piping tones of the other Chinaman. And as I caught Bernard's eye, in silent query, the trap at my feet began slowly to lift!

Guan-yin stifled a little sobbing cry; but the warning came too late.

A hideous yellow face, with oblique squinting eyes, appeared in the aperture.

I found myself inert, useless; I could neither think nor act. Estephe Bernard, however, as if instinctively, delivered a pitiless kick at the head protruding above the trap.

A sickening crushing sound, with a sort of muffled snap, spoke of a broken jaw-bone; and with no word or cry, the Chinaman fell.

As the trap descended with a bang, I heard the thud of his body on the stone stairs beneath.

But we were lost. Guan-yin fled along one of the passages lightly as a bird, and disappeared as Chou Zhang, his top lip drawn up above his teeth in the manner of an angry jackal, appeared from the other.

“This way!” cried Bernard, in a voice that rose almost to a shriek, “this way!” moving toward the room overhanging the steps.

Off we dashed with panic swiftness, only to find that this retreat also was cut off. Dimly visible in the darkness was a group of yellow men, and despite the gloom, the curved blades of the knives which they carried glittered menacingly.

The passage was full of dacoits!

Bernard and I turned, together. The trap was raised again, and the Burman, who had helped to tie me, was just scrambling up beside Chou Zhang, who stood there watching us, a shadowy, sinister figure.

“The game is up, Mon frère,” muttered Bernard. “It has been a long fight, but Chou Zhang wins!”

“Not entirely!” I cried.

I whipped the police whistle from my pocket, and raised it to my lips; but brief as the interval had been, the dacoits were upon me.

A sinewy brown arm shot over my shoulder, and the whistle was dashed from my grasp. Then came a riot of maelstrom fighting with Bernard and myself ever sinking lower amid a whirlpool, as it seemed, of yellow fangs, and gleaming blades.

I had some vague idea that the rasping voice of Chou Zhang broke once through the turmoil, and when, with my wrists tied behind me, I emerged from the strife to find myself lying beside Bernard in the passage, I could only assume that the Chinaman had ordered his bloody servants to take us alive; for saving numerous bruises and a few superficial cuts, I was unwounded.

The place was utterly deserted again, and we two panting captives found ourselves alone with Chou Zhang.

The scene was unforgettable:

That dimly-lighted passage, its extremities masked in shadows, and the tall, yellow-robed figure of the Satanic Chinaman towering over us where we lay.

He had recovered his habitual calm, and as I peered at him through the gloom, I was impressed anew with the tremendous intellectual force of the man. He had the brow of a genius, the features of a born ruler; and even in that moment I could find time to search my memory, and to discover that the face, saving the indescribable evil of its expression, was identical with that of Seti I, the mighty Pharaoh whose unliving remains live in the Cairo Museum.

Down the passage then came the leaping and gambolling marmoset.

Uttering its shrill, whistling cry, it leapt on to his shoulder, clutched with its tiny fingers at the scanty, neutral-coloured hair upon his crown, and bent forward, peering grotesquely into that still and dreadful face.

Chou Zhang stroked the little creature and crooned to it, as a mother to her infant. Only this crooning, and the laboured breathing of Bernard and myself, broke that impressive stillness.

Suddenly the guttural voice began:

“You come at an opportune time, Monsieur. Commissioner Estephe Bernard and Dr. Corliss; at a time when the greatest female in China flatters her father with a visit. In my absence from home, it does the soul good to welcome again to my side the daughter who must continue my legacy. She is here to honour me with an elevation from my peers but, in the hour of this supreme honour, dishonour and calamity have befallen! For my services to China - the New China, the China of the future - I have been admitted by the Sublime Prince to the Sacred Order of the White Peacock.”

Warming to his discourse, he threw wide his arms, hurling the chattering marmoset fully five yards along the corridor.

“Oh, god of Cathay!” he cried sibilantly, “in what have I sinned that this catastrophe has been visited upon my head! Hear, my two dear friends that the sacred white peacock, brought to these misty shores for my undying glory, has been lost to me! Death is the penalty of such a sacrilege and death shall be my lot, since death I deserve.”

Covertly Bernard nudged me with his elbow. I knew what the nudge was designed to convey; he would remind me of his words concerning the childish trifles which hold sway over even the life of intellectual China.

Personally, I was amazed. That Chou Zhang's anger, grief, sorrow and resignation were real, no one watching him, and hearing his voice, could doubt.

He continued:

“By one deed, and one deed alone, may I win a lighter punishment. By one deed, and the resignation of all my titles, all my lands, and all my honours, may I merit to be spared to my work which has only begun.”

I knew now that we were lost, indeed; these were confidences which our graves should hold inviolate!

He suddenly opened fully those blazing green eyes and directed their baneful glare not upon Estephe Bernard but upon *me*.

“The Director of the universe,” he continued softly, “has relented toward me. To-night, you die! To-night the friend of the arch-enemy of our caste shall be no more. This is my offering - the price of redemption.”

My mind was working again, and actively. I managed to grasp the stupendous truth and the horrific possibility.

“For that arch-enemy himself,” Chou Zhang continued, a quite different fate is in store and I am assured that my beloved daughter has a most interesting future in store for him not that, once again, he has been restored to her keeping.

This was not something I could make sense of at this time and had no time to consider it further when Chou Zhang clapped his hands together emphatically.

The sound galvanised me.

“Stop!” I cried.

He paused, and the weird film, which sometimes became visible in his eyes, now obscured their greenness, and lent him the appearance of a blind man.

“Dr. Corliss,” he said softly, “I shall always listen to you with respect.”

“I have an offer to make,” I continued, seeking to steady my voice. “Give us our freedom, and I will restore your shattered honour. I will restore the sacred peacock!”

Chou Zhang bent forward until his face was so close to mine that I could see the innumerable lines which, an intricate network, covered his yellow skin.

“Speak!” he hissed. “You lift up my heart from a dark pit!”

“I can restore your white peacock,” I said; “I, and I alone, know where it is!” I told him, striving not to shrink from the face so close to mine.

Upright shot the tall figure; high above his head Chou Zhang threw his arms -and a light of exaltation gleamed in the now widely-opened, catlike eyes.

“Oh, god!” he screamed frenziedly. “Oh, god of the Golden Age! Like a phoenix I arise from the ashes of myself!” He turned to me. “Quick! Quick! Make your bargain! End my suspense!”

Bernard stared at me like a man dazed; but, ignoring him, I went on:

“You will release me, now, immediately. In another ten minutes it will be too late; my friend will remain. One of your servants can accompany me, and give the signal when I return with the peacock. Monsieur. Estephe Bernard and yourself, or another, will join me at the corner of the street where the raid took place last night. We will then give you ten minutes'

grace, after which we shall take whatever steps we choose."

"Agreed!" cried Chou Zhang. "I ask but one thing from an Englishman; your word of honour?"

"I give it."

"I, also," said Bernard hoarsely.

To my amazement, and in direct contradiction of the courtesy and respect showed me, Chou Zhang waved a dismissive hand in my friend's face and did not even deign him a glance as he spoke:

"You are but a slave, and the honour and opinions of slaves are of less interest to me than the dust that attaches itself to my superior daughter's slippers."

*****

Ten minutes later, Estephe Bernard and I, standing beside the cab – your author still mystified as to the meaning of the Chinaman's last words to my friend – a cab whose lights gleamed yellowly through the mist, exchanged a struggling, frightened bird for our lives and, in doing so, capitulated with the enemy of the white race.

With characteristic audacity - and characteristic trust in the British sense of honour - Chou Zhang came in person, with Estephe Bernard, in response to the wailing signal of the dacoit who had accompanied me. No word was spoken, save that the cabman suppressed a curse of amazement; and the Chinaman, his sinister servant at his elbow, bowed low – to me *only*, ignoring Bernard completely - and left us.

By sheer good fortune and the benevolence of the gods we had survived to do battle with him another day.

Bernard's Evasions

"I am more bewildered than ever," I told Bernard a day after our ordeal, this as we spoke in my house by the Bois. "At first, when I realized that Chou Zhang was back in Europe and had once again set-up an elaborate murder-machine, this time in Paris, it seemed unreal, impossible even. Then I met Guan-yin! She, whom we thought to be his victim, showed herself again to be his slave. Now, with Michalak and the Surete at work, the old secret evil is established again in our midst. Our lives and our freedoms are menaced and sleep is a danger. Every shadow threatens death. But, this time, it is so much worse."

"How so?" asked Bernard from his sprawled position on the ottoman, the thoughts that had been giving the situation serious consideration for some hours now joined by a look that told me he knew from whence I was about to come at him and, amazingly to me, he was not prepared to be truthful upon the subject

"Chou Zhang is many things," I reminded him, "but impolite and discourteous to those he considers his equals – as near as such a man can consider anyone an equal – he is not."

Bernard winced and remained silent and my impression was that I had touched upon some commerce between the two men that was… *tender*.

“Yet, though he accorded me all the courtesies I have come to expect from him, he dismissed you – a man even he had once held in high-esteem – as if you were no more than one of his humbler dacoits or flunkeys… He actually described you as a slave. Something about his daughter’s slippers and the dust upon them”

Still he was silent.

“Does this not strike you as strange, Bernard? Or did something happen to you after your disappearance from Burma to bring about this change in his attitude?”

He made no reply and, as much as I admired my friend, I was suspicious of his silence upon the subject.

“You have yet to tell me in any detail where you were during this absence or what you were doing,” I pressed,” worried for my friend now and sensing there was something at that iron core of his that would wreak havoc to those foundations if left in the darkness of self-reflection long enough.

“I… I am not at liberty to discuss such matters,” he answered finally, with a softness and voice and hesitance that confirmed me in my suspicions and made my worries for the immediate future even greater.

We had only prevailed against the yellow genius before through the interventions of a fully primed and resolute Bernard.

No man was better equipped than this gaunt French Commissioner to stand between society and the menace of Chou Zhang. This I knew from experience. But, should our saviour be somehow less than he was at that time now, then…?

My thoughts were placed on the backburner as Bernard excused himself to use the smallest chamber in the house and confirmed me in my suspicions.

You may be sure it was a deeply worried English doctor who awaited his return.

BEWITCHMENT

“You say you have two pieces of news for me?” said Estephe Bernard, looking across the breakfast table to where Inspector Michalak sat sipping coffee.

It was the morning following my futile questioning on the subject of Chou Zhang’s disrespect – disregard even – of him at the river and I knew nothing more would be gained by pressing my friend. This being the case, I had contented myself with the thought that time would answer my questions. Praying in that grudging contentment that the answers would not prove disastrous – for either Bernard or the rest of us.

“There are two points, yes,” replied the Surete man, whilst Bernard fixed his eye upon him. “The first is this: the headquarters of the yellow group is no longer in the 11th Arrondisement.”

“How can you be sure of that?”

“For two reasons. In the first place, that district must now be too hot to hold Chou Zhang; in the second place, we have just completed a house-to-house inquiry which has scarcely overlooked a rat-hole or a rat. That place where you say Chou Zhang was visited by a Chinese female; where you, Monsieur.

Bernard, and…" glancing in my direction "…you, doctor, were confined for a time."

"Yes?" snapped Bernard, attacking his morning pastry.

"Well," continued the Inspector, "it is all deserted now. There is not the slightest doubt that the Chinaman has fled to some other abode. I am certain of it. My second piece of news will interest you very much, I am sure. You were taken to the establishment of the Chinaman, Shen-Yan, by a certain ex-officer of New York Police - Deschamps...."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Bernard, looking up with a start; "I thought they had him!"

"So did I," replied Michalak grimly; "but they have not! He got away in the confusion following the raid, and has been hiding ever since with a cousin."

"Hiding?" snapped Bernard.

"Exactly. He has been afraid to stir ever since, and has scarcely shown his nose outside the door. He says he is watched night and day."

"Then how ...!"

“He realized that something must be done,” continued the Inspector, “and made a break this morning. He is so convinced of this constant surveillance that he came away secretly, hidden under the boxes of a produce-wagon at the flower-market. He landed there in the early hours of this morning and came straight away to me.”

“What is he afraid of exactly?”

Inspector Michalak put down his coffee cup and bent forward slightly.

“He knows something,” he said in a low voice, “and they are aware that he knows it!”

“And what is this he knows?”

Estephe Bernard stared eagerly at the detective.

“Every man has his price,” replied Michalak, with a smile, “and Deschamps seems to think that you are a more likely market than the police authorities.”

“I see,” snapped Bernard. “He wants to see me?”

“He is worried. He spoke of a sort of gipsy girl with whom he had a short conversation one day, over the fence which divides his cousin's flower plantations from the lane adjoining.”

“Gipsy girl!” I whispered, glancing rapidly at Bernard.

“I think you are right, doctor,” said Michalak with his slow smile. “It was Guan-yin. She asked him the way to somewhere or other and got him to write it upon a loose page of his notebook, so that she should not forget it.”

“You hear that, Corliss?” rapped Bernard.

“I hear it,” I replied, “but I don't see any special significance in the fact.”

“I do!” rapped Bernard. “I didn't sit up the greater part of last night thrashing my weary brains for nothing! Today I need to research a certain suspicion at the Musée Guimet.”

He turned to Michalak.

“Did Deschamps go back?” he demanded abruptly.

“He is now hidden elsewhere in his cousin’s farmhouse.” was the reply. “You never saw a man in such a funk in all your life!”

“He has good reasons!” Estephe Bernard observed grimly. “If that man really possesses information inimical to the safety of Chou Zhang, he can only

escape doom by means of a miracle similar to that which hitherto has protected you and me."

"Deschamps insists," said Michalak at this point, "that something comes almost every night after dusk, slinking about the house. It's an old farmhouse, I understand; and on two or three occasions he has been awakened by sounds of coughing immediately outside his window. He is a man who sleeps with a pistol under his pillow, and more than once, on running to the window, he has had a vague glimpse of some creature leaping down from the tiles of the roof, which slopes up to his room, into the flower beds below...."

"Creature!" said Bernard, his grey eyes ablaze now, "you said creature!"

"I used the word deliberately," replied Michalak, "because Deschamps seems to have the idea that it goes on all fours."

There was a short and rather strained silence. Then:

"Has he heard no other sound?" rapped Bernard; "one like the cracking of dry branches, for instance?"

"He made no mention of it," replied Michalak, staring.

“And what is the plan?”

“One of his cousin’s produce-vans,” said Michalak, with his slight smile, “will return late this afternoon. I propose that you and I, Monsieur. Bernard, imitate Deschamps and ride down to his hiding place under the empty boxes.”

“Do I understand that Deschamps is actually too afraid to go out openly even in daylight?” he asked suddenly.

“He has not left his cousin's property at all,” replied Michalak. “He seems to think that openly to communicate with the authorities, or with you, would be to seal his death warrant.”

“He's right,” snapped Bernard. “We must meet with him as soon as possible.”

“You must also include me in the programme,” I told Michalak. “Will there be room in the van?”

“Certainly,” was the reply; “it is most commodious, but I cannot guarantee its comfort.”

Estephe Bernard left the room then returned carrying a brass ash-tray.

He placed this on a corner of the breakfast table before Michalak.

“Ever seen anything like that?” he inquired.

“It's something like the skin of a water-rat,” he said.

Estephe Bernard stared at him fixedly.

“A water-rat? Now that you come to mention it, I perceive a certain resemblance, yes. But,” he had been wearing a silk scarf about his throat and now he unwrapped it, “did you ever see a water-rat that could make marks like these?”

Michalak started to his feet with some muttered exclamation.

“What is this?” he cried. “When did it happen, and how?”

In his own terse fashion, Estephe Bernard related the happenings of the night. At the conclusion of the story:

“By heaven!” whispered Michalak, “the thing on the roof--the coughing thing that goes on all fours, seen by Deschamps...”

“My own idea exactly!” cried Bernard.

“Chou Zhang,” I said excitedly, “has brought some new, some dreadful creature, from Burma....”

“No, Corliss,” snapped Bernard, turning upon me suddenly. “Not from Burma…”

Michalak and I waited.

“…From Abyssinia.”

*****

The day mentioned above was destined to be an eventful one; a day never to be forgotten by any of us concerned in those happenings which I have to record.

Early in the morning Estephe Bernard set off to pursue his mysterious investigations, and I, having performed my brief professional round. As Estephe Bernard himself had remarked on one occasion, this was a beastly healthy district. I found, having made the necessary arrangements, that, with over three hours to spare, I had nothing to occupy my time until the appointment in the back of that flower-van.

My lonely lunch completed, a restless fit seized me, and I felt unable to remain longer in the house. Inspired by this restlessness, I attired myself for the adventure of the evening, not neglecting to place a

pistol in my pocket, and presently found myself rambling aimlessly along the crowded streets surrounding our later meeting point. Thoughts as rambling as my passage.

It was, as you no doubt suspect, not long before those rambling thoughts settled themselves upon one person.

Guan-yin.

The thoughts she conjured up though were almost too bitter to be for long and without so much as glancing at the books displayed for sale, I crossed the roadway and entered an artefact shop close to the same Musée Guimet of Asian antiquities where my friend had said he would be undertaking his research. In order to distract my mind I set to examine the Oriental pottery, Egyptian statuettes, Indian armour, and other curios. But, strive as I would to concentrate my mind upon the objects in the window, my memories persistently haunted me, and haunted me to the exclusion even of the actualities.

The crowds thronging the pavements of the city swept past unheeded and my eyes saw nothing of pot nor statuette, but only met, in a misty imaginative world, the glance of two other eyes.

The dark and beautiful eyes of Guan-yin.

In the exquisite tinting of a Chinese vase dimly I perceived only the blushing cheeks of the woman with whom I was, unwillingly, infatuated. Her face rose up as a taunting phantom, be it from out of the darkness between a hideous, gilded idol and an Indian sandal-wood screen or from the weave of a rug dating from the Pahlavi Dynasty.

I strove to dispel this obsessing thought, resolutely fixing my attention upon a tall Etruscan vase in the corner of the window, near to the shop door.

Was I losing my senses?

There, looking out at me over an ancient urn as tall as she, was the bewitching face of the slave-girl!

It was bewildering to the point of the uncanny. For, delusion or verity, the glamour prevailed. I exerted a great mental effort, stepped to the door, turned the handle, and entered the shop with as great a show of composure as I could muster.

A curtain draped in a little door at the back of one counter swayed slightly, with no greater violence than may have been occasioned by the draught. But I fixed my eyes upon this swaying curtain almost fiercely as an impassive half-caste of some kind who

appeared to be a strange cross between a Greco-Hebrew and a Japanese, entered and faced me with a slight bow and a complete absence of any revealing emotion.

“Can I show you anything, Monsieur?” inquired the new arrival, with a slight inclination of the head.

I looked at him for a moment in silence.

Then:

“I thought I saw a lady of my acquaintance here a moment ago,” I said. “Was I mistaken?”

“Quite mistaken, Monsieur,” replied the shopman, raising his black eyebrows ever so slightly. “A mistake possibly due to a reflection in the window. Will you take a look around now that you are here?”

“Thank you,” I replied, staring him hard in the face. “Perhaps at some other time.”

I turned and quitted the shop abruptly. Either I was mad, or Guan-yin was concealed somewhere therein.

However, realizing my helplessness in the matter, I contented myself with making a mental note of the

name which appeared above the establishment – “J. Salaman” - and walked on.

As I am sure you can understand, my mind was in a chaotic condition and my heart was beating with unusual rapidity.

AI ZHANG REWARDS

He was in a position no man with one whit of self-respect or masculinity about him would countenance – were, of course, that hypothetical man in either a physical or mental position allowing him to act upon his sense of self-worth.

And HE, sense of renewed moral purpose and determination to escape the toils of his Chinese Master notwithstanding, was most certainly NOT.

That his current position filled him with most uncharacteristic and unmanning excitement was yet another blow to both his self-esteem and any hopes he might have entertained in respect of questioning her supremacy over him at this time.

Seated upon the hard-tiled floor, legs stretched in front of him and bare-buttocks against cool ceramic, he marvelled at the equally bare legs Ai Zhang had thrown over his shoulders.

"How thrilled father will be to see his once estimable foe so malleable and docile he willingly kneels before his daughter to receive a first reward for his diligence as her body-servant."

The words, and the tinkling of the tiny bells attached to his scrotum, seared themselves upon a soul he had thought beyond further humiliation.

And yet, she was wrong.

This was not his first reward.

That, though she did not appear to regard it as such, had been given when she refused the requests of the grotesque and bestial Zhou.

The one to purchase him for his own use; to ferry him further into China's interior and use him as his very own white beast-of-burden.

The other to insist upon his right as the guest of Ai Zhang to lay his corpulent and sweaty body across that of her servant and sate his lust by placing his cock in the man's rectum until his seed exploded in that man's final virginity.

"Does my servant, not adore the soles of his Master's dainty feet against his pitiful erection?" the putrid excuse for womanhood continued, words made all the more demeaning for the slight accent of her native land that corrupted her use of another language.

When he made no answer but, to his shame, continued to thrust against the yellow feet either side of his erect penis that had stopped their rubbing motion, he felt her take a handful of his hair and yank his head backwards until he was staring up at her.

Cruel enough under normal circumstances, seen from such a position she seemed positively barbaric, the orbs of piercing green eyes no longer round but slitted with anger at what she saw as his wilful refusal to answer a question he had taken as rhetorical.

It was when he answered, after the fashion in which she had taught him to respond, and in a voice so tremulous and submissive he could scarce believe it had originated from him, it struck him once again that he regarded the daughter with far greater terror than the father.

And that monstrosity chilled him to his core.

But why? How had she been able to physically overpower him when her masculine and more powerful parent had found the task beyond him? How had those startling green eyes managed to compel him to do her bidding, when the equally compelling stare of her father in perfidy had failed?

“Yes, Master,” he told her, looking upwards at her clothed body and the disdainful and pitiless eyes gazing down at him over the conical mounds of her, admittedly, magnificent breasts. “Your… Your servant adores the touch of your superior feet against his unworthy white cock.”

If possible, the infernal eyes above glowed with an even greater incandescence as they gloried in their triumph over the very man her revered father had tried to subjugate and had failed to succeed at every turn.

With a gloating smile that was purest evil, the pressure on his hair relaxed and his head was lowered that his eyes might take in the feet that now trapped his erection between them.

Despite the levels of pure hatred he felt for at having devastated the landscape of his manhood and the self-loathing that went with it, his breath caught in his throat at the sight before her feet again began to manipulate him and he let our an involuntary sigh so huge it could do no more than verify – if such were required – the fact of his complete and utter capitulation to her.

“Remember,” her voice drifted into his near insensate mind, “there will be no release of your worthless seed until your Master has given her

permission. And you know what she requires of you afterwards."

The manipulation of his cock stopped by way of motivation and he heard his own piteous groan; a mixture of being deprived of her attention and the punishment he could expect to receive if he allowed himself to reach a crisis without her expressed consent.

"Tell me!"

"I… Your… Your most humble bondsman will… will clean his illustrious master's superior feet of any unworthy western seed he has unpardonably placed upon them."

"Good boy!" praised the voice above, sarcasm and triumph unmistakable. "You are becoming a most pleasing slave. So pleasing, in fact, that I truly believe I will keep you at my side when my father and I take our rightful places in what was once your world."

As her feet resumed their ministrations, his excitement, despite the mention of her infernal father, increased five-fold and he felt the unmistakable tightening at his be-ringed and belled ball-sac heralding an imminent explosion.

“Master! P-Please…! I… I…”

Any humour present in the laughter that echoed down to him from his female master was deluged under a wave of pure cruelty as he felt her stroking his head, pet-like, as he tried to stave off the coming catastrophe.

“That is my good boy,” he heard as his imminent release threatened to puncture his eardrums, so great was his need. “Very well. You may spill your useless western seed for your owner.”

The thrusting of her feet stopped and, instead, his bulging eyes saw the red painted nails of her toes pinch either side of his erection.

“Now!” she hissed.

All thoughts of the humiliating service he would be required to pay her afterwards were forgotten as both sight, feel, and sound sent him over the edge and he came…

And came…

And…

THE QUESTING HANDS

After the cramped claustrophobia of the produce-van and the, no doubt, even more disturbing nature, of our private thoughts, a more peaceful scene than the hectares of flower-planted land to the south of the metropolis would have been difficult to imagine for either myself or Bernard.

But, either because of my knowledge that its peace was chimerical, or because of that outflung consciousness of danger which actually, or in my imagination, preceded the coming of the Chinaman's agents, the silence throbbed electrically and the night was laden with dark omens.

Already cramped by my journey in the produce-van, I found it difficult to remain very long in any one position as my thoughts raged to-and-thro.

What information had Deschamps to sell? He had refused, for some reason, to discuss the matter that evening, and now, enacting the part allotted him by Estephe Bernard, he feigned sleep consistently, although at intervals he would whisper to me his doubts and fears.

All the chances were in our favour to-night; for whilst I could not doubt that Chou Zhang was set

upon the removal of the ex-officer of New York police, neither could I doubt that our presence in the farm was unknown to the agents of the Chinaman. According to Deschamps, constant attempts had been made to achieve Chou Zhang's purpose, and had only been frustrated by his own wakefulness.

There was every probability that another attempt would be made to-night.

Our vigil had begun with me taking the man’s bedroom, and with the night at that darkest phase which precedes the dawn, an indescribable dread, such as I had known before in my dealings with the Chinaman, assailed me. For time that seemed interminable, we waited, still and soundless, in the pitch black.

Then:

“Here it is!” whispered Deschamps from the bed.

I rose stealthily out of my chair, and from my nest of shadows watched intently the bright oblong of the window.

Without the slightest heralding sound, a black silhouette crept up against the pane.

The silhouette of a small, malformed head.

A dog-like head, deep-set in square shoulders.

Malignant eyes peered intently in and the higher it rose - that wicked head - against the window then crouched down on the sill, the less sharply defined it became.

There was a faint sound of sniffing.

Judging from the stark horror which I experienced myself, I doubted now, if Deschamps could sustain the rôle allotted him. For in beneath the slightly raised window came a hand, perceptible to me despite the darkness of the room. A hand that seemed to project from the black silhouette outside the pane, to be thrust forward, and forward, and forward…

A small hand with outstretched fingers which, extending its incredibly long arms, now sought the throat of the man upon the bed and I again tasted of that sort of terror which ordinarily one knows only in dreams.

“Quick, Monsieur, quick!” screamed Deschamps, starting up from the pillow.

The questing hands had reached his throat!

Choking down an urgent dread that I had of touching the thing which had reached through the window to kill the sleeper, I sprang across the room and grasped the rigid, hairy forearms.

Heavens! Never have I felt such muscles, such tendons, as those beneath the hirsute skin! They seemed to be of steel wire, and with a sudden frightful sense of impotence, I realized that I was as powerless as a child to relax that strangle-hold.

By now, Deschamps was making the most frightful sounds and quite obviously was being asphyxiated before my eyes!

“Bernard!” I cried, “Bernard! Help! For God's sake!”

Despite the confusion of my mind I became aware of sounds outside and below me. Twice the thing at the window coughed; there was an incessant, lash-like cracking, then some shouted words which I was unable to decipher; and finally the sharp report of a pistol.

Snarling like that of a wild beast came from the creature with the hairy arms, together with renewed coughing. But the steel grip relaxed not one iota. I realized two things: the first, that in my terror at the suddenness of the attack I had omitted to act as

prearranged: the second, that I had discredited the strength of the visitant, whilst Bernard had foreseen it.

Desisting in my vain endeavour to pit my strength against that of the nameless thing, I sprang back across the room and took up the weapon which had been left in my charge earlier in the night, but which I had been unable to believe it would be necessary to employ. This was a sharp and heavy axe which Estephe Bernard, when I had met him four our journey in the produce-van, had brought with him - to the great amazement of Michalak and myself.

As I leapt back to the window and uplifted this primitive weapon, a second shot sounded from below, and more fierce snarling, coughing, and guttural mutterings assailed my ears from beyond the pane.

Lifting the heavy blade, I brought it down with all my strength upon the nearer of those hairy arms where it crossed the window-ledge, severing muscle, tendon and bone as easily as a knife might cut cheese....

A shriek, neither human nor animal, but gruesomely compound of both—followed and merged into a choking cough.

Like a flash the other shaggy arm was withdrawn, and some vaguely seen body went rolling down the sloping red tiles and crashed on to the ground beneath.

With a second piercing shriek, louder than that recently uttered by Deschamps, wailing through the night from somewhere below, I turned desperately to the man on the bed, who now was become significantly silent.

A candle with matches, stood upon a table hard by, and, my fingers far from steady, I set about obtaining a light.

This accomplished, I stood the candle upon the little chest-of-drawers and returned to Deschamps's side.

“Merciful God!” I cried.

Of all the pictures which remain in my memory, some of them dark enough, I can find none more horrible than that which now confronted me in the dim candle-light.

Deschamps lay crosswise on the bed, his head thrown back and sagging; one rigid hand he held in the air, and with the other grasped the hairy forearm which I had severed with the axe; for, in a death-like

grip, the dead fingers were still fastened, vice-like, at his throat.

His face was nearly black, and his eyes projected from their sockets horribly. Mastering my repugnance, I seized the hideous piece of bleeding anatomy and strove to release it.

It defied all my efforts and in death it was as implacable as in life.

I took a knife from my pocket, and, tendon by tendon, cut away that uncanny grip from Deschamps's throat....

Devastated at yet being too late whilst being so near, I nonetheless sensed a great stirring all about me and footsteps came racing up the stairs.

The door burst open and Estephe Bernard stumbled into the room.

“Corliss!” he exclaimed, and started back in the doorway.

“Have you got it, Bernard?” I demanded hoarsely. “In sanity's name what is it?”

“Come downstairs,” replied Bernard quietly, “and see for yourself.” He said, turning his head aside from the bed.

Very unsteadily I followed him down the stairs and through the rambling old house out into the stone-paved courtyard.

“That's Deschamps's cousin with the lantern,” whispered Bernard, in my ear; “do not tell him yet.”

I nodded and soon found myself looking down at one of those thickset Burmese whom I always associated with Chou Zhang's activities. He lay quite flat, face downward; but the back of his head was a shapeless blood-clotted mass, and a heavy and blood soaked stock-whip lay beside him. I started back appalled as Bernard caught my arm.

“It_ turned on its keeper!” he hissed in my ear. “I wounded it twice from below, and you severed one arm. But, in its insensate fury, its unreasoning malignity, it returned--and there lies its second victim....”

“Then....”

“It's gone, Corliss! It has the strength of four men even now. Look!”

He stooped, and from the clenched left hand of the dead Burman, extracted a piece of paper and opened it.

“Hold the lantern a moment,” he said.

In the yellow light he glanced at the scrap of paper.

“As I expected. A leaf of Deschamps's notebook. It worked by scent.”

He turned to me with an odd expression in his grey eyes.

“I wonder what piece of my personal property Chou Zhang has pilfered,” he said. “In order to enable it to deal with me?”

He met the gaze of the man holding the lantern.

“Perhaps you had better return to the house,” he said, looking him squarely in the eyes.

The other's face blanched.

“You don't mean, Monsieur…?”

“Brace up!” said Bernard, laying his hand upon his shoulder. “Remember--he chose to play with fire!”

One wild look the man cast from Bernard to me, then went off, staggering toward the farm.

“Bernard…” I began.

He turned to me with an impatient gesture.

“Michalak will scour the whole district before morning. They probably motored here, but the sounds of the shots will have enabled whoever was with the car to make good his escape. Though, exhausted from loss of blood, its capture is only a matter of time.”

ONE DAY IN RANGOON

Nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed since the awful death of Deschamps when Estephe Bernard returned from the telephone.

“No news, Corliss,” he said shortly. “It must have crept into some inaccessible hole to die.”

I glanced up from my notes and Bernard settled into the white cane armchair, and began to surround himself with clouds of aromatic smoke before continuing:

“The Amharûn, a Semitic tribe allied to the Falashas, who have been settled for many generations in the southern province of Shoa in Abyssinia, have been regarded as unclean and outcast, apparently since the days of Menelek, son of Suleyman and the Queen of Sheba, from whom they claim descent. Apart from their custom of eating meat cut from living beasts, they are accursed because of their alleged association with the Cynocephalus hamadryas, which translates as ‘Sacred Baboon’.”

I waited for him to explain the pertinence of this information.

“I, myself, was once taken to a hut on the banks of the Hawash and shown a creature whose predominant trait was an unreasoning malignity toward all but those fellow members of its furry brethren. Its powers of scent were fully equal to those of a bloodhound, whilst its abnormally long forearms possessed incredible strength.

“That is all very interesting, Bernard, but you have not yet explained to me how you got in touch with Chou Zhang; how you learnt that he was not dead, as we had supposed, but living and-active.”

Estephe Bernard stood up to pace.

“No,” he replied; “I haven't. Do you wish to know?”

“Certainly,” I said with surprise; “is there any reason why I should not? Together with wondering about the lack of respect and courtesy he showed you, but not me, when last we were in his presence?”

He fixed his steely eyes upon me with an indefinable expression in them and I could see he was less perturbed by my first inquiry than the latter.

Then:

“There is no real reason,” said Bernard, staring at me very hard. “Or at least I hope there is no real reason.”

“What do you mean?”

He grabbed up his pipe from the table and began furiously to load it.

“I blundered upon the truth one day in Rangoon,” he began. “I was walking out of a house which I occupied there for a time, and as I swung around the corner into the main street, I ran into – literally ran into....”

Again he hesitated oddly; then closed up his pouch and tossed it into the cane chair.

He struck a match.

“I ran into Guan-yin,” he continued abruptly, and began to puff away at his pipe, filling the air with clouds of tobacco smoke.

I caught my breath. This was the reason why he had kept me so long in ignorance of the story. He knew of my hopeless, uncrushable sentiments towards the gloriously beautiful but utterly hypocritical and evil Eastern girl who was perhaps the most dangerous of all Chou Zhang's servants.

For the power of her loveliness was magical.

As I knew to my cost.

“What did you do?” I asked quietly, my fingers drumming upon the table.

“Naturally enough,” continued Bernard, “with a cry of recognition I held out both my hands to her gladly. I welcomed her as a dear friend regained. I thought of the joy with which you would learn that I had found the missing one and assumed you would be in Rangoon just as quickly as the fastest steamer would get you there.”

“Well?”

“Guan-yin started back and treated me to a glance of absolute animosity! No recognition was there, and no friendliness. Only a sort of scornful anger.”

He shrugged his shoulders and began to walk up and down the room.

“I do not know what you would have done in the circumstances, Corliss, but I…”

“Yes?”

“I dealt with the situation rather promptly, I think. I simply picked her up without another word, right there in the public street, and raced back into the house, with her kicking and fighting like a little demon! She did not shriek or do anything of that

kind, but fought silently like a vicious wild animal. Oh! I had some scars, I assure you; but I carried her up into my office, which fortunately was empty at the time, plumped her down in a chair, and stood looking at her."

"Go on" I said rather hollowly; "what next?"

"She glared at me with those wonderful eyes, an expression of implacable hatred in them! Remembering all that we had done for her; remembering our former friendship; above all, remembering you, this look of hers almost made me shiver.

"She was dressed very smartly in European fashion, and the whole thing had been so sudden that as I stood looking at her I half expected to wake up presently and find it all a day-dream. But it was real as real as her enmity. I felt the need for reflection, and having vainly endeavoured to draw her into conversation, and elicited no other answer than this glare of hatred--I left her there, going out and locking the door behind me."

"Very high-handed?"

"A Commissioner has certain privileges, Corliss; and any action I might choose to take was not likely to be questioned. There was only one window to the

office, and it was fully twenty feet above the level; it overlooked a narrow street off the main thoroughfare and upon a corner, so I did not fear her escaping. I had an important engagement which I had been on my way to fulfil when the encounter took place, and now, with a word to my native servant who chanced to be downstairs, I hurried off."

My fingers continued to drum upon the table, impatient for him to reach the thrust of his observations.

"This boy took her some tea later in the afternoon," he continued, "and apparently found her in a more placid frame of mind. I returned immediately after dusk, and he reported that when last he had looked in, about half an hour earlier, she had been seated in an armchair reading a newspaper - I may mention that everything of value in the office was securely locked up. I was determined upon a certain course by this time, and I went slowly upstairs, unlocked the door, and walked into the darkened office, turning up the light as I did so.

"The place was empty!"

"Empty!"

“The window was open, and the bird flown! And it was not so simple a flight - as you would realize if you knew the place. The street, which the window overlooked, was bounded by a blank wall, on the opposite side, for thirty or forty yards along; and as we had been having heavy rains, it was full of glutinous mud. Furthermore, the boy whom I had left in charge had been sitting in the doorway immediately below the office window watching for my return ever since his last visit to the room above....”

“She must have bribed him,” I said bitterly, “or corrupted him with her infernal blandishments.”

“I'll swear she did not,” rapped Bernard decisively. “I know my man. There were no marks in the mud of the road to show that a ladder had been placed there; moreover, nothing of the kind could have been attempted whilst the boy was sitting in the doorway. That was evident. In short, she did not descend into the roadway and did not come out by the door....”

“Was there a gallery outside the window?”

“No; it was impossible to climb to right or left of the window or up on to the roof. I convinced myself of that.”

“But, my dear man!” I cried. “If you are to be believed, remained to her but flight.”

“Correct. To this day I could not understand how she quitted the room. I only know that she did.”

“And then?”

“I saw in this incredible escape the cunning hand of Chou Zhang, who I believed dead, and convinced myself another of equal status had taken up his mantle.”

His face took on a look of self-reproach mixed with disgust I had noted earlier and could not fathom.

“I was both right and wrong, Mon Frere,” he told me. “Though I would not learn that the devil lived still for some time afterward.”

He mopped at a suddenly damp forehead with a handkerchief and looked suddenly stricken as at a repugnant memory.

“At a time some distance removed from making my first acquaintance with his… with his…”

Never had I seen such a look of consternation, self-reproach and, yes, fear – even during the worst of the infernal Chinaman’s atrocities – than the one

Bernard turned upon me at that point and at his final word.

“…Daughter.”

PART FOUR

THE SILVER BUDDHA

“I have an appointment with Michalak; therefore, leaving you to the task of solving this problem which thus far has defied my own efforts, I will get along.”

He read a query in my glance that ran concurrent with my absolute bafflement as to how the woman who infatuated my thoughts, mentally and physically, might have effected such a disappearance.

“Oh! I shall not be late,” he added, answering the second query. “I think I may venture out alone on this occasion without personal danger.”

Estephe Bernard went upstairs to dress, leaving me seated at my writing-table deep in thought and, at some time later, I heard the front-door close at his departure.

I glanced at the clock, and determined to devote the remainder of the evening to a little private investigation of my own not connected with Guan yin’s disappearance from his rooms in Rangoon. An investigation I had not confided to Bernard. Largely because I feared his ridicule.

Just the same, I had by no means forgotten that I had seen, or had strongly imagined that I had seen, that beautiful anomaly who tormented my moral outlook as much as my sexuality, in the shop of an antique dealer not a hundred yards from the Museum in which Bernard had been undertaking his own inquiries.

A theory was forming in my brain, which I was burningly anxious to put to the test. I had heard Inspector Michalak assert positively that Chou Zhang's headquarters were no longer in at the river's edge as of habit and yore and there seemed reason enough for me to be suspect a suitable base of operations established in or around the antique shop in which I thought to have seen his exotic slave-girl. A place so much less likely to be suspected by the authorities.

Perhaps I attached too great a value to what may have been a delusion; perhaps my theory rested upon no more solid foundation than the belief that I had seen Guan-yin in the shop of the curio dealer. If her appearance there should prove to have been imaginary, the structure of my theory would be shattered at its base. To-night, though, I should test my premises, and upon the result of my investigations determine my future action.

*****

The road housing the Musée Guimet certainly did not seem a likely spot for Chou Zhang to establish himself. Yet, unless my imagination had strangely deceived me, those wonderful and beguiling eyes of Guan-yin, like the velvet midnight of the Orient, had looked out at me. A vison through the glass of the curio shop that may just have been my own wishful thinking.

The glass door of a block of residential chambers, almost immediately opposite to the shop, threw light across the pavement upon which not more than two or three people were visible upon either side of the street.

I turned the knob of the curio shop door and entered.

The same dark and immobile individual whom I had seen before, and whose nationality defied conjecture, came out from the curtained doorway at the back to greet me.

“Bon soir, Monsieur,” he said monotonously, with a slight inclination of the head; “is there anything which you desire to inspect?”

“I merely wish to take a look round,” I replied. “I have no particular item in view.”

The shopman inclined his head again, swept a yellow hand comprehensively about, as if to include the entire stock, and seated himself on a chair behind the counter.

Vases I handled, statuettes, Egyptian scarabs, bead necklaces, illuminated missals, portfolios of old prints, jade ornaments, bronzes, fragments of rare lace, early printed books, Assyrian tablets, daggers, Roman rings, and a hundred other curiosities. Objects I viewed with apparent interest. Yet without forming the slightest impression respecting any one of them as, all the time, I was watched the curtained doorway at the back of the shop.

“We close at about this time, Monsieur,” the man interrupted me, speaking in the emotionless, monotonous voice which I had noted before; this as I racked my brains for some means of penetrating into the recesses of the establishment. Indeed I had been seeking such a plan for the past half an hour, but my mind had proved incapable of suggesting one.

“I should like to examine the silver Buddha image yonder,” I said; “what price are you asking for it?”

“It is not for sale, Monsieur,” replied the man, with a greater show of animation than he had yet exhibited.

“Not for sale!” I said, my eyes ever seeking the curtained doorway; “how's that?”

“It is sold and is not to be handled, Monsieur.”

Such a rebuff from a tradesman would have been more than sufficient to call for a sharp retort at any other time, but now it excited the strangest suspicions.

The street outside looked comparatively deserted, and prompted, primarily, by an emotion which I did not pause to analyse, I adopted a singular measure.

I made as if to go out into the street, then turned, leapt past the shopman, ran behind the counter, and grasped at the silver Buddha!

That I was likely to be arrested for attempted larceny I cared not; the idea that Guan-yin was concealed somewhere in the building ruled absolutely, and a theory respecting this silver image had taken possession of my mind.

Exactly what I expected to happen at that moment I cannot say, but what actually happened was far more startling than anything I could have imagined.

At the instant that I grasped the figure I realized that it was attached to the woodwork and, in the next, I knew that it was a handle.

As I tried to pull it toward me I became aware that this was the handle of a door. For that door swung open before me, and I found myself in a darkened space. I was standing at the foot of a flight of heavily carpeted stairs.

And there, at the head of them, staring down at men, stood Chou Zhang himself!

ELUDING AI ZHANG

CHOU ZHANG'S LABORATORY

I cannot conceive that any ordinary mortal ever attained to anything like an intimacy with the man I knew as Chou Zhang and I cannot believe that any man, no matter how remarkable, could ever grow used to his presence or cease to fear him.

I suppose I had set eyes upon the abomination, as my thoughts described him, some five or six times prior to this occasion, and now he was dressed in the manner which I always associated with both him and the culture that spawned him.

He wore a plain yellow robe, and, his pointed chin rested upon his bosom as he looked down at me, revealing a great expanse of the marvellous brow with its sparse, neutral-coloured hair.

Never in my experience have I known such force to dwell in the glance of any human eye as dwelt in that of this uncanny being. His singular affliction (if affliction it were), the film or slight membrane which sometimes obscured the oblique eyes, was particularly evident at the moment that I crossed the threshold, but now as I stared up at him, it lifted – to reveal the eyes in all their frozen and glittering, emerald greenness.

The idea of a physical attack that would rid us for ever of his sadism and megalomania thrust me upwards as I reached into my coat for the weapon with which I intended to accomplish the deed.

My hand was actually on the butt of the pistol, when…

A dull, crushing blow descended on the top of my skull, and I became oblivious of all things.

*****

My return to consciousness was accompanied by tremendous pains in my head, whereby, from previous experience, I knew that a sandbag had been used against me by someone in the shop, presumably by the taciturn and immobile shopman. This awakening was accompanied by none of those hazy doubts respecting previous events and present surroundings which are the usual symptoms of revival from sudden unconsciousness. Even before I opened my eyes, before I had more than a partial command of my senses, I knew that, with my wrists handcuffed behind me, I lay in a room which was also occupied by Chou Zhang.

This absolute certainty of the Chinaman's presence was evidenced, not by my senses, but only by an inner consciousness that seemed always awakened

into life at the approach not only of Chou Zhang in person but of certain of his uncanny and vicious servants.

A faint perfume hung in the air about me; I do not mean that of any essence or of any incense, but rather the smell which is suffused by Oriental furniture, by Oriental draperies; the indefinable but unmistakable perfume of the East.

Thus, has London has a distinct smell of its own, so does Paris, whilst the difference between Marseilles and… say… Suez, for instance, is even more marked.

Now the atmosphere surrounding me was Eastern, but not of the East that I knew; rather it was Far Eastern.

Perhaps I do not make myself very clear, but to me there was a mysterious significance and a clear difference in that perfumed atmosphere.

Finally, I opened my eyes.

I lay upon a long low settee, in a fairly large room which was furnished, as I had anticipated, in an absolutely Oriental fashion.

The two windows were so screened as to have lost, from the interior point of view, all resemblance to European windows, and the whole structure of the room had been altered in conformity, bearing out my idea that the place had been prepared for Chou Zhang's reception some time before his actual return.

I doubt, be it East or West, a duplicate of that singular apartment could be found.

The far end of the room was occupied by tall cases, some of them containing books, but the majority filled with scientific paraphernalia: rows of flasks and jars, frames of test-tubes, retorts, scales, and other objects of the laboratory.

At a large and very finely carved table sat Dr. Chou Zhang, a yellow and faded volume open before him, and some dark red fluid, almost like blood, bubbling in a test-tube which he held over the flame of a Bunsen-burner.

The enormously long nail of his right index finger rested upon the opened page of a book, to which he seemed constantly to refer, as he progressed an experiment of sorts

A huge glass retort, fitted with a Liebig's Condenser, rested in a metal frame, and within the bulb, floating

in an oily substance, was a fungus some six inches high, shaped like a toadstool, but of a brilliant and venomous orange colour. Three flat tubes of light were so arranged as to cast violet rays upward into the retort, and the receiver, wherein condensed the product of this strange experiment, contained some drops of a red fluid which may have been identical with that boiling in the test-tube.

These things I perceived at a glance; then the filmy eyes of Chou Zhang were raised from the book, turned in my direction, and all else was forgotten.

“I regret,” came the sibilant voice, “that unpleasant measures were necessary, but hesitation would have been fatal. I trust, Dr. Corliss, that you suffer no inconvenience?”

To this speech no reply was possible, and I attempted none.

“You have long been aware of my esteem for your acquirements,” continued the Chinaman, his voice occasionally touching deep guttural notes, “and you will appreciate the pleasure which this visit affords me.”

Resent it though I did, my soul seemed to shrivel and my resolve crumble under the Chinaman’s unblinking stare.

“Here I kneel at the feet of my silver Buddha,” he continued. “And soon, when you shall have overcome your prejudices - due to ignorance of my true motives – you will kneel before me and pledge me your allegiance and obedience in order to assist me in establishing that intellectual control which is destined to be the new World Force as well as its salvation.”

I wanted to tell him that I would never kneel before him in such abject defeat.

And could not find my voice.

“I bear you no malice for your enmity towards me,” he went on, waving one yellow hand toward the retort, “and even now I am conducting an experiment designed to convert you from your misunderstanding, and to adjust your perspective.”

Quite unemotionally he spoke and I do not think the most frenzied outburst on his part, the most fiendish threats, could have produced such effect upon me as those cold and carefully calculated words, spoken in that unique voice.

In its tones, in the glance of the green eyes, in the very pose of the gaunt and high-shouldered body, there was power and force.

An optimist by nature, I nonetheless counted myself lost as I studied the progress of his experiment with frightful interest. But a few moments sufficed in which to realize that, for all my medical training, I knew as little of Chemistry - of Chemistry as understood by this man's genius - as a junior student in surgery knows of trephining. The process in operation was a complete mystery to me; the means and the end were alike incomprehensible.

Which was when I first noticed the jar.

It was made of glass jar and stood some five feet in height.

It was also filled with a viscous fluid of a light amber colour.

Out from this peered a hideous, dog-like face, low-browed, with pointed ears and a nose almost hoggishly flat.

By the death-grin of the face the gleaming fangs were revealed; and the body, the long yellow-grey body, rested, or seemed to rest, upon short, malformed legs, whilst one long limp arm, the right, hung down in the preservative.

The left arm had been severed above the elbow.

Chou Zhang, finding his experiment to be proceeding favourably, lifted his eyes to me again.

“You are interested in my poor Cynocephalyte?” he said, his eyes filmed like the eyes of one afflicted with cataract. “He was a devoted servant, Dr. Corliss, but the lower influences in his genealogy sometimes conquered. Then he got out of hand; and at last he was so ungrateful toward those who had educated him, that, in one of those paroxysms of his, he attacked and killed a most faithful Burman who happened to be one of my oldest followers.”

Chou Zhang returned to his experiment.

Not the slightest emotion had he exhibited thus far, but had chatted with me as any other scientist might chat with a friend who casually visits his laboratory while the horror of the thing was playing havoc with my own composure.

There I lay, fettered, in the same room with this man whose existence was a menace to the entire white race, whilst placidly he pursued an experiment designed, if his own words were believable, to cut me off from my kind and to wreak some change, be it psychological or physiological I knew not, to place me upon a level with such brute things as that which now hung, half floating, in the glass jar!

I uttered a short, harsh laugh and Chou Zhang stood up slowly from the table, and, placing the test-tube in a rack, deposited the latter carefully upon a shelf at his side.

“I am happy to find you in such good humour,” he said softly. “Other affairs call me; and, in my absence, your limited knowledge of chemistry will at least enable you to follow with intelligent interest the action of these violet rays upon this exceptionally fine specimen of Siberian Amanita muscaria.

“At some future time, possibly when you are my guest in China – which country I am now making arrangements for you to visit - I shall discuss with you some lesser-known properties of this species; and I may say that one of your first tasks when you commence your duties as my servant in my laboratory in Kiangsu, will be to conduct a series of twelve experiments into other potentialities of this unique fungus.”

Then, bestowing upon me a slight bow of farewell, he went out of the room.

THE CROSSBAR

How long I lay there alone I had no means of computing. My mind was busy with many matters, but principally concerned with my fate in the immediate future. That Chou Zhang entertained for me a singular kind of regard, I had had evidence before. He had formed the erroneous opinion that I was an advanced scientist who could be of use to him in his experiments, and I was aware that he cherished a project of transporting me to some place in China where his principal laboratory was situated and would, no doubt, enjoy adding another white servant to his coterie of chattels.

Respecting the means which he proposed to employ, I was unlikely to forget that this man, who had penetrated further along certain byways of science than seemed humanly possible, undoubtedly was master of a process for producing artificial catalepsy.

It was my lot, then, to be packed in a chest (to all intents and purposes a dead man for the time being) and dispatched to the interior of China!

What a fool I had been. To think that I had learnt nothing from my long and dreadful experience of the methods of Chou Zhang; so little, in fact, that I had

come alone in quest of him and, leaving no trace behind me, I had deliberately penetrated to his secret abode.

A fool indeed!

I have said that my wrists were manacled behind me, the manacles being attached to a chain fastened in the wall. I now contrived, with extreme difficulty, to reverse the position of my hands; that is to say, I climbed backward through the loop formed by my fettered arms, so that instead of the restraints being behind me, they now were in front.

Then I began to examine them, learning, as I had anticipated, that they fastened with a lock.

I sat gazing at the steel bracelets in the light of the lamp which swung over my head, and it became apparent to me that I had gained little by my contortion.

A slight noise disturbed these unpleasant reveries. It was nothing less than the rattling of keys!

For a moment I wondered if I had heard aright, or if the sound portended the coming of some servant of the Chinaman who was locking up the establishment for the night. The jangling sound was repeated, and in such a way that I could not suppose it to be

accidental. Someone was deliberately rattling a small bunch of keys in an adjoining room.

And now my heart leapt wildly - then seemed to stand still as, with a low whistling cry, a little grey shape shot through the doorway by which Chou Zhang had retired, and rolled like a ball of fluff blown by the wind under the table which bore the weird scientific appliances of the Chinaman; the advent of the grey object was accompanied by a further rattling of keys.

My fear left me, and a mighty anxiety took its place.

This creature which now crouched chattering at me from beneath the big table was Chou Zhang's marmoset, and in the intervals of its chatterings and grimacing, it nibbled, speculatively, at the keys upon the ring which it clutched in its tiny hands. Key after key it sampled in this manner, evincing a growing dissatisfaction with the uncrackable nature of its find.

One of those keys might be that of the handcuffs!

I could not believe that the tortures of Tantalus were greater than were mine at this moment. In all my hopes of rescue or release, I had included nothing so strange, so improbable as this and a sort of awe possessed me.

For if by this means the key which should release me should come into my possession, how could I ever again doubt a beneficent Providence?

But they were not yet in my possession; moreover, the key of the handcuffs might not be amongst the bunch.

Were there no means whereby I could induce the marmoset to approach me?

Whilst I racked my brains for some scheme, the little animal took the matter out of my hands. Tossing the ring with its jangling contents a yard or so across the carpet in my direction, it leapt in pursuit, picked up the ring, whirled it over its head, and then threw a complete somersault around it. Now it snatched up the keys again and, holding them close to its ear, rattled them furiously.

Finally, with an incredible spring, it leapt on to the chain supporting the lamp above my head, and with the garish shade swinging and spinning wildly, clung there looking down at me like an acrobat on a trapeze.

The tiny bluish face, completely framed in grotesque whiskers, enhanced the illusion of an acrobatic comedian.

But never for a moment did it release its hold upon the key-ring.

My suspense now was almost intolerable. I feared to move, lest, alarming the marmoset, it should run off again, taking the keys with it. So as I lay there, looking up at the little creature swinging above me, the second wonder of the night came to pass.

A voice that I could never forget, strive how I would, a voice that haunted my dreams by night, and for which by day I was ever listening, cried out from some adjoining room:

“Ta'ala hina!” it called. “Ta'ala hina, Peko!”

It was the voice of Guan-yin!

The effect upon the marmoset was instantaneous. Down came the bunch of keys upon one side of the shade, almost falling on my head, and down leapt the ape upon the other. In two leaps it had traversed the room and had vanished through the curtained doorway.

If ever I had need of coolness it was now; the slightest mistake would be fatal!

The keys had slipped from the mattress of the divan, and now lay just beyond reach of my fingers.

Rapidly I changed my position and sought, without undue noise, to move the keys with my foot.

I had actually succeeded in sliding them back on to the mattress, when, unheralded by any audible footstep, Guan-yin came through the doorway, holding the marmoset in her arms. She wore a dress of fragile muslin material, and out from its folds protruded one silk-stockinged foot, resting in a high-heeled red shoe....!

I am ashamed to confess the sight instilled in me the most dreadful longing and a desire to throw myself at that high-heel poised foot and smother it with kisses.

For a moment she stood watching me, with a sort of enforced composure, then her glance strayed to the keys lying upon the floor. Slowly, and with her eyes fixed again upon my face, she crossed the room, stooped, and took up the key-ring.

It was one of the poignant moments of my life; for by that simple act all my hopes had been shattered!

Any poor lingering doubt that I may have had left me now. Had the slightest spark of friendship animated the bosom of Guan-yin, most certainly she would have overlooked the presence of the keys.

The keys which represented my one hope of escape from the clutches of the fiendish Chinaman.

Guan-yin stood watching me, heeled foot tapping out a rhythm upon the floor as she contemplated me with a concentrated gaze in which rage and reproach seemed to mingle equally.

And what eyes she had! Blackly lustrous orbs of a sort nearly always associated with unusually dark complexions. But Guan-yin's complexion was peach-like, or rather of an exquisite and delicate fairness which reminded me of the petal of a rose.

By some I have been accused of romancing about this girl's beauty, but only by those who had not met her; for indeed she was astonishingly lovely.

At last her eyes fell, the long lashes drooped upon her cheeks, and she turned and walked slowly to the chair wherein Chou Zhang had sat.

Placing the keys upon the table amid the scientific litter, she rested one dimpled elbow upon the yellow page of the book, and with her chin in her palm, again directed upon me that enigmatical gaze.

I dared not think of the past, of the past in which this beautiful, treacherous girl had played a part; yet,

watching her, I could not believe, even now, that she was false!

My state was truly a pitiable one and I could have cried out of sheer anguish.

With her long lashes partly lowered, she watched me awhile, then spoke.

And, despite the inner battle raging within me to resist her siren call, her voice was nothing less than music to me, despite the fact I knew it was in the process of belittling the manhood she was subjugating.

Every inflection of that elusive accent reopened, lancet-like, the ancient wound of obsession and infatuation she had inflicted upon me upon our first acquaintance.

“Why do you look at me so?” she said in her inflected English, almost in a whisper, the sound of my own native tongue upon hers startling me for some reason, so accustomed was I to conversing in French recently. “By what right do you reproach me? Have you ever offered me friendship that I should repay you with friendship? When first you came to the house where I was, by the river, you treated me as your enemy, although I would have been your friend....”

There was appeal in the soft voice, but I forced myself to laugh mockingly and threw myself back upon the divan.

Guan-yin stretched out her hands toward me, and I shall never forget the expression which flashed into those glorious eyes. But, seeing me intolerant of her appeal, she drew back and quickly turned her head aside. Yet, even in this hour of extremity, of impotent wrath, I could find no contempt in my heart for her feeble hypocrisy.

With all the old wonder I watched that exquisite profile and Guan-yin's very deceitfulness was a salve - for had she not cared she would not have attempted it!

Suddenly she stood up, taking the keys in her hands, and approached me.

“Not by word, nor by look,” she said quietly, “have you asked for my friendship, but because I cannot bear you to think of me as you do, I will prove that I am not the hypocrite and the liar you think me. You will not trust me, but I will trust you.”

I looked up into her eyes, and knew a pagan joy when they faltered before my searching gaze. She threw herself upon her knees beside me, and the faint exquisite perfume inseparable from my memories of

her, became perceptible, and seemed as of old to intoxicate me. The lock clicked...

I was free!

Guan-yin rose swiftly to her feet as I stood up and outstretched my cramped arms. For one delirious moment her bewitching face was close to mine, and the dictates of madness almost ruled; but I clenched my teeth and turned sharply aside. I could not trust myself to speak.

With Chou Zhang's marmoset again gambolling before us, we walked through the curtained doorway into the room beyond. It was in darkness, but I could see the slave-girl in front of me. A slim silhouette, as she walked to a screened window, and, opening the screen in the manner of a folding door, also threw up the window.

“Look!” she whispered.

I crept forward and stood beside her. I found myself looking down into Street from a first-floor window.

Belated traffic still passed below us and to the left, but not a solitary figure was visible to the right, as far as I could see, and that was nearly to the railings of the Musée Guimet.

Immediately opposite, in one of the flats which I had noticed earlier in the evening, another window was opened. I turned, and in the reflected light saw that Guan-yin held a cord in her hand.

Our glances met in the semi-darkness.

She began to haul the cord into the window, and, looking upward, I perceived that it was looped in some way over the telegraph cables which crossed the street at that point. It was a slender cord, and it appeared to be passed across a joint in the cables almost immediately above the centre of the roadway. As it was hauled in, a second and stronger line attached to it was pulled, in turn, over the cables, and thence in by the window.

Guan-yin twisted a length of it around a metal bracket fastened in the wall, and placed a light wooden crossbar in my hand.

“Make sure that there is no one in the street,” she said, craning out and looking to right and left, “then swing across. The length of the rope is just sufficient to enable you to swing through the open window opposite, and there is a mattress inside to drop upon. But release the bar immediately, or you may be dragged back. The door of the room in which you will find yourself is unlocked, and you have only to walk down the stairs and out into the street.”

I peered at the crossbar in my hand, then looked hard at the girl beside me. I missed something of the old fire of her nature; she was very subdued, to-night.

“Thank you, Guan-yin,” I said softly.

She suppressed a little cry as I spoke her name, and drew back into the shadows.

“I believe you are my friend,” I said, “but I cannot understand. Won't you help me to understand?”

I took her unresisting hand, and drew her toward me. My very soul seemed to thrill at the contact of her lithe body....

She was trembling wildly and seemed to be trying to speak, but although her lips framed the words no sound followed. Suddenly comprehension came to me. I looked down into the street, hitherto deserted ... and into the upturned face of Chou Zhang!

Wearing a heavy fur-collared coat, and with his yellow, malignant countenance grotesquely horrible beneath the shadow of a large tweed motor cap, he stood motionless, looking up at me.

That he had seen me, I could not doubt; but had he seen my companion?

In a choking whisper Guan-yin answered my unspoken question.

“He has not seen me! I have done much for you; do in return a small thing for me! Save my life!”

She dragged me back from the window and fled across the room to the weird laboratory where I had lain captive. Throwing herself upon the divan, she held out her white wrists and glanced significantly at the manacles.

“Lock them upon me!” she said rapidly. “Quick! Quick!”

“Tie something around my mouth!” directed Guan-yin with nervous rapidity once the manacles were upon her. “Tear a strip from my dress,” she said; “do not hesitate. Be quick! Be quick!”

I did so as the voice of Dr. Chou Zhang became audible. He was speaking rapidly, sibilantly, and evidently would be upon me in a matter of moments.

I fastened the strip of fabric over the girl's mouth and tied it behind, experiencing a pang half pleasurable and half fearful as I found my hands in contact with the foamy luxuriance of her hair.

Chou Zhang was entering the room immediately beyond.

Snatching up the bunch of keys, I turned and ran, for in another instant my retreat would be cut off.

As I burst once more into the darkened room I became aware that a door on the farther side of it was open; and framed in the opening was the tall high-shouldered figure of the Chinaman, still enveloped in his fur coat and wearing the grotesque cap.

As I saw him, so he perceived me; and as I sprang to the window, he advanced.

I turned desperately and hurled the bunch of keys with all my force into the dimly seen face....

Either because they possessed a luminescent quality of their own or by reason of the light reflected through the open window, the green eyes gleamed upon me vividly like those of a giant cat.

One short guttural exclamation paid tribute to the accuracy of my aim, though, and then I had the crossbar in my hand.

I threw one leg across the sill, and dire as was my extremity, hesitated for an instant ere trusting myself to the flight....

I slipped forward, as a diver, across the broad ledge and found myself sweeping through the night like a winged thing....

The line, as Guan-yin had assured me, was of well-judged length. Down I swept to within six or seven feet of the street level, then up, up, at ever-decreasing speed, toward the vague oblong of the open window beyond.

Crouching forward, half out of the open window, was a Burmese dacoit, a cross-eyed, leering being whom I well-remembered to have encountered two years before in my dealings with Chou Zhang. One bare, sinewy arm held rigidly at right angles before his breast, he clutched a long curved knife and waited for the critical moment when my throat should be at his mercy!

Upon my arrival on a level with the window I threw my body back and thrust my feet forward. As my legs went through the opening, an acute pain in one calf told me that I was not to escape unscathed from the night's mêlée - but the dacoit went rolling over in the darkness of the room.

Avenue of escape closed to me, back I swept upon my trapeze, a sight to have induced any passing citizen to question his sanity. With might and main I sought to check the swing of the pendulum, for if I should come within reach of the window behind I doubted not that other knives awaited me. It was no difficult feat, and I succeeded in checking my flight - swinging there above the road I could even appreciate, so lucid was my mind, the ludicrous element of the situation.

I dropped and my wounded leg almost failed me but, with no other serious damage, I picked myself up from the dust of the roadway to see the bar vanishing into the darkness above. It was a mockery of Fate that the problem which Estephe Bernard had set me to solve should have been solved thus: for I could not doubt that by means of the branch of a tall tree or some other suitable object situated opposite to Bernard's house in Rangoon, Guan-yin had made her escape as to-night I had made mine.

Suddenly, the sound of running footsteps came from the direction of the Musée Guimet and when I turned two gendarmes were bearing down upon me!

This was a time for quick decisions and prompt action. I weighed all the circumstances in the balance, and made the last vital choice of the night; I turned and ran as though the worst of Chou Zhang's

creatures, and not my allies the gendarmerie, were at my heels!

Turning a corner, my luck held and the lamp of a slowly retreating taxi became visible some hundred yards to the left. My leg was paining me greatly, but the nature of the wound did not interfere with my progress and was in the cab no more than twenty seconds later, my would-be allies and pursuers had yet to reached the turn
.
“Dr. Clermont's, Boulevard Raspail!” I shouted at the man, neglecting to add the number in my haste. “Drive like hell!”

*****

Less than an hour later, Inspector Michalak and a party of Surete veterans raided the business premises of J. Salaman and, as I had expected, of the instruments, drugs and other laboratory paraphernalia that had set me to both wonder and terror not one item remained.

It was a huge disappointment.

I would gladly have given my income for a year, to have gained possession of the books, alone; for beyond all shadow of doubt, I knew them to contain

formulæ calculated to revolutionize the science of medicine.

Exhausted, physically and mentally, and with my mind a whispering-gallery of conjectures, I turned in, gratefully, having had my colleague Clermont patch up the slight wound in my calf.

I seemed scarcely to have closed my eyes, when Estephe Bernard was shaking me into wakefulness.

“You are probably tired out,” he said; “but your crazy expedition of last night entitles you to no sympathy.”

Before I could defend my actions a sheet of paper was thrust beneath my nose.

“Read this. There is a night train that will take us to the ferry in an hour. We will reserve a compartment and you can resume your interrupted slumbers while we cross the channel.”

As I struggled upright in bed, rubbing my eyes sleepily, Bernard handed me and edition of Le Figaro, pointing to the following paragraph upon the literary page:

“Messrs. M---- announce that they will publish shortly the long-delayed work of Kegan Van Roon,

the celebrated American traveller, Orientalist and psychic investigator, dealing with his recent inquiries in China. It will be remembered that Monsieur. Van Roon undertook to motor from Canton to Siberia last winter, but met with unforeseen difficulties in the province of Ho-Nan.

He fell into the hands of a body of fanatics and was fortunate to escape with his life and his book will deal in particular with his experiences in Ho-Nan, and some sensational revelations regarding the awakening of that most mysterious race, the Chinese, are promised.

For reasons of his own he has decided to remain in England until the completion of his book, which will be published simultaneously in New York and London. And has leased Cragmire Tower, Somersetshire, in which romantic and historical residence he will collate his notes and prepare for the world a work ear-marked as a classic even before it is published."

I glanced up from the paper, to find Bernard's eyes fixed upon me inquiringly.

"From what I have been able to learn," he said evenly, "we should reach our destination, with decent luck, just before dusk."

As he turned and quitted the room without another word, I realized, in a flash, the purport of our mission; I understood my friend's ominous calm, betokening suppressed excitement.

CORLISS DREAMS OF GUAN YIN

That traitorous voice, at one maddening and enrapturing, spoke down to me, my manhood trapped inside her unforgiving yet indescribably inviting interior as I lay helpless upon my back and gazed up at her in all her womanly perfection.

I was powerless to move until she indicated otherwise, but this did not prevent my thoughts from asking just how she could command such obedience from me when the sight of her pert breasts and the smell of her sex itself made want to take her as savagely as ever a man had taken a female.

"We are reaching an understanding, my lovely Edgar," her words floated down to me as sat astride my supine body as if born to dominate a male in such a fashion. "The master himself assured me it would be so and that your feelings for your little Guan yin would soon make you her compliant chattel."

Despite her command for stillness on my part, I flinched at her less than flattering description of me from the lips of her infernal master.

"But you must not think for a moment that my ownership of you will be as inhuman as that of Ai Zhang's over your poor friend. For I too love you in my own way and, though I will certainly insist upon

obedience and respect from you at all times, I prefer to have you in my life as a very junior partner rather than an abject slave and body-servant."

Both possibilities were so ridiculous I would have laughed out loud had I been able. It was preposterous. Could this, undeniably erotic and beguiling, Sand-Arab actually believe men such as myself and Bernard – especially Bernard – could ever be induced to live their lives in such a subservient fashion?

"Junior partner," or not?

But why, if such a proposition were so preposterous, was my manhood at such attention inside her my discomfort was almost as great as my excitement?

"Being mastered by a woman – and one as frail and delicate as your lovely Guan yin – is new to you Edgar. And yet, can you not admit how delicious it feels to for once set aside your precepts of masculine pride and bow your neck to another?

"Can you truly say that your English cock has ever felt as vibrant and alive as it does at this moment inside the warm and juicy cunny of Mistress Guan yin?"

As much as I wished to refute her, to do so would be not only untrue but patently ridiculous given my current position in respect of her.

"We will be so happy together, Edgar. The master and his daughter with me at their side and you at my feet which you must surely have recognised by now is your true position in life."

"For the Frenchman you have idolized and whose lead you have followed for so long, I am afraid life will not be so easy. Though Ai Zhang is as taken with Monsieur Estephe Bernard as your lovely Guan yin is taken with her handsome and manly English doctor, it is where any similarity in our feelings go their own separate ways."

As the wanton Egyptian beauty spoke she was slowly sliding the length of my joy-stick and I sighed deeply as the unusual, and totally unsought on my part, sensations running tandem with being under another's control took body and mind to places it had seldom imagined, let alone experienced.

"Why else would I have placed myself in such danger in order to warn and save you before persuading my Master to bind your will to mine, if it were not from feelings of the fondest kind towards you? Even if those feelings are, in accordance with

my true temperament, based upon control and obedience."

Her eyes gazed down into mine and fairly glittered with the excitement inspired by both her words and the slow and insistent way in which she made use of my engorged manhood.

"My control and your obedience… Hmmmmm…"

Despite her use of words and sentiments that would, normally, have enraged me, it was only iron control that enabled me to prolong the glorious sensation of having her use me in such a way without erupting after the manner of a fountain into the very heart of her womanhood.

"Now, now, my naughty Edgar," she chided, as if reading my thoughts. "Did I not tell you that any pleasure you receive from this point on is dependent upon the pleasure you deliver to your Mistress Guan yin? Your thoughts must always, be they sexual or otherwise, must always place your young Arab Mistress above your own. Only by accomplishing this will you know the true paradise gifted to the most perfectly submissive."

Her words goaded me to a fury, and yet, at the same time, inflamed my senses to a fever pitch of desire and need.

“In fact, by the time I am satisfied and become of a mind to allow you your own crisis, you will already be far along the road to being my addicted English love slave.”

It is impossible to describe just how acutely and with what power such filth falling from the lips of a woman instilled in me. Disgust and desire vied with equal strength. Until, suddenly, I felt that disgust ebbing away to leave only…

Desire.

And desire of the most demeaning and emasculating kind.

It was almost as if she had reins about my thought processes and could apply pressure upon them to guide me in a direction of her choosing.

No matter my desire to take another.

A groan came down to me from above and her perfect breasts began to quiver furiously as she rode her “English love slave” with greater intent until, soon, she was screaming as her own “crisis” overtook her.

A crisis that seemed unending as I attempted – and marvelled as I did so – to observe her commands and

hold myself in readiness until deigned to free me from inexplicable bondage.

Then, still riding me as if I were no more an animal fit only to carry her…

"Now, my slave..."

…The scream with which I pierced the silence of my chamber must surely have come to the ears of any within a mile of our ferry cabin and must surely have our captain hammering upon our door in enquiry.

Not to mention the sleeping Bernard in the next bunk.

Needless to say, it was a chagrined and ashamed doctor who awoke to find the evidence of his dream soiling both the fresh linen of his bed and the pyjama bottoms his housekeeper had laundered only that morning…

CRAGMIRE TOWER

The crooked high-street practically constituted the entire hamlet of the Somerset village nearest the Tower.

It went by the name of Saul, and its inn, The Wagoners, was the last house in the street; though a tavern was the last thing upon our minds at that moment as we followed the ribbon of moor-path to the top of the rise. When reaching it, we could stand and look back upon the way we had come and, although we had covered fully a mile of ground, it was possible to detect the sunlight gleaming now and then upon the gilt lettering of the inn sign as it swayed in the breeze. The day had been unpleasantly warm, but was relieved by this same sea breeze, which, although but slight, had in it the tang of the broad Atlantic.

Behind us, then, the footpath sloped down to Saul and was unpeopled by any living thing; east and north-east the monotony of the moor swelled out to the hazy distance where the sky began and the sea remotely lay hidden; while in the west there fell the gentle gradient from the top of the slope which we had mounted, and here, as far as the eye could reach, the country had an appearance suggestive of a huge and dried-up lake.

Disturbing images of Guan yin from my slumbers aboard the ferry still assailed me as Bernard peered through his field-glasses in an easterly direction:

“Unless I am greatly mistaken, there lies is Cragmire Tower.”

Shading my eyes with my hand, I also looked ahead, and saw the place for which we were bound; one of those round towers, more early-Celtic then late-Norman. Ramshackle buildings clustered untidily about its base and a sort of tongue of oddly venomous green shot out and seemed almost to reach the tower-base. With tiny exceptions, the land for miles around was as flat as the palm of my hand, while hills and uplands could be seen in the hazy distance, forming a sort of mighty inland bay which I doubted not in some past age had been covered by the sea. Even in the brilliant sunlight the place had something of a mournful aspect, looking like a great dried-up pool into which the children of giants had carelessly cast stones.

We met no living soul upon the moor.

With Cragmire Tower but a quarter of a mile off, Bernard paused again, and raising his powerful glasses swept the visible landscape.

“Not a sign, Corliss,” he said softly. “Yet....”

Dropping the glasses back into their case, my companion began to tug at his left ear.

“Have we been over-confident?” he said, narrowing his eyes in speculative fashion.

“What do you mean, Bernard?”

He glanced about him as though the vastness were peopled with listening Chinamen and I took his drift.

Silently we looked into one another's eyes, each seeking for the dread which neither had named.

Then:

“Come on, Corliss!” said Bernard, grasping my arm: and at quick march we were off again.

Cragmire Tower stood upon a very slight eminence, and what had looked like a green tongue, from the moorland slopes above, was in fact a creek, flanked by lush land, which here found its way to the sea. The house which we were come to visit consisted in a low, two-storey building, joining the ancient tower on the east, with two smaller out-buildings. There was a miniature kitchen-garden, and a few stunted fruit trees in the north-west corner; the whole being surrounded by a grey stone wall.

I find it difficult to account for the unwelcome chill which I experienced at the moment that I found myself at the foot of the time-worn tower but I know that we both pulled up sharply and looked at one another as though acted upon by some mutual disturbance.

Not a soul was visible about the premises and there was no sound of human activity or even the obligatory barking dog as Estephe Bernard drew a long breath and followed the wall, me beside him, until we came to the gate.

It was unfastened, and we walked up the stone path through a wilderness of weeds.

Four windows of the house were visible, two on the ground floor and two above. Those on the ground floor were heavily boarded up, those above, though glazed, boasted neither blinds nor curtains. Cragmire Tower showed not the slightest evidence of tenancy.

We mounted three steps and stood before a tremendously massive oaken door. An iron bell-pull, ancient and rusty, hung on the right of the door, and Bernard, giving me an odd glance, seized the ring and tugged it.

From somewhere within the building answered a mournful clangour, a cracked and toneless jangle, which, seeming to echo through empty apartments, sought and found an exit apparently by way of one of the openings in the round tower; for it was from above our heads that the noise came to us.

Silence fell as the mournful clanging ceased and we looked at one another, and we were both about to express a mutual doubt, when, unheralded by any unfastening of bolts or bars, the door was opened and a huge mulatto, dressed in white, stood there regarding us.

I started nervously, for the apparition was so unexpected, but Estephe Bernard, without evidence of surprise, thrust a card into the man's hand.

“Take my card to Monsieur. Van Roon, and say that I wish to see him on important business,” he directed authoritatively, if on just the right side of rudeness.

The mulatto bowed and retired. His white figure seemed to be swallowed up by the darkness within, for beyond the patch of uncarpeted floor revealed by the peeping sunlight, was a barn-like place of densest shadow.

I was about to speak, but Bernard laid his hand upon my arm warningly, as, out from the shadows, the mulatto returned.

He stood on the right of the door and bowed again.

“Be pleased to enter,” he said, in his harsh, Negro voice. “Monsieur. Van Roon will see you.”

THE MULATTO

The room in which Van Roon received us was dark as a catacomb. The walls were wood-panelled, and the ceiling was oaken-beamed. A small book shelf and tumble-down cabinet stood upon either side of the table, and the celebrated American author and traveller lay propped up in a long split-cane chair. He wore smoke glasses, and had a clean-shaven, olive face, with a profusion of jet-black hair. He was garbed in a dirty red dressing-gown, and a perfect fog of cigar smoke hung in the room.

He did not rise to greet us, but merely extended his right hand, between two fingers whereof he held Bernard's card.

“You will excuse the seeming discourtesy of an invalid, gentlemen?” he said; “but I am suffering from having expended undue temerity in the interior of China!”

He waved his hand vaguely, and I saw that two rough deal chairs stood near the table. Bernard and I seated ourselves, and my friend, leaning his elbow upon the table, looked fixedly at the face of the man whom we were come from London to visit. Although comparatively unfamiliar to the British public, the name of Van Roon was well known in

American and French literary circles; for he enjoyed in the United States a reputation somewhat similar to that which had rendered the name of our mutual friend, Mr Lionel Barton, a household word in England. It was Van Roon who, following in the footsteps of Madame Blavatsky, had sought out the haunts of the fabled mahatmas in the Himalayas, and Van Roon who had essayed to explore the fever swamps of Yucatan in quest of the secret of lost Atlantis.

Lastly, it was Van Roon, who, with an overland car, specially built for him by a celebrated American firm, had undertaken the journey across China.

“Monsieur. Van Roon,” began my friend abruptly, “you will not have seen this paragraph. It appeared in an edition of Le Figaro.”

He stood up, and taking out the cutting from his notebook, placed it on the table.

“Is it to this paragraph that I owe the pleasure of seeing you here?” Van Roon asked after having scanned it.

“The paragraph appeared in yesterday’s issue,” replied Bernard. “An hour from the time of seeing it, my friend, Dr. Corliss, and I were on route towards you.”

“Your visit delights me, gentlemen, and I should be ungrateful to question its cause; but frankly I am still at a loss to understand why you should have honoured me thus. I am a poor host, God knows. For what with my tortured limb - a legacy from the Chinese devils whose secrets I surprised - and my semi-blindness, due to the same cause, I am but sorry company.”

Estephe Bernard held up his right hand deprecatingly. Van Roon tendered a box of cigars and clapped his hands, whereupon the mulatto entered.

“I see that you have a story to tell me, Monsieur. Bernard,” he said; “therefore I suggest whisky-and-soda--or you might prefer tea, as it is nearly tea-time?”

Bernard and I chose the former refreshment, and the soft-footed half-breed having departed upon his errand, my companion, leaning forward earnestly across the littered table, outlined for Van Roon the story of Chou Zhang, the great and malign being whose mission in England at that moment was none other than the stoppage of just such information as our host was preparing to give to the world.

“There is a giant conspiracy, Monsieur. Van Roon,” he said, “which had its birth in this very province of

Ho-Nan, from which you were so fortunate to escape alive; whatever its scope or limitations, a great secret society is established among the yellow races. It means that China, which has slumbered for so many generations, now stirs in that age-long sleep. I need not tell *you* how much more it means, this seething in the pot....”

“In a word,” interrupted Van Roon, pushing Bernard's glass across the table, “you would say…”

“That your life is not worth that!” replied Bernard, snapping his fingers before the other's face.

“Your information is very disturbing,” said the American who, as we had thought, was not scared easily. “I am the more disposed to credit your statement because I am all too painfully aware of the existence of such a group as you mention, in China. But that they had an agent here in England is something I had never conjectured. In seeking out this solitary residence, it seems I have unwittingly done much to assist their designs....”

He became thoughtful, then:

But, my dear gentlemen, I am very remiss! Of course you will remain to-night, and I trust for some days to come?”

Bernard glanced rapidly across at me, then turned again to our host and smiled our assent.

“Hagar shall go to the station for your baggage,” said the American rapidly, and clapped his hands, his usual signal to the mulatto.

“How long has that man been in your service?” asked my friend once the servant had departed.

“For some years,” he replied; “he was with me in both India and China.”

“Where did you engage him?”

“Actually, in St. Kitts.”

Bernard made no comment but automatically took out and began to fill his pipe.

“I can offer you no company but my own, gentlemen,” continued Van Roon, “but unless it interfere, with your plans, you may find the surrounding district of interest and worthy of inspection, between now and dinner-time. By the way, I think I can promise you quite a satisfactory meal, for Hagar is a model chef.”

“A walk would be enjoyable,” said Bernard, “but dangerous, in that we would be leaving you alone.”

“Then I must place myself unreservedly in your hands.”

His high-pitched voice, with a certain laboured intonation, not quite so characteristically American as was his accent, was discomfited but determined.

“We cannot presume further upon your kindness,” said Estephe Bernard, standing up. “No doubt we can amuse ourselves in the neighbourhood of the house until the return of your servant.”

“Look upon Cragmire Tower as your own, gentlemen!” cried Van Roon. “Most of the rooms are unfurnished, and the garden is a wilderness, but the structure of the brickwork in the tower may interest you archeologically, and the view across the moor is at least as fine as any in the neighbourhood.”

*****

The silver wisps which had raced along the horizon, as we came to Cragmire Tower, had been harbingers of other and heavier banks. A stormy sunset smeared crimson streaks across the skyline, where a great range of clouds, like the oily smoke of a city burning, was banked, mountain topping mountain, and lighted from below by this angry red.

As we came down the steps and out by the gate, I turned and looked across the moor behind us.

A sort of reflection from this distant blaze hued the whole landscape crimson and the inland bay glowed sullenly, as if internal fires and not reflected light were at work.

A scene both wild and majestic.

Estephe Bernard was staring up at the cone-like top of the ancient tower in a curious, speculative fashion. Under the influence of our host's conversation I had forgotten the reasonless dread which had touched me at the moment of our arrival, but now, with the red light blazing over Sedgemoor, as if in memory of the blood which had been shed there by Roundhead and Cavalier alike during our own English civil-war, and with the tower of unknown origin looming above me I became very uncomfortable again.

Nor, you will not be surprised, did I envy Van Roon his eerie residence.

“What is that?” snapped Bernard suddenly, as if to underpin my thoughts, grasping my arm out of instinct.

He was peering southward, toward the distant hamlet, and I too jumped before staring in that direction.

“We were followed, Corliss,” he almost whispered. “I sensed it. Look! Something moves.”

Together we stood staring into the dusk; then Bernard burst abruptly into one of his rare laughs, and clapped me upon the shoulder.

“It is Hagar, the mulatto!” he cried. “With our luggage. This places certainly plays the devil with one’s nerves.” He glanced up at the tower. “What a place to live in…! And yet… I sense that Chou Zhang is close to implementing his plan for world dominion and will not trust our seeming ignorance of those plans not to thwart them.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, Corliss, that the Chinaman may have led us to this desolate place in order to dispose of us the more readily. We are far from Michalak and the forces disposed to aid us in our quest and nowhere could be more convenient for disposing of two corpses than one of the bottomless bogs upon the moor outside.”

“But, Bernard, if that is the case, why did you allow us to be lured to such a place? And how in the devil’s name does the fiend intend to gain this world dominion of which you speak?”

“The answer to the first is simple, Mon frère. *Gullibility*. Pure and simple. Van Roon has, no doubt, much of interest to tell us. But, in my haste to hear it, I have placed us in an unenviable position and offer you my apologies for any inconvenience – such as the loss of our lives – that may follow.”

I gave out with a *“Harrumph”* at his attempt at a Gallic version of our very English gallows humour.

“As to the second of your questions, the answer is equally as simple.”

I allowed him a look of cynical incredulity.

World dominion?

Simple?

“I speak not of the cultivation of the dark art necessary for such plans to succeed,” he went on. “But of the routine way in which the building blocks will be put in place.”

“In heaven’s name, Bernard,” I hissed, patience near exhausted. “Stop playing for effect and tell me of what these *‘building blocks’*, as you call them, consist.

“You have no sense of the grand, Corliss,” he tutted, “and offend my sense of Parisian drama.”

“Cut to the chase, for devil’s sake!”

“It is mind control, Mon frere. Nothing less and nothing more. You have seen the effect our Chinese adversary can have upon the conscious mind with, apparently, no more than the focus of his eyes and his thoughts upon a subject.”

His eyes, suddenly, were faraway.

Then:

“His daughter in evil is no less proficient in these arts and… and I have experienced at first-hand…”

He broke off and I could not help but miss the sheen of perspiration that suddenly coated his high-forehead at the mention of Chou Zhang and his offspring; his *“experience”* not something he had bothered to confide to me before this point.

“Bernard, the whole of the civilised world and freedoms its governments serve are not likely to fall because of the mesmeric capacity of on Chinaman and his perfidious offspring – no matter how great the genius of the Chinaman in question.”

“I have no disagreement with you on the subject, my good Corliss. But what if that evil genius could take certain, multitudinous numbers of his slavish followers and impart something of the gift to them?”

The possibility pulled me up short.

“And what if those followers were sent out into the world en masse with the unswerving intention to make contact with the political leaders of the West and bring them under their hypnotic sway? And in doing so made them, ultimately, the creatures of their oriental master? Can you not see the power this mesmeric control over minds of such influence would confer upon the one capable of demanding it?”

“It… It is beyond believable,” I scoffed, disbelieving my own cynicism even as I voiced it.

“Exactly why, Corliss, nobody will notice and, soon, the world in which we move and believe will be overseen not from Paris, London, Moscow and Washington, but from the interior of China itself.”

At this sobering – and now quite believable prospect – we fell into a pensive silence and tried to focus our thoughts and our energies upon the task at hand.

Namely: that of staying alive long enough to thwart the Chinaman's plans.

*****

Together we waited by the gate until the half-caste appeared on the bend of the path with a grip in either hand. He was a great, muscular fellow with a stoic face, and, for the purpose of visiting Saul, presumably, he had doffed his white raiment and now wore a sort of livery, with a peaked cap.

Bernard watched him enter the house, then:

"Despite the false alarm, Mon frère, I do believe that we were followed here to-day!" he muttered. "The agents of Chou Zhang are nearby and ready to silence us."

Before he could say anything else, the mulatto turned and beckoned us to follow and soon we found ourselves on the floor above, and an apartment on the immediate left was indicated by the mulatto as that allotted to Bernard. It was a room of fair size, furnished quite simply but boasting a wardrobe

cupboard. Bernard's grip stood beside the white-enamelled bed.

I glanced around, and then prepared to follow the man, who had awaited me in the doorway.

He still wore his dark livery, and as I followed the lithe yet brawny figure along the corridor, I found myself considering critically his breadth of shoulder and the extraordinary thickness of his neck.

I have repeatedly spoken of a sort of foreboding, an elusive stirring in the depths of my being, of which I became conscious at certain times in my dealings with Chou Zhang and his murderous servants.

It was this sensation, or something akin to it, that claimed me now.

As I stood looking into the neat bedroom, on the same side of the corridor but at the extreme end, wherein I was to sleep. A voiceless warning urged me not to enter. A kind of childish panic came fluttering about my heart, a dread of entering the room, of allowing and was not lessened any by a gesture from the mulatto bidding me welcome to my new and temporary abode.

Suddenly, on impulse, I merely nodded, turned on my heel and went back to Bernard's room.

“Bernard,” I said, “that man sends cold water trickling down my spine!”

My friend nodded his head.

“You are curiously sensitive to this sort of thing,” he replied slowly; “I have noticed it before as a useful capacity. I do not like the look of the man myself. The fact that he has been in Van Roon's employ for some years goes for nothing. We are neither of us likely to forget Kwee, the Chinese servant of Monsieur Lionel Barton, and it is quite possible that Chou Zhang has corrupted this man as he corrupted the other. It is quite possible....”

His voice trailed off into silence, and he stood looking across the room with unseeing eyes, meditating deeply.

It was quite dark, now, outside, as I could see through the un-curtained window, which opened upon the dreary expanse stretching out to haunted Sedgemoor. Two candles were burning upon the dressing-table; they were but recently lighted, and so intense was the stillness. So still, in fact, that I could distinctly hear the spluttering of one of the wicks, which was damp.

Without giving the slightest warning of his intention, Bernard suddenly made two strides

forward, stretched out his long arms, and snuffed the pair of candles in a twinkling!

The room became plunged in impenetrable darkness.

“Not a word, Corliss!” whispered my companion.

He was looking out across the moor.

“See!” he hissed.

A light was dancing out upon the moor, a witch-light that came and went unaccountably, up and down, in and out, now clearly visible, now masked in the darkness!

“Lock the door!” snapped my companion. “If there be a key.”

I did as asked.

“There is no key.”

“Then wedge the chair under the knob and let no one enter until I return!”

With that he opened the window to its fullest extent, threw his leg over the sill, and went creeping along

a wide concrete ledge, in which ran a leaded gutter, in the direction of the tower on the right!

Not pausing to follow his instructions respecting the chair, I craned out of the window, watching his progress, and wondering with what sudden madness he was bitten. Indeed, I could not credit my senses, could not believe that I heard and saw.

Yet there out in the darkness on the moor moved the will-o'-the-wisp, and ten yards along the gutter crept my friend, like a great gaunt cat. For, unknown to me he must have prospected the route by daylight, for now I saw his design.

The ledge terminated only where it met the ancient wall of the tower, and it was possible for an agile climber to step from it to the edge of the unglazed window some four feet below, and to scramble from that point to the stone fence and thence on to the path by which we had come from Saul.

This difficult operation Estephe Bernard successfully performed, and, to my unbounded amazement, went racing into the darkness toward the dancing light, headlong, like a madman!

The night swallowed him up, and between my wonder and my fear my hands trembled so violently

that I could scarce support myself where I rested, with my full weight upon the sill.

One--two--three--four--five minutes passed. The light vanished and did not appear again. Five more age-long minutes elapsed in absolute silence, whilst I peered into the darkness of the night and listened, muscles tensed, for the return of Estephe Bernard.

Yet two more minutes, which embraced an agony of suspense, passed in the same fashion; then a shadowy form grew, phantomesque, out of the gloom; a moment more, and I distinctly heard the heavy breathing of a man nearly spent, and saw my friend scrambling up toward the black embrasure in the tower.

His voice came huskily:

“Creep along and lend me a hand, Corliss! I am nearly winded.”

“Quick! Light the candles!” he breathed hoarsely once safely inside the room. “Did any one come?”

“No one--nothing.”

Having expended several matches in vain, for my fingers twitched nervously, I ultimately succeeded in relighting the candles.

“Get along to your room!” directed Bernard. “Your apprehensions are unfounded at the moment, but you may as well leave both doors wide open!”

I looked into his face.

It was very drawn and grim, and his brow was wet with perspiration, but his eyes had the fighting glint, and I knew that we were upon the eve of strange happenings.

A CRY ON THE MOOR

Of the events intervening between this moment and that when death called to us out of the night, I have the haziest recollections.

An excellent dinner was served in the bleak and gloomy dining-room by the mulatto, and the crippled author was carried to the head of the table by this same herculean attendant as lightly as though he had but the weight of a child.

Van Roon talked continuously, revealing a deep, knowledge of all sorts of obscure matters and Estephe Bernard followed his lead.

Plans for the future were discussed.

I can recall none of them.

I could not stifle my queer sentiments in regard to the mulatto, and every time I found him behind my chair I was hard put to it to repress a shudder.

In this fashion the strange evening passed, and to the accompaniment of distant, muttering thunder, we two guests retired to our chambers in Cragmire Tower.

Bernard had contrived to give me my instructions in a whisper, and five minutes after entering my own room, I had snuffed the candles, slipped a wedge, which he had given me, under the door, crept out through the window on to the guttered ledge, and joined Bernard in his room. He, too, had extinguished his candles and the place was in darkness.

“Listen!” he said, finally.

At first I heard nothing, then, looking out upon thunderous skyscape that would have been a fit setting for the witch scene in Macbeth, there came a remote murmuring, as of a troubled sea imitating a hushed and distant chorus. In the west lightning flickered intermittently.

Then came the call:

Out of the blackness of the moor it came, wild and distant:

“Help! Help!”

Then, our eyes met:

“Monsieur. Bernard!” came the agonized cry. “Estephe Bernard, help! For God's sake....”

“Quick, Bernard!” I cried, “It's Van Roon--he's been dragged out... They are murdering him....”

Estephe Bernard held me in a vice-like grip, silent and unmoved!

Louder and more agonized came the cry for aid, and I felt more than ever certain that it was poor Van Roon who uttered it.

“Monsieur. Bernard! Dr. Corliss! For God's sake come or it will be too late....”

My doctor’s blood boiled now with hot resentment. It was incredible, inhuman, that we should remain there inert whilst a fellow-man, and our host to boot, was being done to death out there in the darkness. I exerted all my strength to break away; but although my efforts told upon him Estephe Bernard clung to me tenaciously.

Had my hands been free, in my fury I could have struck him; for the pitiable cries, growing fainter now, told their own tale.

Then, suddenly:

“Be quiet, Corliss!” he snapped. “Or is it your intention to insult me?”

I was, you may imagine, totally bemused by the situation.

“It's little less than an insult, Corliss, to think me capable of refusing help where help is needed!”

Like, a cold douche his words acted and in that instant I knew myself a fool.

“You remember the Call of Siva?” he said, thrusting me away irritably. “Remember what it meant to those who obeyed it?”

“You might have told me....”

“Told you! You would have been through the window before I had uttered two words!”

“Forgive me, old man,” I said, crestfallen and chastened, “but my impulse was a natural one, you'll admit. You must remember that I have been trained never to refuse aid when aid is asked.”

His answer was a curt and preoccupied nod.

The cries had ceased, now, entirely, and a peal of thunder, louder than any yet, echoed over distant Sedgemoor. The chasm of light splitting the heavens closed in, leaving the night wholly black.

“You wedged your door?” Bernard asked.

“Yes.”

“Good. Get into that cupboard, have your Browning ready, and keep the door very slightly ajar.”

He was in that mood of repressed fever which I knew and which always communicated itself to me. I spoke no further word, but stepped into the wardrobe indicated and drew the door nearly shut. The recess just accommodated me, and through the aperture I could see the bed, vaguely, the open window, and part of the opposite wall. I saw Bernard cross the floor, as a mighty clap of thunder boomed over the house.

A gleam of lightning flickered through the gloom and I saw the bed for a moment, distinctly, and it appeared to me that Bernard lay therein, with the sheets pulled up over his head. The light was gone and I could hear big drops of rain pattering upon the leaden gutter below the open window.

My mood was strange, detached, and characterized by vagueness. That Van Roon lay dead upon the moor I was convinced; and - although I recognized that it must be a sufficient one - I could not even dimly divine the reason why we had refrained from lending him aid.

To have failed to save him, knowing his peril, would have been bad enough.

To have _refused, however, I thought, was shameful.

Better to have shared his fate than…

My thoughts were distracted by the increasing downpour as it beat a regular tattoo upon the gutter-way. Then, splitting the oblong of greater blackness which marked the casement, another flash of lightning came and I saw the bed again with that impression of Bernard curled up in it.

The blinding light died out and then came the crash of thunder, harsh and fearsome, more imminently above the tower than ever.

The building seemed to shake.

Somehow, though, I now seemed detached and set apart from the whirl of events as if a spectator. Even when a vague yellow light crept across the room from the direction of the door and flickered unsteadily on the bed, I remained unmoved to a certain degree - although passively alive to the significance of the incident.

I now realised that the ultimate issue was at hand, but either because I was emotionally exhausted, or from some other cause, the pending climax failed to disturb me.

Going on tiptoe, in stockinged feet, across my field of vision, passed Kegan Van Roon!

He was in his shirt-sleeves and held a lighted candle in one hand whilst with the other he shaded it against the draught from the window.

He was a cripple no longer, and the smoked glasses were discarded.

And now I saw him for who he truly was.

The eyes hidden by those glasses were unmistakably Oblique.

Though highly educated, and possibly an American citizen, Van Roon was a Chinaman!

Upon the picture of his face as I saw it then, I do not care to dwell. It lacked the unique horror of Dr. Chou Zhang's unforgettable countenance, but possessed a sort of animal malignancy which the latter lacked.

He approached within three or four feet of the bed, peering. Then, with a timidity which spoke well for

Estephe Bernard's reputation, he paused and beckoned to someone who evidently stood in the doorway behind him. As he did so I saw that the legs of his trousers were caked with greenish-brown mud nearly up to the knees.

The huge mulatto, silent-footed, crossed to the bed in three strides. He was stripped to the waist, and excepting some few professional athletes, I had never seen a torso to compare with that which, brown and glistening, now bent over Estephe Bernard. The muscular development was simply enormous; the man had a neck like a column, and the thews around his back and shoulders were like ivy tentacles wreathing some gnarled oak.

Whilst Van Roon, his evil gaze upon the bed, held the candle aloft, the mulatto, with a curious preparatory writhing movement of the mighty shoulders, lowered his outstretched fingers to the disordered bed linen....

I pushed open the cupboard door and thrust out the Browning. As I did so a dramatic thing happened. A tall, gaunt figure shot suddenly upright from beyond the bed.

Estephe Bernard held upraised in his hand a heavy walking cane.

I knew the handle to be leaded, and I could judge of the force with which he wielded it by the fact that it cut the air with a keen swishing sound.

It descended upon the back of the mulatto's skull with a sickening thud, and the great brown body dropped inert upon the padded bed in which not Bernard, but his luggage reposed.

There was no word, no cry, and I knew with certainty the man was dead before his powerful frame made contact with the floor.

Then:

“Shoot, Corliss! Shoot the fiend!”

Van Roon, dropping the candle, in the falling gleam of which I saw the whites of the oblique eyes, turned and leapt from the room with the agility of a wild cat.

The ensuing darkness was split by a streak of lightning and there was Estephe Bernard scrambling around the foot of the bed and making for the door in hot pursuit.

We gained it almost simultaneously. Bernard had dropped the cane, and now held his pistol in his hand. Together we fired into the chasm of the

corridor, and in the flash, saw Van Roon hurling himself down the stairs. He went silently in his stockinged feet, and our own clatter was drowned by the awful booming of the thunder which now burst over us again.

Three times our pistols spat venomously after the flying figure, then we had crossed the hall below and were in the wilderness of the night with the rain descending upon us in sheets. Vaguely I saw the white shirt-sleeves of the fugitive near the corner of the stone fence. A moment he hesitated, then darted away inland, not toward Saul, but toward the moor and the cup of the inland bay.

“Steady, Corliss!” cried Estephe Bernard. He ran, panting, beside me. “It is the path to the mire.” He breathed sibilantly between every few words. “It was out there that he hoped to lure us with the cry for help.”

A great blaze of lightning illuminated the landscape as far as the eye could see. Ahead of us a flying shape, hair lank and glistening in the downpour, followed a faint path skirting that green tongue of morass which we had noted from the upland.

Van Roon glanced over his shoulder, showing a yellow, terror-stricken face.

We were gaining upon him.

Darkness fell, and the thunder cracked and boomed as though the very moor were splitting about us.

“Another fifty yards, Corliss,” breathed Estephe Bernard, “and after that it's uncharted ground.”

On we went through the rain and the darkness; then:

“Slowly now, Mon frère!” cried Bernard. “It feels soft!”

Indeed, already I had made one false step--and the hungry mire had fastened upon my foot, almost tripping me.

We stopped dead. The falling rain walled us in. I dared not move, for I knew that the mire, the devouring mire, stretched, eager, close about my feet. We were both waiting for the next flash of lightning, I think, but, before it came, out of the darkness ahead of us rose a cry that sometimes rings in my ears to this hour.

Yet it was no more than a repetition of that which had called to us, deceitfully, awhile before.

“Help! Help! For God's sake help! Quick! I am sinking....”

Estephe Bernard grasped my arm furiously.

“We dare not move, Corliss!” he breathed. “It is no more than God's justice - visible for once.”

Then came the lightning and, ignoring a splitting crash behind us, we both looked ahead, over the mire.

Just on the edge of the venomous green patch, not thirty yards away, I saw the head and shoulders and upstretched, appealing arms of Van Roon.

Even as the lightning flickered and we saw him, he was gone; with one last, long, drawn-out cry, horribly like the mournful wail of a sea-gull, he was gone!

The eerie light died, and in the instant before the sound of the thunder came shatteringly, we turned about in time to see Cragmire Tower, a blacker silhouette against the night, topple and fall!

A red glow began to be perceptible above the building and the thunder came booming through the caverns of space.

Estephe Bernard lowered his wet face close to mine and shouted in my ear:

“Kegan Van Roon never returned from China. It was a trap. Those were two creatures of Dr. Chou Zhang....”

The thunder died away, hollowly, echoing over the distant sea....

“That light on the moor to-night?”

“You have not learnt the Morse Code, Corliss. It was a signal, and it read: S M I T H ... S O S.”

“Well?”

“I took the chance, as you know. And it was Guan-yin! She knew of the plot to bury us in the mire. She had followed from London, but could do nothing until dusk. God forgive me if I've mis-judged her, for tonight we owe her our lives.”

It would turn out later that we had misjudged her.

But our forgiveness would *not* be required!

Flames were bursting up from the building beside the ruin of the ancient tower which had faced the storms of countless ages only to succumb at last.

The lightning literally had cloven it in twain.

“The mulatto?” I asked, knowing the answer even as I framed the question.

Again the lightning flashed, and we saw the path and began to retrace our steps.

Estephe Bernard turned to me; his face was very grim in that unearthly light, and his eyes shone like steel.

“I killed him, Corliss ... as I meant to do.”

THE NIGHT OF THE RAID

Much had happened since the return across the channel from England and, after the terror of the tower and the moor, Bernard felt assured that, due to his efforts upon his home turf, the net was now closing about our adversary and his murderous cohorts.

We had no way of knowing when the vessels of his plan for world dominion would be sent out to gain their hypnotic sway over men of power and time was of the essence if we were to find out who they were and prevent their departure.

As well as put an end to any such future threat emanating from their inglorious master. .

“Dieu nous sauve, Corliss!” cried Bernard. “This is most annoying!”

I was back in practice and the bell was ringing furiously - although midnight was long past. Almost certainly this ringing portended an urgent case. In other words, I was not fated to take part in what I anticipated would prove to be the closing scene of the Chou Zhang drama.

“Everyone is in bed,” I said ruefully; “and how can I possibly see a patient in this costume?”

Bernard and I were both arrayed in rough tweeds, and anticipating the labours before us, had dispensed with collars and wore soft mufflers. It was hard to be called upon to face a professional interview dressed thus, as well as having a big tweed cap pulled down over my eyes.

Across the writing-table we confronted one another, in dismayed silence, whilst, below, the bell sent up its ceaseless clangour.

“It has to be done, Bernard,” I said regretfully. “Almost certainly it means a journey and probably an absence of some hours.”

I threw my cap upon the table, turned up my coat to hide the absence of collar, and started for the door.

My last sight of Bernard showed him standing looking after me, tugging at the lobe of his ear and clicking his teeth together with suppressed irritability.

Not wishing to disturb my admirable housekeeper at such an hour, I stumbled down the dark stairs, along the hall, and opened the front door. Vaguely visible in the light of a street lamp which stood at no great

distance away, I saw a slender man of medium height confronting me. From the shadowed face two large and luminous eyes looked out into mine. My visitor, who, despite the warmth of the evening, wore a heavy greatcoat, was an Oriental!

I drew back, apprehensively; then:

“Ah! Dr. Corliss!” he said in a softly musical voice which made me start again. “To God be all praise that I have found you!”

Some emotion, which at present I could not define, was stirring within me. Where had I seen this graceful Eastern youth before? Where had I heard that soft voice?

“Do you wish to see me professionally?” I asked--yet even as I put the question, I seemed to know it unnecessary.

“So you know me no more?” said the stranger as his teeth gleamed in a slight smile.

Heavens! I knew now what had struck that vibrant chord within me! The voice, though infinitely deeper, yet had an unmistakable resemblance to the dulcet tones of Guan-yin!

Of Guan-yin, whose eyes haunted my dreams, whose beauty had done much to embitter my years.

The Oriental youth stepped forward, with outstretched hand and I asked myself if this was some male relation of hers I might have made some fleeting – and forgotten, it seemed – acquaintance at some time in the past.

“So you know me no more?” he repeated; “but I know you, and give praise to Allah that I have found you!”

I stepped back, pressed the electric switch, and turned, with leaping heart, to look into the face of my visitor.

It was a face of the purest Greek beauty, a face that might have served as a model for Praxiteles.

The skin had a golden pallor, which, with the crisp black hair and magnetic yet velvety eyes, suggested to my fancy that this was the young Antinoüs risen from the Nile, whose wraith now appeared to me out of the night.

I stifled a cry of surprise, not unmingled with gladness as recognition came to me.

It was Azîz!

The brother of Guan-yin!

Never could the entrance of a figure upon the stage of a drama have been more dramatic than the coming of Azîz upon this night of all nights.

I seized the outstretched hand and drew him forward, then reclosed the door and stood before him a moment in doubt.

A vaguely troubled look momentarily crossed the handsome face; with the Oriental's unerring instinct, he had detected the reserve of my greeting.

Yet, when I thought of the treachery of Guan-yin…

Knowing from Bernard that her saving of my life – m and, co-incidentally, his – was not from some humane and altruistic instinct borne of her love for me, and that he knew exactly what kind of an abject, menial and sexually servile, fate awaited me when I securely ensconced in the world she inhabited with her Chinese master – I was inclined to view *all* of her kin with suspicion.

Though Bernard's less than forthcoming explanation as to how he knew such a fate awaited me and how he could possibly know of the *"sexual and domestic servility"* that awaited me in her service, gave me much pause for thought.

On the other hand, when I remembered how she, whom we had befriended, whom we had rescued from the house of Chou Zhang, had then turned like the beautiful viper that she was to strike at the hand that caressed her; when I thought how to-night we were set upon raiding the place where the evil Chinese genius lurked in hiding and were set upon the arrest of that malignant genius and of all his creatures, Guan-yin amongst them, is it strange that I hesitated to greet her brother hospitably?

And yet, Bernard's concerns to one side, it could not be denied that twice, she had risked her life to save mine.

Avoiding the gaze of the lad, I took his arm, and in silence we ascended the stairs and entered my study.

Estephe Bernard stood bolt upright beside the table, his steely eyes fixed upon the face of the new arrival.

No look of recognition crossed the bronzed features, and Azîz, who had started forward with outstretched hands, fell back a step and looked pathetically from me to Estephe Bernard, and from the grim Commissioner back again to me. The appeal in the velvet eyes was more than I could tolerate, unmoved.

"Bernard," I said shortly, "you remember Azîz?"

Not a muscle visibly moved in Bernard's face, as he snapped back:

“I remember him perfectly.”

“He has come, I think, to seek our assistance.”

“Yes, yes!” cried Azîz, laying his hand upon my arm with a gesture painfully reminiscent of Guan-yin. “I came only to-night to Paris. Oh, my gentlemen! I have searched, and searched, and searched, until I am weary. Often I have wished to die. And then at last I come to Rangoon....”

“To Rangoon!” snapped Bernard, still with the grey eyes fixed almost fiercely upon the lad's face.

“To Rangoon. And yes; there I hear news at last. I hear that you have seen my sister and that after your disappearance, Monsieur Bernard, and the… *fate*… that befell you…”

I noted a look of embarrassment and, yes, shame, I had yet to see upon my friend’s face up to this point but had no chance to ponder the significance of such a reaction as Aziz was continuing:

“…that you had returned to Paris and had, once again, met with your valued friend, Doctor Corliss.”

He was not entirely at home with his English, I make pains to draw to your attention, lest you think your writer’s attempt at veracity nothing more than ill education.

“I know then that she must be here, too. I ask them everywhere, and they answer 'yes.' Oh, Bernard, Monsieur, Pasha!” he stepped forward and impulsively seized both Bernard's hands. “You know where she is. As you are a man of mercy, do please take me to her!”

Bernard's face was a study in perplexity now. In the past we had befriended the young Azîz, and it was hard to look upon him in the light of an enemy. Yet had we not equally befriended his sister?

And she....

At last Bernard glanced across at me where I stood just within the doorway.

“What do you make of it, Corliss?” he said harshly. “Personally I take Aziz and his presence here to mean that our plans have leaked out.”

He sprang suddenly back from Azîz, and I saw his glance travelling rapidly over the slight figure as if in quest of concealed arms.

“I take it to be a trap!”

A moment he stood so, regarding our unexpected guest, and despite my well-grounded distrust of the Oriental character, I could have sworn that the expression of pained surprise upon the youth's face was not simulated but real.

Even Bernard, I think, began to share my view; for suddenly he threw himself into the white cane rest-chair, and, still fixedly regarding Azîz:

“Perhaps I have wronged you,” he said. “If I have, you shall know the reason presently. Tell your own story!”

There was a pathetic humidity in the velvet eyes of Azîz - eyes so like those others that were ever looking into mine in dreams – as, glancing from Bernard to me, he began, hands outstretched, characteristically, palms upward and fingers curling, to tell in broken English the story of his search for Guan-yin....

“It was Chou Zhang, my kind gentlemen - it was the hâkîm, who is really not a man at all, but a… a demon. He found us again less than four days after you had left us, Bernard Pasha! He found us in Cairo, and to Guan-yin he made the forgetting of all things - even of me.”

Saying it aloud seemed to amaze him all over again; so much, in fact, he had to repeat himself:

“Even of me!”

Estephe Bernard snapped his teeth together sharply; then:

“What do you mean by that?” he demanded.

For my own part I understood well enough, remembering how the brilliant Chinese doctor once had performed such an operation as this upon poor Inspector Weymouth; how, by means of an injection of some serum, prepared (as Guan-yin afterwards told us) from the venom of a swamp adder or similar reptile, he had induced amnesia or complete loss of memory.

As well as complete obedience to the fiend performing the operation!

I felt every drop of blood recede from my cheeks.

This was the *“Training”* Bernard had spoken of and which Chou Zhang’s acolytes, even as we sat and discussed, were preparing to unleash upon the leaders of the free world.

“Bernard!” I began....

“Let him speak for himself,” interrupted my friend sharply.

“They tried to take us both,” continued Azîz, still speaking in that soft, melodious manner, but with deep seriousness. “I escaped, I, who am swift of foot, hoping to bring help.”

He shook his head sadly.

“But, except the All Powerful, who is as powerful as the Hâkîm, Chou Zhang? I hid, my gentlemen, and watched and waited, one, two, then three weeks. At last I saw her again, my sister Guan-yin. But she did not know me. Azîz, her brother! She was in an arabeeyeh, and passed me quickly along the Sharia en-Nahhâsin. I ran, and ran, and ran, crying her name, but although she looked back, she did not know me. Me! I felt that I was dying, and presently I fell upon the steps of the Mosque of Abu.”

He dropped the expressive hands wearily to his sides and sank his chin upon his breast.

“And then?” I asked huskily, for my heart was fluttering like that of a captive bird.

“Alas! From that day to this I see her no more, my gentlemen. I travel not only in Egypt but near and

far, and still I see her no more until in Rangoon I hear that which brings me to England again."

He extended his palms naïvely, "and here I am--Bernard Pasha."

Bernard sprang upright again and turned to me.

"Either I am growing over-credulous," he said, "or Azîz speaks the truth. But," he held up his hand, "you can tell me all that at some other time, Corliss! We must take no chances. Sergeant Cartier is downstairs with the cab and you might ask him to step up.

"He and Azîz can remain here until our return."

THE SAMURAI'S SWORD

The muffled drumming of sleepless Paris seemed very remote from us as, side by side we crept up the narrow path to the studio that was our objective. This was a starry but moonless night, and the little dingy white building with a solitary tree peeping, in silhouette above its glazed roof, bore an odd resemblance to one of those tombs which form a city of the dead so near to the city of feverish life, on the slopes of the Mokattam Hills.

The star-jewelled sky, was strongly suggestive – and fittingly so - of an Eastern night and gave up no sign to show that it masked the presence of more than twenty men.

Some distance away on our right was Les Pignons, the sinister and deserted mansion which we assumed, and with good reason, to be nothing less than the gateway to the subterranean abode of Dr. Fu Manchu.

Before us, however, was the studio, which, if Estephe Bernard's deductions were accurate, concealed a second entrance to the same mysterious dwelling.

As my friend, glancing cautiously all about him, inserted the key in the lock, an owl hooted dismally almost immediately above our heads and I caught my breath sharply, for it might be a signal; but, looking upward, I saw a great black shape float slantingly from the tree beyond the studio into the coppice on the right which hemmed in Les Pignons.

Silently the owl winged its uncanny flight into the greater darkness of the trees, and was gone.

Bernard opened the door and we stepped into the studio.

Our plans had been well considered, and in accordance with these, I now moved up beside my friend, who was dimly perceptible to me in the starlight which found access through the glass roof, and pressed the catch of my electric pocket-lamp....

I confess that my facility as a chronicler of events fails me now as I attempt in cold English to portray my emotions when the white beam from the little lamp cut through the darkness of the studio, and shone fully upon the beautiful face of…

Guan yin!

Less than six feet away from me she stood, arrayed in the gauzy dress of the harem, her fingers and slim white arms laden with barbaric jewelry!

The light wavered in my suddenly nerveless hand, gleaming momentarily upon bare ankles and golden anklets, upon little red-leather shoes.

I spoke no word, and Bernard was as silent as I; both of us, I think, were speechless rather from amazement than in obedience to the evident wishes of Chou Zhang's slave-girl. Yet I have only to close my eyes at this moment to see her as she stood with one finger raised to her lips, enjoining us to silence.

She looked ghastly pale in the light of the lamp, but so lovely that my rebellious heart threatened already to make a fool of my resolve.

So we stood in that untidy studio, with canvases and easels heaped against the wall and with all sorts of litter about us, a trio strangely met, and one to have amused the high gods watching through the windows of the stars glittering above.

Then, suddenly:

“Go back!” came in a whisper from Guan-yin.

I saw the red lips moving and read a dreadful horror in the widely opened eyes - those eyes that reacted upon me as though they were pools of mystery designed specifically to taunt my thirsty soul.

So great was my need for this creature that the world of realities was slipping past me and I seemed to be losing my hold on things actual. In the fantasy world I had envisaged about us, I had built up an Eastern palace for Guan-yin and myself, wherein the world was shut out and I might pass the hours in reading the mystery of those dark eyes. It was, loathe as I was to admit it in my more sober moments, a world I cherished.

As was usually the case, it was Estephe Bernard who brought me sharply to my senses.

“Steady with the light, Corliss!” he hissed in my ear. “My scepticism has been shaken to-night, but I am taking no chances.”

He moved from my side and forward toward that lovely, unreal figure which stood immediately before the model's throne and its background of plush curtains as Guan-yin started forward to meet him, suppressing a little cry whose real anguish could not have been simulated.

“Go back! Go back!” she whispered urgently, and thrust out her hands against Bernard's breast. “For God's sake, go back! Again I have risked my life to come here to-night. He knows and is ready.”

The words were spoken with such passionate intensity even the impervious Estephe Bernard hesitated and to my nostrils was wafted that faint, delightful perfume which, since one night, two years ago, had come to so disturb my senses and had taunted me many times, much as the mirage taunts the parched Sahara traveller.

I took a step forward.

“Remain still, Corliss!” snapped Bernard.

Guan-yin clutched frenziedly at the lapels of his coat.

“Listen to me!” she said beseechingly, and stamped one little foot upon the floor. “You are a clever man, but you know nothing of a woman's heart. Nothing! I tell you that it is death to go behind those curtains. That he....”

“And that is exactly what I wanted to know!” snapped Bernard, voice quivering with excitement.

Suddenly grasping Guan-yin by the waist, he lifted her and set her aside; then in three bounds he was on to the model's throne and had torn the plush curtains bodily from their fastenings.

Then, suddenly, Bernard seemed to topple forward amid the purple billows of velvet, and his muffled cry came to me:

“Corliss! My God, Corliss!”

The pale face of Guan-yin looked up into mine and her hands were clutching me, but the glamour of her personality had lost its hold, for I knew without shadow of a doubt that Estephe Bernard was gone to his death. What I hoped to achieve, I know not, but hurling the trembling girl aside, I snatched the Browning pistol from my coat pocket, and with the ray of the lamp directed upon the purple mound of velvet, I leaped forward.

I think I realized that the curtains had masked a collapsible trap, a sheer pit of blackness, an instant before I was precipitated into it, but certainly the knowledge came too late.

With the sound of a soft and shuddering cry in my ears, I fell, dropping lamp and pistol and clutching at the fallen hangings.

But they offered me no support.

My head seemed to be bursting and I could utter only a hoarse groan, as I fell…

And fell…

And…

*****

“There is such a divine simplicity in the English and, yes, the Gallic mindset that one may lay one's plans with mathematical precision, and rely upon the Estephe Bernard’s and Dr. Corliss’s of this world to play their allotted parts,” said the even toned and infinitely terrifying, as well as mocking. Voice of Chou Zhang.

“Excepting two faithful followers, my friends are long since departed. But here, in these vaults which time has overlooked and which are as secret and as serviceable to-day as they were two hundred years ago, I have waited patiently, with my trap set, like the spider for the fly!”

To the sound of that taunting voice, I opened my eyes and, as I did so I strove to spring upright.

Only to realize that I was tied fast to a heavy ebony chair inlaid with ivory, and attached by means of two iron brackets to the floor.

“Even children learn from experience,” continued the unforgettable voice, alternately guttural and sibilant, but always as deliberate as though the speaker were choosing with care words which should perfectly clothe his thoughts. “A burnt child fears the fire, says a fabled western adage. But Commissioner Estephe Bernard, who enjoys the confidence of the Surete and the French government, and who is empowered to control the movements of the Criminal Investigation Department, learns nothing from experience. He is less than a child, since he has twice rashly precipitated himself into a chamber charged with an anaesthetic prepared, by a process of my own, from the lycoperdon or Common Puffball.”

Gazing about me, I saw we sat in a low vaulted room. The roof was of ancient brickwork, but the walls were draped with exquisite Chinese fabric having a green ground whereon was a design representing a grotesque procession of white peacocks. A green carpet covered the floor, and the whole of the furniture was of the same material as the chair to which I was strapped - ebony inlaid with ivory.

There was a heavy table in one corner of the dungeonesque place, on which were a number of books and papers. Before this table were two high-backed, heavily carven chairs.

A smaller table stood upon the right of the only visible opening, a low door partially draped with bead-work curtains, above which hung a silver lamp. On this smaller table, a stick of incense, in a silver holder, sent up a pencil of vapour into the air, and the chamber was loaded with the sickly sweet fumes. A faint haze from the incense-stick hovered up under the roof.

In one of the high-backed chairs sat Chou Zhang, wearing a green robe upon which was embroidered a design, the subject of which at first glance was not perceptible, but which presently I made out to be a huge white peacock. He wore a little cap perched upon the dome of his amazing skull, and one clawish hand rested upon the ebony of the table and sat slightly turned toward me, his emotionless face a mask of incredible evil.

In spite of, or because of, the high intellect written upon it, the face of Chou Zhang was more utterly repellent than any I have ever known, and the green eyes, eyes green as those of a cat in the darkness, which sometimes burnt like witch-lamps were, to

me, little less than an emanation of Hell itself, incarnate in this gaunt, high-shouldered body.

Stretched flat upon the floor lay Estephe Bernard, stripped of his clothes and his understandably chagrined manhood visible to all, his arms were thrown back over his head and his wrists chained to a stout iron staple attached to the wall.

Staring down upon him from my own captivity, I noticed what appeared to be some lettering of deepest blue and fringed with crimson - in a Chinese that would be beyond my comprehension even had I been able to see it complete – scrolling around to the side of his naked buttock that was nearest me.

Despite the danger surrounding us, I found myself shocked that Bernard could ever have succumbed to such a base and maritime tattooing that would mark him forever.

Until, that is, it struck me that this… *marking*… especially its language, may not have been succumbed to willingly.

Which was, of itself, even more of a shock.

My friend was fully conscious and staring intently at the Chinese doctor. His bare ankles also were manacled and fixed to a second chain, which

quivered tautly across the green carpet and passed out through the doorway, being attached to something beyond the curtain, and invisible to me from where I sat.

But it was the occupant of the second high-backed chair that, despite my terror of the Chinaman, commanded the lion's share of my attention.

An occupant who stared down at my friend's nakedness as if it was nothing she had not seen on many occasions and in no way offended delicate female sensibilities.

Unlike Guan yin, she was no exquisite oriental beauty and, though lean, was made of more… *masculine*… stuff. She was dressed, head to foot, in a tight leather catsuit of a design unseen by me save for the cover of a scandalous, and quite possibly illegal, magazine I had spied once at the house of an elderly widower long past a desire for the approbation of his peers or a fear of their contempt and scorn even. It clung to her as if it were a second skin and accentuated an hour-glass figure and prominent breasts. Long and powerful looking legs were crossed and her black leather outfit completed by a pair of calf-length boots with heel and toe viciously pointed.

Hair blacker than coal from the seam itself was pushed from her face and tied at the nape of a long neck made unladylike by sinews and muscularity I had seldom seen upon a woman – and certainly not one of Chinese extraction.

But it was the face that gave me her identity without necessity of being told.

The long and curved nose that added a somewhat avian cruelty to prominent cheekbones which made her oval shaped face appear almost angular, was evidence enough.

Should I have needed further convincing as to her identity, however, the glacial green eyes that fixed upon mine and sent my terror racing towards a greater pitch of near uncontainable hysteria would have provided confirmation of my suspicions.

I was, I knew with certainty, in the presence of the woman my great friend Bernard had – uncharacteristically - found it so difficult to speak of without immense discomfort.

Sitting next to her paterfamilias in evil was no less than the daughter of Chou Zhang.

The eyes boring into my own as if they would take receipt of my very soul belonged to the infamous Ai Zhang!

Next to his daughter, Chou Zhang was now silent and I could hear Bernard's heavy breathing and my watch ticking in my pocket. I suddenly realized that although my body was lashed to the ebony chair, my hands and arms were free. Next, looking dazedly about me, my attention was drawn to a heavy sword which stood hilt upward against the wall within reach of my hand.

It was a magnificent piece, of Japanese workmanship; a long, curved Damascened blade having a double-handed hilt of steel, inlaid with gold and looked exactly what it was: a perfect killing tool.

I also perceived that the sword was attached to the wall by a thin steel chain some five feet in length.

“Even if you had the dexterity of a Mexican knife-thrower,” came the guttural voice of Chou Zhang, “you would be unable to reach me, dear Dr. Corliss.”

The Chinaman had read my thoughts and both he and his daughter allowed themselves some small laughter at my extent.

As with her appearance, that belied her womanly shape and its curves, there was nothing feminine in the laughter of the daughter.

Bernard turned his eyes upon me momentarily, only to look away again in the direction of Chou Zhang, studiously, I thought, avoiding the gaze of Ai Zhang herself.

My friend's face was slightly pale beneath the tan, and his jaw muscles stood out with unusual prominence. By this fact alone did he reveal the knowledge that he lay at the mercy of these enemies of the white race, of this inhuman father and daughter who knew no mercy. At the mercy of a man and a woman – if what I had heard of her proved true as it seemed sure to do - whose very genius was inspired by the cool and calculated cruelty of their race.

A race which, to this day, disposes of hundreds, nay, thousands, of its unwanted girl-children by the simple measure of throwing them down a well specially dedicated to the purpose.

“The weapon near your hand,” continued the Chinaman imperturbably, “is a product of the civilization of our near neighbours the Japanese, a race to whose courage I prostrate myself in meekness. It is the sword of a samurai, Dr. Corliss.

It is of very great age, and was - until an unfortunate misunderstanding with myself led to the extinction of the family - a treasured possession of a noble Japanese house....”

I could see the muscles moving in Bernard's jaws as he convulsively clenched his teeth; whereby I knew that, impotent, he burned with a rage that matched his obvious terror.

“…The ancient tradition of seppuku,” continued the Chinaman, “or hara-kira, still rules, as you know, in the great families of Japan. There is a sacred ritual, and the samurai who dedicates himself to this honourable end, must follow strictly the ritual.”

Green eyes were fixed upon mine as he spoke and, just as it had been when I bargained with him for the release of myself and Bernard down by the river, he appeared to be ignoring my friend as if her were not worthy of consideration.

“As a physician, Doctor Corliss, the exact nature of the ceremony might possibly interest you, but be somewhat of a bore for my beloved daughter here who is has been aware of such information for some time now. Therefore I will merely enlighten you upon one little point, a minor one, but interesting to the student of human nature. In short, even a samurai

- and no braver race has ever honoured the world - sometimes hesitates to complete the operation."

I had heard such myself.

"The weapon near to your hand, my dear Dr. Corliss, is known as the Friend's Sword. On such occasions as we are discussing, a trusty friend is given the post - an honoured one - of standing behind the brave man who offers himself to his gods, and should the latter's courage momentarily fail him, the friend with the trusty blade diverts the hierophant's mind from his digression, and rectifies his temporary breach of etiquette by severing the cervical vertebra of the spinal column.

"You can reach the blade quite easily, Dr. Corliss, if you care to extend your hand."

Some dim perception of the truth was beginning to creep into my mind and, expecting something terrifying anyway, I foresaw that a frightful ordeal beyond my imagination was reserved for us both.

"That I hold you in high esteem," continued Chou Zhang, "is a fact which must be apparent to you by this time, but in regard to your companion, I now entertain very different sentiments...."

As I have mentioned above, I suspected as much.

“One quality possessed by Monsieur. Estephe Bernard,” resumed the Chinaman, “has always been his courage. But, that courage having been revealed by my daughter as the reed blown by the breeze that it is, I now wish for you to see the type of man to whom you have so erroneously pledged your allegiance. Either that or your friend will redeem himself in all our eyes by ending his miserable existence in this noble and time-honoured way, or…”

Horrified by such a prospect, and no less so for the part this infernal abomination of a man indicated I would be expected to play during its execution, I waited anxiously for the next words that promised, I prayed, a compromise of some kind.

It was to turn out a compromise that saddened me to the depths of my very soul.

Suddenly, he struck lightly upon a little silver gong at his side and, through the curtained doorway, there entered a short, thickly built Burman whom I recognized for a dacoit. Upon his back he carried a sort of wire box rather less than six feet long, some two feet high, and about two feet wide. In short, it was a stout framework covered with fine wire-netting on the tops, sides and ends, but open at the bottom. It seemed to be made in five sections, or to contain four sliding partitions which could be raised

or lowered at will. These were of wood, and in the bottom of each was cut a little arch. The arches in the four partitions varied in size, so that whereas the first was not more than five inches high, the fourth opened almost to the wire roof of the box or cage; and a fifth, which was but little higher than the first, was cut in the actual end of the contrivance.

“Mon seigneur divine dans les cieux!” uttered, voice – yes, it must be said – a cowed whisper. “It is the Six Gates!”

“The slave’s knowledge of my beautiful country serves him well,” replied Chou Zhang gently, still not deigning to address Bernard and, contradicting his usual courtesies in even the most appalling circumstances, belittling his adversary further by referring to him as a slave.

Instantly I looked to my friend and every drop of blood seemed to recede from my heart, leaving it cold in my breast.

For if I did not know the purpose of the cage, obviously Bernard knew it all too well.

The dacoit, in obedience to a guttural order from Dr. Chou Zhang, placed the cage upon the carpet, completely covering Bernard's body, but leaving his neck and head exposed. The dacoit’s seared and

pock-marked face set in a sort of placid leer, he then adjusted the sliding partitions to Bernard's recumbent form, and I saw the purpose of the graduated arches.

They were intended to divide a human body in just such fashion, and, as I realized, were most cunningly shaped to that end.

The whole of Bernard's body lay now in the wire cage, each of the five compartments whereof was shut off from its neighbour.

“The man you know as a resourceful friend, Doctor Corliss, and my daughter knows as her abject bondsman and body servant…”

My eyes flew down to Bernard’s and he could not meet them.

The Chinese sadist spoke truly and my friend’s former reticence in respect of the daughter who gazed upon events with such satisfaction and amusement was explained.

At least in part.

Chou Zhang continued:

“This… *chattel*…” he went on, “shall have the honour, should he possess the necessary courage, of acting as hierophant, admitting himself to the Mysteries…”

Nausea and bile battled for my attention, and were soon made still more competitive:

“And you, Dr. Corliss, shall be the Friend.”

THE SIX GATES

Opening a little trap in the top of the first compartment of the cage (that is, the compartment which covered Bernard's bare feet and ankles), the dacoit inserted the neck of a sack he had retrieved from the room beyond. Suddenly, seizing it by the bottom and shaking it vigorously four huge rats came tumbled out and into the cage. Then he snatched away the sack and snapped the shutter fast.

A moving mist obscured my sight, a mist through which I saw the green eyes of Chou Zhang fixed upon me, and through which, as from a great distance, his voice, sunk to a snakelike hiss, came to my ears:

“Cantonese rats, Dr. Corliss... The most ravenous in the world... They have eaten nothing for nearly a week!”

I blush to think of it now, and though I am assured my reaction was totally understandable given the circumstances, it was also… *womanly*.

I feinted.

It was from this state unconscious state that I was awakened and brought back to the realities by a

sound which ever afterward I was doomed to associate with that ghastly scene.

This was the squealing of the rats.

The mist that had come upon me as I fainted away seemed to disperse at that and, with frightfully intense interest, I began to study the awful torture to which Estephe Bernard was being subjected.

The dacoit had disappeared, and Chou Zhang placidly was watching the four lean and hideous animals in the cage as I also turned my eyes in that direction.

It was then that the rats overcame their temporary fear, and began....

“You have been good enough to notice,” said the Chinaman, his voice still sunk in that sibilant whisper, “my partiality for dumb allies. You have met my scorpions, my death-adders, and my baboon-man. The uses of such a playful little animal as a marmoset have never been fully appreciated before, I think, but to an indiscretion of this last-named pet of mine I seem to remember that you owed something in the past, Dr. Corliss....”

Estephe Bernard stifled a deep groan and I took in his face. It was a greyish hue now and dank with

perspiration as his gaze met mine. The rats had almost ceased squealing.

“It is solely the decision of the creature in the box, doctor,” continued Chou Zhang, slightly raising his voice and still refusing to honour Bernard with the status of an equal and converse with him. “Should he apologise to his owner…”

“His owner?” raced my thoughts at hearing a man such as Bernard referred to as the possession of another in this way.

“…and beg most humbly to be allowed to continue his service as a loyal and totally obedient slave, then I leave it to the discretion of my beautiful Ai Zhang as to whether she still values his possession highly enough to receive him back into her service.”

My look was incredulous:

“Back into her service?”

Chou Zhang took up the challenge:

“My dear Ai Zhang, the good doctor here is having difficulty believing his… *heroic*… friend could ever have been… *persuaded*… into accepting such a lowly position in your service. Perhaps you I should

do him the courtesy of describing exactly the duties your slave in the cage performed for you."

Still not bothering to speak, Ai Zhang instead delivered her father a smile that was both adoring and indulgent, signalling with a nod that her father indeed had her consent to spared me no detail of Bernard's domestic *and* sexual service to her.

And spare me he did *not*.

If I felt nausea and bile before they were now joined by a white-hot fury and, yes, I can say nothing less, the beginnings of contempt for a man I had held above all others.

As unfair as such thoughts would turn out to be.

As the monstrous Father explained the fine details of his equally monstrous daughter's ownership of my good friend, her eyes held mine with a diabolical intent as if she would enjoy using those mesmeric eyes to add me to her inventory of human property also.

And yet I could not help but feel that she restrained herself out of respect for another.

Almost as if a greater force had preference over her.

My thoughts were a whirl as Chou Zhang finished detailing my friend's shame, but much that had previously mystified me was becoming clear.

Bernard's disappearance from Rangoon was explained.

He had been taken by the Chinaman's daughter and – be it by physical coercion or the mental and mesmeric kind with which her father was a master – been subjugated to her will. The shame such a man would feel for the indignity would explain his reticence to speak on the subject made his inability to be forthcoming totally explicable and elicited my sympathy.

And yet…

I could not help but feel an infinite sadness in the inevitable loss of face this *hero* of mine was already undergoing in my thoughts and emotions. My *"hero"* came with feet of clay and had, apparently, served this Chinese woman in the most abject of ways. Ways, even with an understanding of the woman's power that matched her father's, I could not contemplate suffering for longer than it took me to open a suitably large artery.

That Bernard had not done this lowered him in my esteem and it would only be later, when it was too

late, that I would know he might have done just that had he not been obsessed with making his escape to inform the free world that Chou Zhang lived and had designs through his mental and mesmeric supremacy upon democracy everywhere.

A low shuddering sound, which I cannot hope to describe but can *never* forget, broke from the lips of my tortured friend.

“In China,” resumed Chou Zhang, “we call this quaint fancy the Six Gates of Joyful Wisdom. The first gate, by which the rats are admitted, is called the Gate of Joyous Hope; the second, the Gate of Mirthful Doubt. The third gate is poetically named the Gate of True Rapture, and the fourth the Gate of Gentle Sorrow. I once was honoured in the friendship of an exalted mandarin who sustained the course of Joyful Wisdom to the raising of the fifth gate – the Gate of Sweet Desires - and the admission of the twentieth rat. I esteem him almost equally with my ancestors. The sixth, or Gate Celestial, whereby a man enters into the Joy of Complete Understanding, I have dispensed with, here, substituting a Japanese fancy of an antiquity nearly as great and honourable. The introduction of this element of speculation I count a happy thought, and accordingly take pride to myself.”

Hearing my friend's screams as the rats began their initial feasting upon his lower extremities, I reached for the sword offered me. Even my ever present optimism and faith that a road to salvation would always reveal itself was vanished in its entirety. Bernard's cause was unsalvageable and all I could do for his memory and his current agonies was to put him out of his miseries. As swiftly and painlessly as a true friend should.

I stood above my friend with the sword to hand, that chain to which it was attached making it impossible for me to reach the infernal Chinese opposite.
But enough to plunge it through the wire and into the heart of the man suffering beneath me.

Should I find the courage to end his suffering, knowing it would be exactly what such a man would wish me to do.

I was wrong.

As, with eyes full of unmanly but unavoidable, tears, I raised the instrument of my friend's death with both hands grasped upon its ornate handle and prepared to make his end both more swift and more dignified, as befitted a man of his status – even if that status had been tarnished somewhat by the revelations to which I had just found myself privy – words tumbled from Estephe Bernard's mouth.

Words such as I would *never* have conceived it possible to hear coming from this man who had, hitherto, been my benchmark when it came to sheer courage and moral dignity.

Words aimed in the direction of the leather-clad Chinese female who now observed the caged man at her feet with a malignity that was only matched by the obvious and unnatural levels of her excitement to watch a man such as he reduced to such a condition.

“Please, Master…!”

“Master??” I thought, sensibilities outraged to hear him describe another human being in such an abject way and outraged even further when I realised that, because he had used its masculine form, it did not mean he was directing it at Chou Zhang himself.

“Please, Master!” he continued, no hint of strength or manhood in his beseeching tones. “Your white slave and abject property apologises for shedding your collar and leaving your service. Please take him back and allow him to bask in becoming useful to you once again.”

I truly found it next to impossible to believe my ears.

The man I had thought of as near godlike when it came to the courage of his convictions, and the resolve and natural bravery to see them those convictions through, was literally begging a Chinese – and a Chinese woman at that – to be allowed to serve her in ways I knew could only be disgraceful.

A sickening sense of loss assailed me as I realised my world had turned upon its axis and would *never* see itself right side up again. No matter how free-spirited some amongst us profess themselves to be, it is the certitudes that root us. The enduring love of parents, family, and friends – especially friendships such as Bernard's and mine – the bedrock that enables and instils the confidence within us from which we can attempt that self-improvement likely to prove our reach does indeed exceed our grasp.

With that certitude of my friendship with Estephe Bernard proved to have been based upon sand rather than bedrock – at least in the terrifying situation in which we had been placed – I felt, truly, as I would feel at the loss of someone much loved.

To see and hear him beg in so craven a manner the woman seated so cool and arrogant before us placed all my certitudes into question and I knew with certainty that – whether I myself came through this ordeal alive and in one-piece – exactitude upon such personal matters would be an impossibility for me.

If a man such as Estephe Bernard could be revealed as less than the sum of his parts then…

The first words from the daughter of evil came to me in a voice that was, by turns, harsh, mocking, sibilant and compelling.

For some reason, *extremely* compelling.

“Is it not fitting, Doctor Corliss, that such a pitiful excuse for a man – even in western terms – should serve a superior Chinese woman?”

The anger and indignation that placed my sadness and sense of loss to the background were so great it was hard to form words; yet to this day I am not sure if my fury was greater for being in the presence of such unmitigated sadism or the fact its actions had lessened my respect for a man I had held above all others.

Lessened respect or not, however, I knew it was necessary to defend Bernard.

“Given sufficient… *torture*…” I began, “I should think it possible for any man to be forced to act against his grain. More so, if those inflicting these torments upon him are expert in the art of mesmerism also.”

“That may be so for some men,” she answered, the power of her green eyes as they held mine undeniable and causing me to avert my gaze. “But, are you truly going to tell me that you would endure the domestic and sexual humiliations I so gladly inflicted upon my white slave, and not at least attempt to end your own life rather than suffer such indignity? Is that not what a real man would do?”

I knew this would be exactly my intent but could not bring myself to be in accord with the Chinese bitch goddess at the expense of my friend and his standing as a man.

And, of course, Bernard’s desire to thwart this despicable father/daughter partnership, and preserve the West’s hard won social and political freedoms in the process, at least made his desire to stay alive until it was accomplished understandable if, I have to say, a little hard to take given the nature of his service to her.

The rats began squealing again and prevented me from making an answer I was at a loss to give anyway.

They were fighting over a particularly juicy piece of flesh at their supper’s ankle.

Bernard screamed and I raised the sword higher, preparatory to making the downward thrust that would end his suffering and at least spare him something of his pride.

The words that held me in my intent were as sonorous as they were commanding:

“NO, DOCTOR CORLISS.”

Against my instincts, I paused.

“YOU MUST ASK HIM FIRST.”

Why I observed this stricture and did not simply continue with the thrust guaranteed to remove my friend from his misery, I cannot explain to you to this day.

But continue I did not.

Chou Zhang, however, was under no such restriction:

“If your friend chooses to live a life without respect, as the most abject chattel of my superior daughter, you must observe his wishes.”

“But…?”

“Ask him for yourself, most esteemed doctor,” Chou Zhang insisted, voice almost kindly now, as if he regretted the loss of my faith and would somehow restore it.

“Estephe,” I screamed, sufficient to distract him from the agonies of the rodent teeth feasting upon him. “Look at me!”

The eyes that rose to mine were moist with tears of agony and shame yet, despite the deep disappointment and loss they read in mine, did not look away.

“Give me the word and your suffering will end. That is my sacred promise to you.”

The look he threw me was so pitiful I hardly recognised my friend in its geography.

“Tell me what you choose, Bernard,” I pressed as the rats squabbled once again over some chosen flesh.

He was crying now, great heaving sobs that shook his shoulders inside the cage, and I felt no less defeated as I gazed upon the spectacle.

I girded my loins:

“One word, Estephe, and it will be over for you. Is it to be *‘Death’* or is it to be…”

Even thinking of saying the word caused my gag-reflex to kick in.

“…Or is it to be… *‘Slavery’*?”

His eyes held mine then, even the agonies of rodent feasting forgotten for a moment; eyes that were sad with the knowledge of a coming farewell.

Then…

AN EPILOGUE IN CHINA'S INTERIOR

The human capacity for change - for accepting that which once would have been unthinkable and coming to see it as, *almost*, normal – must, I can only believe, be as infinite as it is constant.

What else could explain my experiences since having been forcibly removed from my second country and the adjacent island that was my homeland in the baggage of Guan yin? A woman for whom, I must shamefully confess, my infatuation endures, despite the odious nature of her allegiance to the Chinaman and his daughter. A woman strict Chinese protocols – protocols that make their English counterparts seem as mere guidelines – insist I address as *"Mistress"*.

How else would one in the service of a woman in such a land address that woman?

I will not tax you with the details of how I came to be shipped to this god forsaken, if undeniably luxurious by local terms, hole in the Chinese in the Chinese interior. A *"hole"* that was almost the size of England itself and owned in its entirety by *"Lord"* Chou Zhang; the ancient fortification he had renovated and in which we abided.

Save it to say that my means of transport was far more conducive to comfort than the conditions under which the shamed and emasculated Estephe Bernard was obliged to make his.

I would add to this that the infernal Chinaman's misdirected impression of me as a man of science who, whilst not his equal – and who was – soon became apparent to him when he tried to share some of his enthusiasm for the leaps forward he was making in both chemistry and medicine.

His interest in me – along with a certain amount, if not all, of his courtesy towards me – receded after this discovery and I was not troubled to view his experiments and discoveries again. We, Bernard and I, were no longer a threat to him. So far from being so, I confess, that the Chinaman's regard of us was mixed and seemed to consist of contempt and disregard of Bernard whilst disregard alone suffice in his reaction to me.

But then, why would he behave otherwise?

After my shocking discovery that Bernard was a mere mortal along with the rest of us mediocrities – and the more than shocking ordeal of having to hear him beg Chou Zhang's daughter to spare him his life that he may return to her service in the most appalling and unmanly way imaginable – even I was

having trouble believing the Frenchman could ever have held such a high position of esteem and, even, awe in my eyes.

It was unfair and I knew I had *not* been the one caged and at the mercy of the vicious and hungry rodents about to partake of their human feast.

Nor, had I been made subject to the mesmeric eyes of Zhang's emotionally hideous daughter and the control Bernard had been unable to prevent her from exerting over him.

Both the above explications enough to at least extend to my friend some small understanding for his inability to rise to my, perhaps, unreasonable expectations.

And yet…

Having learned that the daughter had not only overmastered Bernard mentally and emotionally but, before this, had bested him in a physical confrontation between the two, it was even harder to keep alive a little of my former regard for this *"Man above other men"*.

And seeing him every day in attendance upon his female Master – sometimes naked and with a ring of steel about his scrotum to which was attached an

even more ridiculous bell that tinkled whenever he moved – was not likely to restore my once unshakable faith in his resolution and manhood.

That *my* female *"Master"* – even if I did address her as *"Mistress"* – treated me in an entirely different and more loving way; even if there was no question as to which of us ruled and which served; made my growing and, I now say, unwarranted contempt of my friend all the greater.

Was I not treated in such a way, after all, because the Chinaman and his daughter, along with Guan yin herself, knew I should prefer death of any kind than suffer the sexual and domestic indignities thrust upon my friend?

I was as certain as I could be that, had I been in the rodent infested cage, and Bernard above me with the sword of the seppuku, I would have begged, not her but *him*, to spare me the indignity of being indentured to her service.

The sight of him kneeling naked at her feet to perform a pedicure, all the time - no matter what sexual and domestic duty he carried out for her - appearing to mumble something incomprehensible under his breath, confirming me in my certainty regarding my own behaviour

And what, I hear you ask, of the father and daughter's plan for world dominion?

This, I could only assume – Guan yin had become furious when I once questioned her on the subject: *"Your life now is here in China with me. Do NOT speak of your past again!"* – was ongoing.

And, amazingly, I did not.

You see, for all the professed contempt of my emasculated friend, I was, in my own way, equally as denuded of the trappings of my former manhood.

The longer I accepted this female dominated status quo the more it seemed natural to me. Even denied the opportunity to lead, as a man and a lover should, and becoming addicted to accepting her sexual lead as much as I accepted her superior social status in these, decidedly heathen, surrounds. Should not the above weakness in me have extended my understanding of Bernard's?

The answer I gave my own thoughts at the frequently asked question was an unreserved *"Yes"*.

It *should* have.

But then, daily sightings of my seemingly ever mumbling and once proud friend as he was led

around by a lead attached to a collar about his neck – sometimes on all fours, naked buttocks proclaiming he was *"Property of Ai Zhang"*, in both French and Chinese – made such empathy difficult. He was her complete and utter chattel now, and knowing some of the debased ways in which his owner insist he serve her, be it in her boudoir or her water-closet, assured me there would be no resurfacing of the old Bernard either now or at some foreseeable time in the future.

Which did not mean I had given up all hope of securing my freedom and making the free world aware of the threat to its own via the projected mental domination of one evil Chinese megalomaniac and his equally sadistic and power-hungry daughter.

After all, had not Bernard – under worse conditions of captivity – once done the same?

Even if his effort had proved ultimately futile and he was now so dehumanised and slavish in the service of the Chinese female who took such perverted pleasure from owning him that it would take nothing less than a miracle to spark his former spirit into existence.

Or would it?

My reasoning for the small optimism hinted at above was an episode of not an hour before now outside a local emporium Chou Zhang allowed to trade in his province.

An emporium that his daughter and other favoured females at his court might avail themselves of the Western fashions so sought after by the upper strata of Chinese womanhood.

That the clothed men and women who went about their daily business saw nothing remarkable in the presence of a naked and kneeling Frenchman, tethered to a post outside the emporium with eyes cast down to the dust pavement, was tribute to both the economic and mental hold their *"Lord"* and his daughter had upon them.

The despicable, the debased, and the inhumane had become an everyday occurrence for them.

It was also the first time I had been close enough to Bernard to decipher the constant mumbling spilling from his lips and it was this that gave me some hope our battle against the infernal Chinese father and daughter might yet continue.

As I passed my tethered, unseeing and naked, friend, my own step taken some five steps behind that of the woman who, however I might describe it to myself,

was my owner also, I heard the following, repeated over and over:

“Bend, do not break… Bend, do not break… Bend…”

THE END