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THE  
**JUGGLER OF NANKIN:**

—OR,—

**THE GRANDEE'S PLOT.**

A Story of the Celestial Empire.

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BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.  
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# THE JUGGLER OF NANKIN.

## CHAPTER I.

PAUL ARDEN.



UPON a fair, warm day in midspring, near the *Bund*, at Shanghai, lay an English frigate. Her men were nearly all upon deck, some of them engaged in laying up the rigging, polishing the guns, cleaning the brass-work, etc., while the rest busied themselves in looking off upon the quaint scenery that lay open to their view. The curious houses, with their dingy tiles and over-reaching, bent-up eaves, the tall pagodas, with their gilded ornaments and peaked roofs, the long line of clumsy junks, with their stumpy masts and bamboo sails, and the still more curious tide of humanity that throngs the quay, with its gaudy, fluttering dresses of blue, purple, pink, red, yellow and black, all combine to form a scene both strange and novel to the European sailor. And then there is the noise that con-

tinuously salutes his ears—a noise which at first amounts to a deafening din, but which becomes bearable by use, proceeding from gongs and drums, fire-crackers and torpedoes, and shouts and yells. Altogether it is a strange affair, and gives a reliable idea of Chinese cities in general. The wind is from the eastward, and so the seamen are spared the stench that reeks up from the filthy streets and gutters that lay near the river and its tributary creeks.

Upon the poop of the frigate stood two men, one of them wearing a sort of undress uniform, and the other being habited in the court costume of a British minister. There were others upon the poop, but it is with these two that we have to do at the present time. The first mentioned person—he in the undress uniform—was a young man, not over five-and-twenty years of age, with a look of quick, bright intelligence, and a bold, frank bearing. He was not stout in his build, but the slightest observer would have seen that his frame was muscular and compact in the extreme. His hair, which grew in wavy masses, was of a dark brown color, seeming almost black in certain lights, and his eyes, which were large and piercing, were of the darkest, deepest hazel.

His brow was high and full, and his other features clearly defined and regular. His face was deeply bronzed by exposure, showing most plainly that his had been no idle life. With regard to his beauty there could have been but one opinion among those who seek real beauty in the nobly developed man, for he was a man in every sense of the word—a good, kind, generous, bold man. Such was Paul Ardeen. His father, when living, had been an English nobleman. He was a Commissioner to Canton, from the British Government, and it was at Canton that he died, about twelve years previous to the time of the opening of our story. Paul had accompanied him on his mission, and had spent most of the time, since the death of his father, in China, where he had served the government in various ways, receiving ample remuneration for his services. Being naturally of a quick, energetic turn, he had thoroughly mastered the Chinese language, and there were but few of its quaint and difficult intonations that he did not understand.

Paul's companion—he in the court dress—was Lord Archibald Sumpter, an elderly man, who had charge, for the time, of the British consulate in Shanghai.

"I should think," said Sumpter, in furtherance of a conversation which had been going on but a few minutes, "that you would rather return now to England. Your father's estates are ready for you, and I know that honor and respect will be yours as soon as you assume the position which belongs to you in the kingdom. Come, you have spent years enough in this empire of fat and folly—why not seek the home of your birth, where you have warm-hearted relatives still living?"

"No, no—not yet," replied the youth, showing by his manner that he was affected by his friend's kindness. Not yet, my lord. Between the Tsao lake and Fou-tching-yo, away beyond Nankin, there are some temples of Fo which I must visit. I have heard such wonderful accounts of them from the Buddhist priests that I have determined to see them if the thing is possible."

"It will be a dangerous undertaking," said Sumpter, with a dubious shake of the head. "A few miles back from here it is safe enough to travel, but when it comes to a few hundreds the case is different. Do you remember Lord Buxton?"

"The Lord William Buxton?"

"Yes."

"I remember him well. He was my father's friend."

"Well," resumed Sumpter, "he thought to travel, and you perhaps know the result? He was most cruelly murdered, and his mangled body sent to the English government at Hong Kong."

"Yes," said Paul, with a slight shade of sadness upon his features, and speaking in a lower tone, "I remember all about it, for I was at Hong Kong at the time, and I attended Lord William's funeral. I shall never forget how I loved him, for he was kind to me when I was a boy, and he ministered to my father in his dying hour. I wept, my lord, when I stood by the noble Buxton's coffin."

"Then why not take warning by Lord Buxton's fate, and give up this projected tramp?" inquired Sumpter.

"Ah, Sir Archibald, you know those were troublous times when Lord Buxton was killed. Things are different now. We are not only at peace with China, but the people here stand in fear of offending our government. If you can get me that letter from the governor of Shanghai I shall feel myself in no danger, for I know that part of the way I can pass as a veritable Chinaman. I speak the language well, and I surely look almost brown enough for a Celestial."

"But your hair—and your eyes."

"Ah, a wig will cover the first, and the second I can squint into some sort of conservatism. But if I can have the letter from the Shanghai grandee, I shall feel under no apprehension, for no one will dare to molest me with such a protection about my person. Don't you think you can get the letter?"

"Yes, I think I can. I have done the governor some favors, and I feel sure that he will grant me the boon I have asked for you. He may send it off by Tai-tsong, the old mandarin of whom you have heard me speak. But yet I would urge you to give it up."

"No, no, my lord," returned Paul, with a weak smile. "I think it is almost a fate that I should visit the old Buddhist temples of Fou-tching-yo. It was there that tradition says that Wontu found the water of life. Have you ever heard the story?"

"No."

"This Wontu was a prince of the blood. He sought the water of life, and the god Buddha, at Fou-tching-yo, gave it to him. He lived three

hundred years, and at the end of that time he lost the never-failing phial which contained the liquid. All search proved fruitless, and he went back after more, but before he reached the temple he died. He was sainted, however, for his old age, and a wooden image of him is now kept in the same temple where Buddha first smiled upon him. I have had some most strange dreams about that same temple. I have dreamed, I know not how many times, that I found the water of life there, and also that the great Joss gave it to me; and I have dreamed that I found there a flower whose bloom was perpetual, and which gave to its possessor eternal health and beauty. These dreams are continually upon me since I first thought of visiting the place. Something seems to bid me go."

"A mere chimera of a youthful brain," said Sumpter, with a smile.

"It may be so," returned Paul; "but nevertheless I am resolved to go."

Here the conversation was broken in upon by the shrill pipe of the boatswain's whistle, and upon looking shoreward our two friends saw a mandarin's barge putting off. They knew that these were high functionaries who had been invited to visit the ship, so they left the poop and went down to the mainmast. All work was at once put aside, the men were called to quarters, and the mariners were drawn up in single file under the break of the poop. Shortly afterwards the clumsy barge came alongside, and three mandarins came over the side. The officers of the frigate removed their caps, and the Celestial grandees bowed and scraped most prodigiously.

"There is Tai-tsong," whispered Lord Sumpter.

"Ay—I see him," returned Paul. "I hope he has the letter."

"—ah! He is coming this way. He has recognized us."

Sumpter was right, for the old mandarin was waddling towards the spot with his face all beaming with fat smiles and mysterious winks, and from the quaint bobbing of his head it was evident that he had something to communicate, so his lordship left Paul standing near the mainmast and approached the mandarin.

"A letter for you," said Tai-tsong, fumbling beneath his long blue robe.

"From the governor?" asked Sumpter.

"Yes," returned the mandarin, drawing forth

a yellow packet bearing a great red seal; and Sumpter put out his hand to receive it.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

Tai-tsong winked and smiled more than ever when he placed the letter in Sumpter's hand, and by his manner he plainly indicated that the matter must be kept as secret as possible, for, as he afterwards explained, the governor was afraid that other foreigners might want favors of a like kind, and he dared not grant any more.

The mandarins remained on board the ship nearly an hour, and after they were gone Sumpter handed the letter to Paul, and having sought a place secure from observation he opened it. It was a strip of tough yellow paper, containing a column of Chinese hieroglyphics, and Paul quickly decyphered them. They were to the effect that the bearer was a pious missionary, and that Buddha would protect him in his journeyings, and it bore the governor's own signature. Both the youth and Sumpter smiled as they read it.

"Never mind," said Paul, after he had read it the second time, "it has a little deception in it, but I will use it, even though I be taken for a Buddhist priest."

"It will serve you, certainly," returned his lordship, "for few of the people would dare to trample upon the protection of a powerful mandarin. Now you can go and visit the curiosities you wish to see, and then I hope you will return to England and write a book, for you must surely possess a great fund of information."

Paul Ardeen smiled a reply, and shortly afterwards he took leave of the officers of the frigate, whose guest he had been, and returned to the shore. He sought the apartments he had previously occupied in the foreign settlement, which was without the walls of the Chinese town, and here he began to prepare for his journey. He felt much elated by his good fortune in having obtained the passport, for he knew that his journey would now be rendered comparatively secure from harm.

By the time it was dusk the youth had nearly everything ready, and as the shades of evening began to deepen he sat down by his window and gazed out upon the waters of the Woosung. For a while he thought of the journey he was to make, and with that thought came the strange dreams that had of late visited his hours of sleep. Slight as they may have appeared when told to other ears, yet they had much influence upon

him. He could not drive them from him, nor could he separate them from a certain dim, undefinable idea of fate which had taken possession of his mind.

In this mood Paul Ardeen grew sad and downcast—not unhappy—but only pervaded by a sort of calm melancholy. He thought of times that were past—of times when he had a mother to love him and care for him. He remembered when that good, kind mother died—of standing by the green turf that arose above her grave, and of kneeling upon that grave and weeping. He was a boy then. Ere long his wandering thoughts ran on the scene when his father died—he remembered how looked that pale and sunken cheek—how the dying noble blessed his son and left him with an inheritance of honor. All this Paul Ardeen remembered; and he remembered,

too, that he had no brother nor sister to share with him the griefs of his orphanage—that he had no near relatives to bless him. Relatives, to be sure, he had, relatives who might love and cherish him—but he remembered them not; the most he could remember was that which he had lost.

But before the youth retired he cheered himself up with the reflection that he was about to add to his stock of knowledge—that he was about to visit a section of the empire that he had long had a desire to see—and he thought that when this was done, he would go back to his home in Old England. But even here his thought was not clear, for, think as he would at that lone hour, that same dim, undefinable image came up from the unexplored future.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE JUGGLER.

ON the following morning Paul Ardeen was ready to set out upon his journey. He had dressed himself in a thorough Chinese garb—the long blue vest or robe, reaching nearly to his feet, confined at the waist by a silken cord, from which was suspended a knife and a pair of *chopsticks*. The drawers were of linen, the boots of stout silk, and the cap was of the usual pyramidal form, lined with satin, and covered with neatly wrought cane, having a tuft of red hair at the top which nearly covered it. The youth had folded his own hair neatly up out of sight, and above it he wore a flesh-colored skull-cap of such exquisite finish and fit, that a very close examination would have been required to discover that it was not his own skin. From the top of this depended a thick, glossy braid of black hair which reached nearly to the inner side of the knees. When Paul surveyed himself in the mirror he was really astonished at his own metamorphosis. He bowed to himself, and talked Chinese to himself, and he could not help laughing outright to see the comical cut of that second self in the mirror. He secured his money in a small bag which he hung over his right shoulder, and then he carried concealed beneath his vest a pair of double-barrelled pistols.

Thus equipped, Paul set out. At the distance of about ten miles from the city he struck

the river again, and here he hired a boatman to carry him on towards the great lake of Tai-hou. He reached the borders of the lake on the evening of the second day, having travelled not far from seventy-five miles. Here he found a small village, inhabited mostly by peasants, and he easily obtained food and lodgings at the rough, dirty inn which was kept open for travellers and the lake fishermen who might be forced in there by sudden storms.

It was not quite sundown when our hero reached this inn. He had taken a drink of tea, and was quietly smoking his pipe, when he was aroused by the sharp tinkling of bells and the yells of men and boys in the yard.

"What does that all mean?" he asked of the fat, greasy host, who sat on an old carved lounge smoking opium.

"O, that's Ye-fo-hi, the great Juggler of Nankin," replied the host, lifting himself with difficulty from his seat, and waddling towards the window that overlooked the yard. "The greatest man of the time," the obese publican resumed, after he had placed himself comfortably against the low stool of the open window. "He can do things that make the great *Tee-tan* look astonished. He counts the stars, and holds the comets by their tails. He makes money where there is no money, and he makes the rice

grow on rocks. See, he is going to please the women and children."

Paul remembered that he had heard of this Ye-fo-hi—that he had heard him spoken of in Shanghai as a most wonderful man, and he had a great curiosity to see him. So he arose and went out into the yard, and there he found the object of wonder just arranging his implements for exhibition. The juggler was a quaint-looking man, to begin with. He was very tall and stout, and much darker in complexion than most of his countrymen; but it was evidently continued exposure in his wandering mode of life that had made him so. His face was somewhat wrinkled with age, but his step was yet bold and firm. His large, angular, black eyes sparkled with intensity as he gazed about him, and his long, braided moustache helped to give mark to his features. In dress he was odd enough, his robe being of many colors, and worked with curious devices, such as birds, serpents, dragons, and mysterious characters which none but himself could translate. Upon the top of his conical cap was perched a six-headed hydra carved from wood, and then his long queue was ornamented with little gods done in glass and porcelain. At first sight the juggler might have drawn forth only a smile, but upon regarding him more closely the beholder was sure to be stricken with a kind of awe, for there was something about the strange man that was not to be laughed at, nor yet trifled with; and then his eye—that keen, quick orb of fire—when that rested upon you the effect was almost electrical.

At length his little table was arranged, and for some time he performed curious little tricks just to amuse the children and women. He made little balls dance in the air, drew long dragons out from little nut-shells, wove silk from the rind of a pomegranate, and made two short sticks dance on his table. But this did not seem at all congenial to his tastes, and he evidently did it more for the purpose of gaining the good will of the people than from any self-interest. After the sticks had done dancing he took an egg from a small box by his side, and put it into a cotton bag. This he shook and pounded upon the edge of the table till the egg appeared to have been pretty essentially smashed up, and then he opened the bag and began to take therefrom little square cakes of candy which he distributed amongst the children. The youngsters shouted and yelled in their delight, and at a

word from the juggler they began to disperse.

As soon as the children were most of them gone, Ye-fo-hi packed up his implements, and then turned towards the inn.

"Who among you would look into the future?" he asked; for several men had collected about the door. "Who would like to see that which is now hidden from you? I can tell you that which is, and that which is to come."

No one seemed inclined to profit by the juggler's offer, and ere long his gaze rested upon our hero. The latter was startled as he met those keen, black eyes, for he could not help it; but yet he did not avert his gaze, nor did he exhibit any perturbation.

"You, sir," said Ye-fo-hi, coming nearer to Paul, and looking him steadily in the face, "you should let me draw your horoscope."

"I am not anxious," replied the youth, not at all desirous of being made the centre of observation.

"But I will tell you nothing to your disadvantage. If I see storms and clouds over your way I will keep them from you. I will not draw your full horoscope. I will only read the face. It is a great truth which I have learned, young sir, that men's fortunes are written upon their faces. The secret is there—every act of life leaves a light or a shade upon the face, though few can read the mystic scroll. I shall tell you what I see in your face."

"No, no, not now," uttered Paul, betraying a little trepidation, and at the same time trying to get his face as much into the shade as possible. In truth he began to fear that the juggler might really possess some strange power, and he had reason for wishing that his secrets might be kept in his own bosom.

Ye-fo-hi insisted no more, but turned his attention to a fisherman who had moved towards him, and Paul Ardeen seized the opportunity to go back into the house, where he relighted his pipe, and then sat down in one corner away from the light of the window. His true character had not yet been discovered, and though he felt much confidence in his disguise, yet he thought it best to conceal his features as much as possible without seeming to design it. Twilight was already upon the scene, and soon the darkened shades began to gather around. The host lighted a couple of candles, and as they chased away the gloom our hero busied himself in reading a book of prayers which he found hanging from a peg near him. He had been

engaged in this way about half an hour when he found that some one was sitting close by his side. He turned, and found the juggler gazing intently upon him. There was an exclamation of anger upon his lips, but he did not speak it, for an instant's reflection told him that he had better not run the risk of making an enemy.

"Do you wish for anything?" he asked, still gazing upon the book which he held in his hand.

"I do wish for something," the juggler returned, bending his head so as to gaze more directly into the young man's face. "Pardon me if I seem intrusive, but your features are the most strange of any that I ever saw. Their language is the most obscure, and if I could but read them I should know how great was my power. You need not fear, for we are alone."

Paul looked up and found that the old man's words were true. The fat host had gone, and the other loungers had put up their pipes and dropped off unperceived by him. Finding that there were none others to overhear, the youth had less fear, and at length his curiosity overcame the repugnance he had before felt.

"I think you will find but little in my face to reward you for your search," he said, turning towards the juggler.

"O, yes, I shall. I have always been used to reading the lines of those who were of my own country."

Paul started, for he saw that the juggler had at least discovered his secret.

"You need not fear," resumed Ye-fo-hi, "for I never divulge that which comes to me through my power of divination. It was but a single glance that told me you were not of this country. But that is nothing. I suppose you have your reasons for thus moving."

"Only that I wish to see the country, and in this guise I thought I should be more free from annoyance."

"But you are not wholly safe if you intend to travel far."

"I have a passport from the governor of Shanghai."

"Ah, that alters the matter. One like you can afford to travel, for I see that you are alone in the world. Am I not right?"

"I have no parents, nor brothers or sisters," returned Paul, somewhat surprised.

"I knew it. The heart once shocked writes its tale upon the face. I read it all there. But your past life has little in it of startling moment.

The great points of experience, save such as make mourners, lie in the future. Even now there is a cloud upon your brow, and you are going where it is dark."

Paul looked upon the speaker in wonder. It was not so much the words that moved him as it was the manner in which they were spoken. A strong hand seemed to press hard upon him, and his heart beat with a stiller motion as the light of his companion's eyes continued to gleam upon him. There was something in their dark depths that seemed mystic, and which spoke to him in an unknown tongue.

"This may be a moment which high heaven has marked out in both our lives," resumed the juggler, speaking very slowly. "Many years ago it was told to me that a foreigner should cross me in my line of fate—not that he should disturb me, but that his own line of life should mingle strangely with mine. I feel a presentiment that the prediction was true, and why may not the saying be fulfilled in you? I feel that it is so."

Somehow Paul was becoming bewildered. Those eyes seemed to have a fascinating power, and his mind was running into strange vagaries. There came a doubt to his thoughts, and he feared that the juggler was exercising some *kweish* art upon him—else why should he feel as he did? Why should his heart beat so lowly, and his pulse seem to stand still? He gazed fixedly into the man's face, but he did not speak.

"I think you are going to Fou-ting-yo?" the juggler said, without seeming to notice that the youth did not answer him.

"What makes you think so?" asked Paul, giving more importance to his companion's surmise than perhaps there was any ground for.

"Because there are some curious things there for the stranger to behold." And as the old man thus spoke he bowed his head and seemed to engage in his own deep thoughts. "Go, go, there," he added, raising his head quickly, as though some sudden thought had seized him. You will be repaid for your trouble."

At this juncture the host came lumbering into the room, and the conversation was dropped. The juggler moved his seat farther away from the youth, and soon entered into a talk with the publican. For some time Paul sat in the corner and gazed upon the face of the strange being who had so worked upon him, and the more he gazed the more bewildered he became. There was a sort of dim, secret dread working

in his mind, and he felt that the sooner he got rid of the sorcerer the freer he should be from harm. He did not absolutely fear him, but he dreaded his influence—just as a stout man dreads the darkness of the cold, wild morass. The influence was chilling—it was unpleasant. And yet Paul Ardeen could not remove his eyes from that strange face—he could not resist the dull charm that was at work upon him.

At length, however, he was relieved. The host had eaten and smoked so much opium that he became stupid and sleepy, and Ye-fo-hi left him and quitted the apartment, not, however, without having first given our hero another keen, searching glance. Shortly afterwards Paul sought his place of rest. He threw off the filthy

bedding from the frame, and laid down upon the finely woven cane upon which the mattress had rested, making a pillow of his cap and pouch. He was fatigued, and he soon fell asleep, but more than half of the night he was dreaming of the juggler, and once or twice he fairly started up under the influence of the startling images that presented themselves in connection with that dark man. Once he thought he was by a ruined wall. He found the most beautiful flower upon which his eyes had ever rested, and he plucked it and hid it in his bosom. The Juggler of Nankin appeared at his side and touched the flower with his finger, and it changed to an asp and stung the bosom whereon it rested. So ran Paul's dreams, and they worried him exceedingly.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE RUINED TEMPLE. A MYSTERY.

On the following morning, Paul was up before any of the lazy inhabitants were stirring, and as he did not dare to disturb the host he took a stroll down by the margin of the lake. In half an hour he went back, and having found one of the boys up he settled for his fare. He did not stop, for he did not wish to see Ye-fo-hi again. The dreams of the past night, added to the experience of the evening before, had made such an impression upon his mind that he could not think of the juggler without a shudder. He tried to argue with himself that the feeling was unjust, but it was of no use—the doubt was engrafted upon his mind, and there it remained.

Again the young adventurer sought the shore of the lake, and after some search he found a small, barge-like junk, the captain of which agreed to take him across. The distance to be sailed was not far from fifty miles. After much crying and stumping the captain managed to arouse his sleepy crew, which consisted of four men and a boy, and in half an hour more the anchor was hauled inboard and the sails set. The wind happened to be fair, and at length our hero had the satisfaction of seeing the roof that covered the juggler grow dim in the distance. At the end of two hours the shores had become indistinct and cloudlike, and as there was no more scenery worth seeing, Paul crept into the low

bunk to sleep, for the wakefulness of the previous night left him dull and drowsy. When he awoke it was past noon, and the captain had called him to dinner. He ate some of the rice, drank some tea, and then went off to smoke, for he carried his own pipe and tobacco, and he smoked more for the purpose of making company for himself than from a fixed habit.

It was near night when the junk reached the western coast of the lake, and having paid the captain a sum equal to about three shillings, Paul went on shore, and that night he stopped in the little village called San-ping. On the afternoon of the fourth day he crossed the great river—Yang-tse-kiang—about fifty miles below Nankin, and on the night of the seventh day he slept within fifteen miles of Fou-tching-yo. On the eighth morning he started betimes for the scene he was to visit. Thus far he had met with no difficulty. No one had interrupted him, and, save the juggler, no one seemed to have discovered that he was not what he appeared to be.

The road which he travelled was a wide, well-beaten horse-path, and he knew there was no danger of losing his way. Near the middle of the forenoon he came to a small collection of mean cottages, and having stopped here just long enough to rest himself and witness the

wretched filthiness of the people, he moved on again. Before him lay a long, high hill, upon the top of which he could see a single building. When the sun was at its meridian, he had gained the summit of the hill, and here he stopped to gaze upon the scene that lay spread out to his view. Away in the distance, to the right, lay the town of Fou-ting-yo, with its single pagoda, and surrounding mass of low peaked roofs, looking like a gaunt mandarin surrounded by kneeling subjects, while directly before him, in the deep valley at his feet, lay a scene that made his heart beat quicker. There were numerous temples, and nearly all of them in ruins. The ruins were not so stupendous as to strike one with awe; but they were strange and marvelous, exhibiting a style of architecture which, if it lacked in massive symmetry, more than made it up in originality of design and exquisiteness of finish.

At length our traveller began to descend the hill. At the foot, and near the temples, ran a small stream of water, across which was thrown a bridge of bamboo. This our hero crossed, and ere long he became lost amid the ruins. On all hands, and in the most perplexing disorder, lay slabs of marble, blocks of porcelain, huge columns of granite, images in wood and stone, and gilded and painted gods of every description. Amongst the ruins of the largest temple, Paul found a Buddhist joss, or idol, near fifty feet in length. It had been tumbled from its pedestal, and now lay out at full length upon the stone floor. It was an image of Buddha, and the fine gilding was yet in its place where the weather had not beat upon it.

Before Paul thought of the flight of time, the afternoon had flown away, and the first that recalled him to a sense of his situation was the presence of twilight. As yet he had thought of no place to sleep. He had noticed some small houses upon the opposite slope of the hill, but he knew not whether he could find accommodations there. He had provisions enough with him for his supper and breakfast, and after revolving the matter over in his mind for some time, he resolved to pass the night among the ruins. He examined his pistols before it became quite dark, and having looked out a comfortable place in which to sleep, and marked it so that he might find it again, he went down to the stream to eat his supper. At about eight o'clock the moon arose, and as its face was bright and full, Paul spent some time further in

rambling about amongst the quaint ruins. At length, however, he began to grow sleepy, and he sought the place which he had marked for his night's rest. It was beneath one of the arms of the gigantic idol, where the rank grass had grown up around a broken flagstone, and where he would be protected from the damp night wind.

Here Paul Ardeen laid himself down; and as he lay there he could but think how strange was his position. All around him lay the fragments of an age that had passed away, and he was reposing beneath the shadow of a mute god that millions might have worshipped. But why was that god allowed to rest there in an attitude so degrading? And why were those hundreds of lesser deities suffered to remain idle amid the ruins of their earthly tabernacle, when so many were ready to worship and bow down to them? He hoped to find out why all this was so, and thus hoping he sank into a drowsy slumber; but he was not destined to sleep long—for before he had half finished his first dream, he was awakened by an unusual noise. He started up and listened, and found that it was the sound of horses' feet, and he judged that they must be crossing the bamboo bridge. He climbed up on to the side of the great joss, and by the light of the moon he could see two horses approaching the ruins. Paul remained upon the idol long enough to satisfy himself that they were approaching the very spot where he stood, and then he got down and concealed himself—for he felt that even though there might be no danger, yet concealment was the safest side. Soon the horses stopped, and shortly afterwards he heard footsteps approaching the place of his concealment. He peeped out between two blocks of stone, and saw a single man coming up towards him. The new-comer was habited in the robe of a priest; but the silken girdle had been loosened, as though to admit the cool air, and beneath the priestly robe our hero saw the flash of jewels and the color of a richer garb. This of course aroused the youth's curiosity, and as soon as the stranger had passed him, he carefully arose to watch him. He could plainly see all his movements—for the light of the moon came down almost with the power of day.

First the intruder approached the broad stone pedestal, upon which the giant joss had once stood; and here he stopped and gazed about, as if to assure himself that he was not watched. Having satisfied himself upon this point, he

drew a dagger from his bosom, and with its metal haft he gave several quick, smart raps upon the stone. In a few minutes there came a low rap from the inside, and then the stranger rapped again, accompanying this last rap by a peculiar whistle. In a moment more, Paul was not a little astonished at seeing a portion of the massive pedestal sink from its place, leaving an aperture some three feet square, through which the applicant quickly passed, and immediately afterwards the place was closed up as before.

For a while Paul was lost in astonishment; but when he grew more calm he began to reflect upon what he had seen. He fancied that he had dreamed something like this; he had, at least, dreamed of things full as strange in connection with the place, and he began to think that some of his other phantasms might have weight and meaning. For a long while he remained behind the granite blocks, so as to see the stranger when he should return; but his drooping eyes would not obey his will, and he had to surrender to the sleepy god. He dared not go back to the spot he had formerly occupied—for in case the strange visitor should come out while he slept, he would run the risk of exposure, so he sought a safe place, and there he lay down, and was soon asleep. When he next awoke it was from being roused by a low, grating sound, and on starting up he saw by the pale light that was reflected into the place, the same corner of the night before just emerging from the aperture in the pedestal. He turned after he came forth from the mystic retreat, and having seen the place re-closed, he walked quietly away. Paul knew that it must be near morning, for the moon had sank far into the west, and a tall wall threw its shade over the place where he had been sleeping. He crept out from his hiding-place, and saw the man just passing behind the ruins of the adjoining temple. Pretty soon he heard the low hum of voices, and then came the sound of prancing horses, and not long afterwards he saw the two horsemen ride over the little bridge, and dash swiftly away up the hill. As soon as they were

out of sight he came down from his place of observation, and commenced walking up and down the stone pavement. The scene he had witnessed was not only strange, but to him it held out a peculiar interest.

Paul Ardeen had long held the desire to visit these ruins—for there were strange tales connected with them which had been whispered into his ears; and being naturally of a bold, energetic disposition, with a love of adventure, and, maybe, a fair share of curiosity, he had determined, let the risk be what it might, to make the trial. Since the resolution had been formed, he had had any quantity of presentiments, and hence it is no subject of marvel that he should be upon the rack of curiosity after what had now happened. So he walked up and down among the dingy relics of Buddha, and while he walked he resolved that he would solve the mystery if it lay in his power. There might be danger in the undertaking, but he cared not for that. He had set his soul upon the task, and no other thought came to make any strong opposition.

As soon as it was daylight our hero went down to the stream and washed himself; and having eaten his scanty breakfast, he returned to the ruins. He went to the pedestal, but he could find no clue to the place he had seen opened. The rock was a sort of hard, flinty granite, and carved with various mystic devices. Paul knew that among some of these carvings must be the joint of the movable piece; but he could not find it. He put the point of his knife into every visible angle and turn, but he could find no crack or crevice. Paul thought it best not to make too much disturbance about the place at present, so he turned from the spot and went to view the ruins of the other temples, and in this occupation he took up the time until noon. Paul now felt faint and hungry, and he turned his steps towards the cots he had seen on the opposite hill. They were about a mile distant, and situated upon a sort of table, which inclined towards the south. There was nothing very inviting in their appearance, but the adventurer was not in a situation to stand upon trifles.



## CHAPTER IV.

## STORY OF THE TEMPLES—AN ADVENTURE.

WHEN Paul reached the dwellings, he found them to be bamboo huts, thatched with coarse grass and strips of tallow-tree bark. They were dirty, filthy-looking holes, but he selected the one that seemed the least objectionable, and having approached the door, he found it occupied by a middle-aged man, with his wife and four children. The family were just at their dinner as our hero entered, and the peasant at once arose and bade him welcome. Paul made his wants known, and at the same time expressed his desire to pay for all that he might receive. The freedom and kindness of his reception nearly made up for the amount of dirt which he had to encounter, and without further ceremony he sat down to the meal, which consisted of boiled rice, a boiled fowl, and some black bread, made from rice flour, sweetened from some dark syrup. Notwithstanding the amount of dirty grease which defaced the table and the dishes, the youth ate heartily, for he was fortified by an excellent appetite. After the meal was finished, the host lit his pipe, and Paul did the same, both seating themselves upon a rude bench that stood in front of the hut, under the broad, overhanging eaves.

"You are from the north?" said the host, who had given his name as Lin-fou.

"From the northwest," returned our hero, seeing that Lin had no suspicions against him.

"I thought so. And your name—"

"Is *Pau-ding*," said Paul, smiling at the oddity of the assumed cognomen.

"How far have you come this day?"

"Only from the temples."

"Temples!" uttered Lin-fou, elevating his eyebrows. "What temples?"

"Why, those in the valley, to be sure."

"But you did not stop there last night?"

"Yes."

"You did not sleep there?"

"Yes."

"Not among the ruins?"

"Yes."

"Among those ruins?" pursued the host, taking his pipe from his mouth, and pointing down to the massive ruins from whence Paul had just come.

"Yes, I slept there last night. I got belated while examining them, and so made up my mind to stop there. Is there anything wonderful in that?"

"Wonderful!" uttered Lin, laying his hand upon his head with a sort of reverential awe. "It's perfectly miraculous! You are the first man that has ever passed the night there and come forth alive!"

"But what is the mystery?" asked Paul, hoping that he might gain some insight into what he had witnessed.

"Did you not see anything strange there?" returned the host, speaking as one yet lost in astonishment.

"Yes; I saw that the great Buddha was overthrown and disgraced; and I saw that numerous gods and charms were scattered about in plentiful confusion. I wondered that the people did not take some of them home to their own houses."

"God preserve us from such a fate!" piously ejaculated Lin, again placing his hand upon the top of his head. "There is a curse upon that place, and upon all that is in it."

"I am ignorant, good Lin. Let me have the light. I have heard that the ruins were wonderful, but I know nothing more."

"Then you do not know why those temples are in ruins, and why the cold east wind blows so bleakly about their gods?"

"No. Tell me."

"I will. And you slept there!—you must be smiled upon by the great Eminence of Heaven. But let me tell you, for I know it well. A great many years ago—many hundreds, I think—the people of Fou-tching-yo, Lin-tchou, and Teng-yuen, assisted by the emperor and his grandees, built those great temples. The largest was for Buddha, the next for Teoo-moo, the goddess of all things, and the third for Shing-moo, our holy mother. Time passed on, and the virtuous people came and worshipped in these temples, and they gave to the gods everything that lay in their power. At length there came a great drought, and it cursed only this section. The people prayed to the gods upon their knees; they gave Teoo-moo and Shing-moo rare flowers and jewels, and to the great joss they gave a new clothing of gold and many valuable ornaments; but their prayers were not heard. The corn would not grow, and the sheep died upon the hills. Of course the people were angry; but they thought all this might be to punish them for their sins, and so through the whole of the next winter they fasted and prayed, and bestowed more attention than ever upon the offended gods. In the spring, the cold east winds came and nipped the fruit, and the whirlwind broke down the vines and the tallow-trees. The people were exasperated now, for they knew that their gods meant them harm instead of good, so they collected together, many thousands of them, and tore down the temples and hurled the gods from their seats. The priests made no resistance, but helped in the work of

destruction. After this was done the people went to their homes, and from that time they prospered; but they would not build up the temples again. That is why those ruins are in the valley."

It was a strange tale; but Paul did not wonder at it, for he knew that it was characteristic of the Chinese people. Only a few months before, he had seen a huge gilded idol dragged through the mud at Amoy, because it had not answered the prayers of the people; but in this latter case the people prospered soon afterwards, and then the idol was not only restored to its place, but it was re-gilded, new ornaments placed upon it, and then the people rolled in the dust at its feet, and implored its forgiveness.

"But where is the danger of now visiting the place?" asked our hero, after he had pondered a while upon what he had heard.

"Why," returned the peasant, with a slight shudder, "it seems that the disgraced gods try to wreak their vengeance upon all whom they can lay hold of. They have no power beyond the limits of their ruined houses; but they must have power there, or they have called the dark spirits to their aid. Unfortunate travellers who have stopped there, have been found dead in the morning; and then the most strange noises are sometimes heard. The Prince of Nankin long since issued an edict that no one should attempt to pass the night near the ruins."

"But why did he do so?"

"To save the lives of his people."

"And how long since the edict was passed?"

"About two years."

"Is there any penalty attached?"

"There is no need of any penalty, for death is sure to follow."

"And yet I am not dead," said Paul.

The peasant looked up, and shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know," he at length said, "how you escaped. The gods may have been asleep, or the dark spirit may have been away upon some errand among wicked people. I would not sleep there for all the gold and precious stones upon the imperial joss!"

Paul could not but smile at the poor peasant's superstitious earnestness; but he took good care that his smile should not be seen. But then the desire to smile soon passed away, for a strange crowd of surmises and suspicions had begun to pass through his mind. He remembered well the gaudy dress and jewels he had

seen beneath the dark robe of him who had so mysteriously visited the ruins on the night before, and he wondered if that very individual might not be the prince himself. The suspicion was a strange one, but the youth thought he had good grounds for it. And yet it did not tend in the least to dampen his ardor—his determination to pursue the plan he had formed was as strong as ever.

Towards the middle of the afternoon our hero signified his intention of leaving, and having paid for his dinner—only about the amount of an English penny—he told Lin-fou that he might be there again on the next day. He bought some bread for his supper, and then he turned to depart.

"Of course you won't venture among the temples again," said the peasant.

"I shall be more careful in future," was Paul's reply, and with that he set out.

The young adventurer followed along the hill-side until he arrived at a point opposite to the temples, and then he descended. Until evening he wandered about amongst the ruins, and as soon as it was dark he crept to the same place where he had slept the night before, and then he laid himself down. For several hours he remained awake to watch the pedestal, but gradually sleep overpowered him, and he fell off into a doze. How long he had remained so, he could not tell, but he was at length aroused by that same low, grating sound. It struck upon his ears with a quickening power, and on starting up he could just discern a human head thrust out from the aperture in the pedestal. It was not the one he had seen on the previous night—he was sure of that—for this head was bare, and wholly shaved, and the moonbeams glistened upon the bald pate as though it had been a ball of polished metal. Shortly, the owner of the head made his whole body visible. It was a large, stout body, and clothed in the garb of a priest of Buddha. After he had come up, he closed the aperture, and having gazed carefully about him, he walked quietly away.

For a while after the priest had gone, Paul remained on the watch; but sleep again overpowered him. If he could only have gone out and moved about, he might have kept awake well enough; but he dared not venture out lest the priest should return unexpectedly upon him, and thus, perhaps, upset his whole plan. But he was not destined to sleep long, for approaching footsteps soon aroused him, and under the

excitement of a dreamy phantasy that was just working in his mind he started to his feet more quickly than he would otherwise have done. And that movement came near costing him his life, for the stout priest saw him, and turned quickly towards him.

"Ha! ha!" uttered the bald-headed bonze, starting back a pace, "you are the cause of all this thumping and bumping. Now the angry gods be revenged upon you for thus desecrating their shattered abode!"

As the bonze spoke he raised a heavy club of iron-wood which he carried, and sprang forward; but the moment of time that intervened between his discovery and the raising of the club, had given Paul opportunity for clear thought. He remembered what the peasant had told him about the finding of dead travellers in the temple, and he now thought he had found what made them die. With this conviction, he had instinctively drawn a pistol from his bosom, and he had just cocked it as the bonze started to spring upon him. It was the instinct of self-preservation that made him raise his weapon, and just as the ponderous club was raised above his head, he fired. He dodged the blow, and sprang back. The priest uttered a quick cry, and raised his club again; but he struck wildly and at random. Once or twice he raised the club, and then it dropped from his hand, and with a deep groan he staggered towards the pedestal; but he did not reach it. He stretched out both his hands, as though he would have clasped the massive rock for support, and with one more groan he sank down, or rather fell forward, upon the stone pavement.

Paul left his place, and hastened forward. He stooped down and turned the body of the fallen man over; but there was no life in it. The moon shone full upon the spot, and the youth could see that the ball had entered the left breast, and perhaps touched the heart. This was a position for which our hero had not looked, and for a while he knew hardly how to act. But it soon came to his mind that he had better, for the present, at least, hide the body, and taking it by the feet, he dragged it away between two massive fragments of wall, and there covered it with the old rubbish that lay around. He felt really sorry that he had killed the fellow, but the thought that the deed was necessary to save his own life, eased his conscience; and then, perhaps, he had revenged the death of many an innocent traveller, who had unsuspect-

ingly sought the shelter of the ruins. At all events, he thought that the bonze deserved death more than he did himself, and there he let the matter rest.

With a strangely beating heart, Paul now approached the old pedestal. He had a mind to try and gain admittance to the place from whence the bonze had come. It was venture-

some—it was, perhaps, foolhardy; but the youth could not turn from the purpose. He remembered the signal he had heard the visitor give, and he drew his dagger; he had turned the haft, and was upon the point of knocking, when he was startled by the laying of a hand upon his arm.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE COMPACT.

On the instant that Paul felt the touch upon his arm, he started up and drew a pistol; but when he had turned and seen who it was that had thus arrested him, he recoiled with a startled emotion, for it was none other than Ye-fu-hi, the Juggler of Nankin!

"You would not shoot me," calmly said the juggler, with a smile.

"Not if you mean me no harm. But why are you here?"

"I would ask the same question of you."

"I came to see these ruins."

"So did I."

"But you take a strange hour for your visit."

"I thought the same of you."

"But I slept here."

"Were you asleep now?"

Paul found himself cornered, and he did not answer. The juggler looked upon him with a keen, searching glance. The smile had passed away, and he seemed now earnest and thoughtful.

"I heard the report of a pistol a few moments since," he resumed, seeing that the youth did not speak. "What was the trouble? Ah!—what is this upon which the moonbeams shine so brightly? It is blood! Why is this? Do not fear to tell me if you know."

At first Paul hesitated. He feared to try his hand at falsehood or direct deception, and after a moment's thought he resolved to tell the thing as it really happened.

"I wandered about among the ruins during most of the day that has last passed," he said, "and at nightfall I laid me down behind those

stones to sleep. How long I had slept I know not, but I was awakened by the approach of footsteps, and on starting to my feet beheld a stout man close to me. He saw me at the same moment, and sprang upon me with a club—that is the club, there. I drew my pistol and shot him."

The juggler stooped down and picked up the club, which had dropped near the pedestal, and his face kindled as he examined it.

"This was made on purpose for killing men," he said, as he turned the weapon over in his hand; "and I think here is matted hair upon it, too! But did the fellow give you no reason for his onset?"

"He only said that the angry gods should be revenged upon me for desecrating their shattered abode."

"This, then, is the secret of the deaths that have occurred here," said the juggler, speaking half to himself; and then looking up, he added: "The people fear these ruins, and give them room to lie in quiet. Perhaps you know the story."

"Yes; an old peasant on the hill told me."

"And did you venture to sleep here after that?"

"I treated the matter only as an idle superstition."

"And yet you see there was truth in it."

"Something of truth."

"Ay, much of truth—for there have many people lost their lives here. But where is the body of him you shot?"

"I dragged it to a place out yonder, and covered it up."

"I would see it. You have nothing to fear from me. Come."

Paul could not resist the beck of the strange man. He did not fear him now, and yet he wished he had not come. He had an instinctive feeling that it would be better to trust him, and yet he would have given much to have kept the whole matter to himself. But with what the juggler already knew, it could do no harm to show him the body; so the youth led the way to the place where it had been concealed, and threw off the rubbish that covered it; then they both took hold and drew the corpse out into the moonlight.

"I have seen that fellow before," said Ye-fu-hi, stooping down and gazing intently into the dead man's face. "I have seen him in Nankin, and twice have I tried to track him; but both times I lost him. I wish I had known him better before you sent that lead through his body."

"I did it upon a pinch," replied Paul. "I had no choice in the matter."

"Yes; I know. But, perhaps, he may have something in his pockets that will throw light upon the subject. Let us see."

And thereupon the juggler began to overhaul the dead man's garments. He found a bunch of keys, a knife, a small ivory whistle, and a small strip of parchment, and that was all. The knife he put back; but the keys, the whistle, and the parchment he kept. The latter he unrolled and found it written upon. The characters were bold and heavy, and were plainly to be traced by the moonlight. The juggler started as he read it, and then handed it to Paul. The latter read it, and he, too, started—for it clinched the suspicion he had before entertained. It was a special passport from Kong-ti, the powerful Prince of Nankin, and gave the bearer—whose name was set down as Fau-king—liberty to pass at will where he pleased in the provinces of Kiang-su and Ngan-hoei,—even to be free from all civil process, and exempt from all arrest on any account whatever. This was signed by the prince's own hand, and bore his seal. After Paul had read it, he handed it back to the juggler, and the latter looked it over once more. His features were worked upon strangely as he traced the bold characters over again, and at length he turned to our hero.

"Your name, I think, is Paul Ardeen. O, you need not start—I saw you at Canton some

months since, and I seldom forget a face when once I see it. Now, you are an Englishman, and not moved by the petty superstitions that enter into the movements of my countrymen. You may help me if you will, and I assure you that you shall be well rewarded if you do. Ye-fu-hi is not so poor as most people take him for."

"But how can I help you?" asked Paul, after he had pondered some upon the curious subject. For to him it did appear curious that he should be brought into such contact with one of the most notorious men in the empire—and a man, too, whom he had tried to avoid, and whom he had looked upon with something of fear.

"Why, you have wit, courage and coolness, and I think you are one who might be trusted. I do not think I am mistaken in your countenance. I think the Prince Kong-ti must have a haunt about here somewhere, and I would find out where it is. If you would watch here, keep your eyes about this vicinity, and see what movements are made, I think you may learn something."

"But what shall it profit me? I am not so fond of running my neck to the block!"

"O, if you fear, then we will say no more about it. I had thought you fond of adventure, and fond, too, perhaps, of hunting up and solving mysteries."

"I do not fear, sir," returned Paul, with a flush upon his face. "But my life was not given me to throw needlessly away. But yet, perhaps, I may do as you wish, for I should really like to know why that fellow attacked me."

"O, I wish you would help me," pursued the juggler, evincing much earnestness. "The prince has done me a most foul wrong, and I would have my hand upon him. I feel sure that he haunts this place; but I cannot remain here now. I must away to Nankin. If you will but stop here and watch—perhaps one more night, perhaps a week, perhaps more—you may see the prince about here."

"But how shall I know him?" asked Paul, who was all the while considering deeply upon the subject.

"You may know him by his very bearing. He is a man about forty years of age, somewhat taller than yourself and quite corpulent. His skin is light—lighter than yours—for he was born in the extreme north of the empire. He is our emperor's youngest brother. You will

surely know him if you see him, and if he comes disguised I think you will easily see through it. I ask you to do this, for I do not know an available man of my own people who would dare to do it. What say you?"

Paul was now sure that the man whom he had seen enter the ruins on the previous night, was none other than the prince; but he did not mean that the juggler should know how much of a clue he had. He revolved the matter over; he had determined to explore the mystic place beneath the ruins, and why should he hesitate now? In fact, the presence of the juggler had given him a new incentive to explore the place, for he felt less fear of the consequences. If harm should happen to him, there would now be one who would know where he was. There is a vast difference between being alone in an adventure and having a companion, even though that companion be but a confidant and sympathizer without direct personal companionship. These kind of thoughts came to Paul's mind, and at length he replied that he would make the trial.

"You know not, sir," exclaimed Ye-fu-hi, with much gratitude in his manner, "how you have pleased me in this. I do not think there will be much danger. I have long needed a stout arm and a resolute heart to help me; but among my people I could find them not. You shall remain here, and among the honest peasants you can find sustenance. O, if I can but once get upon the track of the prince, I shall be content. Watch for him—watch for him. This man was his tool, and when he finds him gone he may come to seek him."

"Suppose you let me have those keys and that whistle," said Paul. "Who knows but that they may come in use? That whistle may be for the giving of some secret signal, and the keys may be also used. At least, they may serve me better than yourself."

"So they may," returned the old man, passing the articles over without even a thought, save to comply with the youth's wishes.

After this, the body of the bonze was dragged back to its hiding-place, and then the two walk-

ed out into the court. When they stopped, the juggler laid his hand upon Paul's arm, and with more of emotion than he had before betrayed, he said:

"I must leave you now, for I have business that must be done. I heard that the prince had left Nankin, and that he had taken this path, and hence I followed; but I cannot stop now to hunt for him. You will not deceive me—you will not neglect the work. I trust you—I put all confidence in you, and in the end you shall own that I have not done you wrong; but you shall find that I have a power to make you blessed. Believe me—O, believe me! I will bless you with earth's sweetest blessings, and I will help open heaven to your feet."

Paul Ardeen stood like one entranced. The words he had heard were not so powerful in themselves, but there was that in the speech that affected him wondrously. It was something aside from the tone—something more than the mere language—it was something that did not belong to the sounds he had heard, and yet it was a power that came from the man before him. He gazed up into the juggler's face, and with a most searching look did he scrutinize every lineament of those dark features. Why he did so, he knew not; he only knew that his soul was struggling to leap forth into some knowledge that was not yet his—that he was the plaything of a double mystery. He did not reply, and ere long the old man continued:

"I shall be here again in one week. Shall I find you here then?"

"If I am alive—yes."

"Then heaven protect you! I must be with-in the walls of Fou-tching-yo before the sun is up. As you love yourself, do not deceive me—do not neglect me. In one week, if I am alive, I shall be here, and perhaps before."

And thus speaking, the strange man turned and walked swiftly away. Paul watched him as he walked down the valley, nor did he move until the departing form was lost in the gloomy shadows of the distance.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A CURIOUS DISCOVERY.

Soon after the juggler had gone Paul began to think intently of the plan he had in view. As near as he could judge by the moon, it was an hour past midnight. There were but a few hours left to him before it would be daylight, and he considered some time before he could make up his mind; but when his mind was made up he had resolved to make the venture. He re-loaded the barrel of the pistol he had discharged, and having seen that the other barrels were safe he went once more to the pedestal. He drew his dagger, and with its haft he knocked smartly upon the stone. It produced a sharp, ringing sound, and ere long he heard a knock from the inside. He remembered the whistle which he had heard given the man by whom he now knew to be the prince, and he thought of the little ivory instrument he had obtained from the pocket of the bonze. He drew it out and blew upon it, sharply and shrilly, as he had heard the prince do, and in a moment more a portion of the rock seemed to sink away. Within he saw a middle-aged woman who bore a lighted candle in her hand, but she did not look particularly at him. She only seemed to observe that the one who had summoned her was ready to come in, and then she started down.

Paul hesitated a moment, and during that moment there seemed a thousand thoughts rushing

through his mind; but his courage was good, and he stepped in through the aperture. Here a new difficulty presented itself. By the light of the candle which the woman carried he could see that the way led down a long flight of stone steps, and she was nearly half-way down. How was he to shut the aperture up? He looked behind him, and all around, but he could see nothing that seemed made for that purpose. The woman had stopped and looked back, and with a sudden thought Paul put his head out through the opening as though he were looking to see that all was safe. This gave him time for thought. He remembered that the movable part of the rock had sank down, and of course it must be lifted up again. Perhaps it was so hung that it would lift up easily. Upon this thought he drew in his head and reached down. He felt a ring, which he seized, and lifted with all his might, but he had no need to have laid out half the strength, for the rock came up easily, and slid into its place with a sharp click.

As soon as the woman saw that the place was shut she turned and pursued her way down again, not having noticed in the gloom of the place, who it was that followed. One thought now came to our hero's mind which made him feel comparatively safe: If there had been a man in

the place he would certainly have come to open the passage. This circumstance gave the youth new courage, and he followed on with less hesitation. At the foot of the stairs he came to a narrow, vaulted passage through which the woman walked without turning, and Paul kept far enough behind to be in the gloom. After following around a gentle curve the woman opened a door to the left and passed through, but even here she did not stop for her follower to come up. When Paul passed in at the door he saw that the woman had already opened another door, through the opening of which came a stream of rich, mellow light, and through this opening she disappeared. The youth followed on, and when he had passed the second door he found himself in a large apartment, and he saw his guide just disappearing behind a heavy silken arras that hung in one corner of the place. He stopped and gazed about him, and for a while he was fairly bewildered by the scene which was thus opened to his view. The room was spacious, and adorned with every luxury that wealth could afford. From the centre of the arched ceiling hung a cluster of crystal lanterns, the soft beams from which bathed the place in a flood of light almost equal to noonday. Upon a rich couch, at one end of the apartment, reclined the form of a female. At first she did not notice who had entered, but gradually she turned her eyes towards the door, and as she met the gaze of our hero she started to her feet.

"This is not Fau-king!" she uttered, almost in a whisper.

"No, lady," quickly returned Paul, "I have come in Fau-king's place."

The youth spoke so calmly, and his answer was so frank, that the female seemed to be at once disarmed of all fear, and Paul had an opportunity to view her. Never before had he seen a being so lovely. She could not have been over twenty years of age, and it really seemed as though every hour of her life had added some new charm to her person. Her skin was as fair as the new-blown lily, and upon her cheeks dwelt the blush of the newly opened rose. Her hair was black as the sparkling jet, and its clustered curls hung freely over her faultless neck and shoulders. Her eyes, which were large, dark and brilliant, were shaded by long silken lashes, and her brow, upon which rested a diadem of pearls, was clear and frank. Her form was light and airy, for her dress was not like that worn generally by her countrywomen.

But had her form been enveloped in the garb of a bonze it could not have detracted from the beauty of her face—that was a sphere of its own, a sphere in which loveliness reigned supreme.

"Did the prince send you here?" asked the girl, slightly lowering her eyes before the enraptured gaze of the youth.

"May I sit down and tell you my errand?" asked Paul, after a few moments' hesitation.

The girl did not hesitate in her answer, nor did she exhibit the least fear, though it must be confessed that she showed much surprise.

"Of course I have nothing to fear," she said. "You have a right here, or you would not be here. Let me know why you are come?"

"I have come in Fau-king's place," returned the youth. "He will come here no more. Are you sorry that he is to stay away?"

"Do you speak truly?" quickly asked the girl, looking up into the young man's face. "Is it true that Fau-king is to be here no more?"

"Certainly it is, lady."

"Then I am very glad," uttered the lovely girl, in a quick, frank tone, "for Fau-king was not kind to me. I hope you will be more kind and generous."

"As kind as heaven itself," said Paul, seating himself upon the couch by the fair girl's side, and removing his cap. "Could my heart hold a feeling of ill for such as you, I would tear it out as a thing not fit to beat with life."

The excitement under which Paul had labored for the last few hours, and the physical exertions consequent thereon, had served to loosen the skull-cap which he wore, and in removing his outer cap they both came off, and the dark, glossy, wavy hair fell about his neck and temples. The girl started, and a quick flush suffused her features. Paul noticed the mishap, and with a quick smile he said:

"I hope my head will not frighten you. I follow the customs of my country as nearly as possible, but I cannot deprive myself of the covering and protection which God has given me."

"O, I do not blame you," replied the girl, with a sort of twinkling, appreciating glance. "We have but few heads that are worth protecting, and hence, I suppose, the fashion."

She smiled as she spoke, and for a few moments Paul was perfectly entranced. He remembered his dreams, and the phantasy became more and more real. He gazed into the features of his companion, and his heart beat so wildly that for a while he was unable to speak.

For the time he forgot that he had laid himself liable to danger, he forgot that he had taken a human life—he forgot all save the presence of the being who had enchanted him. Under other circumstances the feeling he now experienced might not have been so sudden, but his strange dreams had prepared the way, and he now gave his heart up without a struggle.

"Lady," he said, at length gaining the power and the courage to speak, "it may be a strange tale that I shall tell to you; but first you must assuredly know that in me there can dwell no harm. Tell me, if under any circumstances, you should fear me?"

"I know not why I should," replied she, speaking very low, and looking into the youth's handsome, bold features with peculiar earnestness. There was surely a deeper tinge of the rose upon her cheeks, and the emotion even reached to her eyes. "I do not think I should fear you," she added, "for you do not look like one who could willingly do harm to any person."

"You do surely speak in justice," said Paul, and then, with a light smile, and in a light tone, he added: "But just for the whim—just to please a passing thought—just to know how much there can be in a countenance—suppose—mind, I only suppose the case—suppose the prince had not sent me here—suppose I had come here without the knowledge of any one save myself, and that Prince Kong-ti never even saw me?"

"O, that would be impossible."

"But suppose it were possible?"

"Then I should first wish to know why you came?"

"But you are too fast," said Paul, with another smile—a smile which was as frank and open as the sunbeams at noonday. "The question is, should you fear me before you knew my business?"

The girl hung down her head for a moment, and then again she gazed up into the youth's face. There was a peculiar light in her dark eye, and the long silken lashes even seemed to droop while she gazed.

"I do not think I should fear you," she whispered; "but I should fear for you, for you would be in greater danger than myself."

"I know not why you should fear for me," uttered Paul, going deeper and deeper into the meshes that were surrounding him.

"Why—because you would be in danger,"

returned the girl, with perfect simplicity. "Of course you must know that this would be a very dangerous place?"

"O, certainly—I am aware of all that. But do not start, now—do not fear me when I tell the truth. I am just as I have supposed. I know not the prince, nor have I ever seen him but once, and even then he did not see me."

"You trifle, sir," uttered the girl, starting with amazement.

"Upon my soul I do not. I am just as I have said. A strange fate has led me to this place. Perhaps the great Spirit of heaven himself has whispered the dreams that are more than half realized. You do not fear me?"

The youth spoke in a tender tone, and his whole countenance showed how deep was the feeling that moved him. The girl again looked up into his face, and this time her own countenance betrayed more of emotion than had before appeared there.

"No," she at length said; "I do not fear you, but tell me what this all means. Tell me," she added, with much agitation, "for there is something wondrous here—something which I cannot understand."

"I will tell you," said Paul, now perfectly assured that the fair being did not fear him. "For a long time I have had a desire to visit these ruins, and in connection therewith I have had many strange dreams—dreams which were thrilling and mystic. I have dreamed of a rare and lovely flower that I should find here—of a water of life and a nectar that should give me eternal youth and peace—and then I have dreamed some things that are beyond my power to describe, but which yet have affected me deeply. At length I came here, and on the night last past, I slept in a close corner above where we now are. A man came to the ruins, and I concealed myself, but yet I could watch his movements. I saw him approach the great stone pedestal of Buddha, and witnessed his entrance to this place. I caught a glance of his rich dress, and from what I learned from the neighboring peasants, I knew that he must be the Prince Kong-ti. From that moment I made up my mind that I would explore this place if possible. It was not all curiosity that moved me; there was a deeper feeling, though I might not explain it if I should try. I watched, and saw that man go away, and this evening I came again. I concealed myself as before, and ere long I saw a man come out from the mysterious passage.

When he came back he discovered me, and made at me with a heavy club which he carried. I knew that he would take my life if he could, for so he assured me. I had not molested him, but I found that I must either die, or else kill him. I drew a pistol and shot him. I did the deed with a better grace, for I believed he had killed many an unsuspecting traveller who had sought the shelter of these ruins. I had learned the secret of gaining entrance to the place, and I tried. The woman who came up did not notice but that it was the bonze who followed her."

"He was no bonze," said the girl.

"But he wore the dress."

"Yes, that was for effect. He was a eunuch, one of the prince's most trusty slaves."

"A eunuch?" repeated Paul, with a start. "But you are not the wife of the prince?"

"No, no—I am no wife yet. Thank God I am yet a maiden—as pure as the mountain snow."

How Paul's heart leaped at those words! He clasped his hands, and a silent prayer of thanks went up from his soul. Strange that he should have felt so.

"And Fau-king is dead?" murmured the maiden, bowing her head.

"Yes; but I could not help it. I trust you will not blame me?"

"No, no," quickly replied she; "for I have heard, even here, enough to satisfy me, that he has killed innocent men whom he has found there. It is dreadful!"

The maiden shuddered as she spoke, and while yet she was moved by the memory of the fatal truth, the silken arras at the extremity of the apartment was moved aside, and the same woman who had conducted Paul down from the pedestal entered. She had advanced half-way up the room when she noticed our hero. She stopped and clasped both hands to her eyes, and thus she remained for half a minute. Then she looked once more upon the youth, and as she did so a quick, sharp cry broke from her lips. Paul knew not what to do or say. He knew not what course would best serve his sweet companion. But he was not left long in suspense, for the maiden soon regained her presence

of mind, and in a tone comparatively calm, she said:

"You seem surprised, Lan. This is a man who has come in place of Fau-king. Did you not notice that you were conducting a stranger to our place?"

"The great Tieu-tan preserve me," uttered the woman, lifting both hands in astonishment. "Is it possible?"

"It certainly is," returned the maiden. And then with much earnestness she added: "But is it not strange that Fau-king should have said nothing to us about the matter?"

"Very strange," responded Lan, regarding Paul curiously. There was a dubious look upon her face, but she did not seem to really entertain any doubts. Perhaps she had not had time to frame any positive thoughts about the matter.

"I will show him Fau-king's apartments," resumed the maiden, without showing the least signs of discomposure. "I want nothing now."

The old woman seemed to hesitate. She was evidently not in a position to exercise control over the movements of the maiden without some unusual cause; but she certainly appeared to desire further light upon the present state of affairs. She started towards the arras, but she turned before she had reached it and looked back. She looked first upon the maiden, and then upon Paul, and from the nature of this last look it was evident that she had now begun to entertain some doubts. But she said nothing plainly, though her lips moved, and the sound of low mutterings came to the ears of our hero and his companion.

"She mistrusts us," said the fair girl, looking up into the youth's face.

Paul made no reply, for the words of his companion sounded strangely in his ears, and they rang strangely, too, upon his heart. "She mistrusts us!" It was a strange sentence. And then the manner in which she had behaved in the presence of the old woman was also strange. Paul's heart fluttered wildly as he thought over the events of the past ten minutes, and an atmosphere of mystic power seemed to be moving about him and enthralling his senses.



## CHAPTER VII.

## NIAO.

LET us change the scene now to Nankin. Nankin—once the proudest city in the great empire—the home of wealth, power and learning—the great capital where the Child of the Sun held his magnificent court, and where the princes of the realm made manifest their wealth. But Nankin has greatly changed now. The emperor is not there—the wise men speak not in her streets, and her court is but secondary to the great court of the North. Yet Nankin is still a great city—great in wealth—great in space—great in ease—great in poverty, and great in ignorance and debauchery.

Near one of the great canals stood the palace of the prince Kong-ti. He was a powerful man in Nankin, and so he was powerful in the whole of his province. He was looked up to as a pattern of sobriety and virtue, and towards those who were guilty of low debauchery and lust he was most severe and rigorous. Sometimes when people wished to use a strong term to express the superlative of constancy and virtue, the Prince Kong-ti was brought up as an example. It was most fortunate for him that his people had discovered these things.

It was late in the evening—on the very evening that Paul Ardeen had gone for the second time to the ruined temples—and in one of the sumptuously furnished apartments of the prince's

palace, sat a middle-aged woman. She was still beautiful, but there were traces of deep sorrow upon her brow, and her eyes gave signs of much weeping. She was Niao, the wife of the prince. Well was it for the prince that Niao never went abroad, for people would then have seen her tears, and they might have wondered how the wife of such a husband could find occasion to weep. But the people did not see all this, and many a noble dame envied the fair Niao the possession of the virtuous prince for a husband.

Niao sat upon a soft couch, and near her stood a maid who watched her with much interest. The princess was looking upon the great rose that formed part of the figure of the carpet, and ever and anon a bright tear would fall from her long lashes upon the very rose that fastened her gaze. She was pale now, and her bosom was heaved with some powerful emotion.

"Tsi," she said, looking up at her attendant, "has my lord returned yet?"

"Not yet," replied the maid, moving nearer to her mistress. "I have hearkened for the music of his horse's hoofs upon the court, but the sound has not yet come."

There was a silence of some minutes, broken only by the deep sighs of the princess. At length she spoke again:

"Tsi," she said, in a tone of strange sound, "do you think I am grown very ugly?"

"Ugly?" repeated the maid, holding up her hands in amazement. "Are you not still the most beautiful woman in Nankin? Do not all acknowledge you to be the very flower of—"

"Stop, stop, good Tsi," interrupted the princess, with a faint smile. "There is no need that you should flatter. I know that I was once called beautiful, and hence Kong-ti loved me; but all things of earth must fade, and I know that I am not exempt from the great law. I was young then, but years have rolled upon me, and I know they have left their mark on my face. Perhaps Kong-ti sees that the bloom of the flower has gone, and I am less pleasing to him now."

"Does he see your heart?" asked the maid, moving still nearer to the princess. "Ah, he would find the bloom more than made up there."

"Alas, good Tsi, I fear he would find the bloom all gone from there, too. Mine is a sad heart. I know that my beauty is fading, and that my lord no longer loves me. He is cold and harsh, and his words freeze me when he speaks. Alas! his love is not mine. He does not know how mightily this heart clings to him."

The attendant had no consolation to offer, for she knew that her mistress spoke the truth. She had noticed the change in the manner of the prince, and she knew full well how sadly it worked upon the poor wife. She had been long with her mistress—she was with her when they were both young and joyous. She loved the good and gentle Niao with her whole heart, and she suffered when Niao was unhappy.

"Tsi," continued the princess, after a few moments' pause, "you do not think Kong-ti would harm me?"

"Harm you? Heaven forbid! Does any man hold such a heart as that?"

"Alas! I sometimes fear him. O, you do not know how strangely he speaks to me. And then I have—"

"What is it?" asked Tsi, bending affectionately over her mistress.

"I have heard him speak in his sleep!" the princess uttered, with a fearful shudder.

"But he may only have dreamed."

"Ah, people do not speak so plainly save where the heart has a feeling. He may have dreamed, but there must have been solid foundation for such dreams. O, my husband!"

While yet Tsi was pondering upon what she

had heard, the sound of tramping hoofs came up from the court. The princess started up and gazed into her companion's face.

"I think that is my lord," she said, in a low, earnest whisper.

"Yes," returned Tsi. "It is the tread of his horse, and Li is certainly with him. Courage, my lady. Things may not be so bad as you fear. Smile upon the prince, and his heart must soften. I do not think he is all stone."

The wife looked up with a melancholy expression, but she made no reply, and ere long she arose from her seat and went to sit by the open window. The faithful maid saw that her mistress was busy with her own thoughts, and she remained silent. Thus passed nearly an hour, and at the end of that time a female messenger entered the room. She approached the princess and informed her that her husband would see her.

"He may smile upon you now," said Tsi, after the messenger had withdrawn. "Try and see if he does not still love you."

"I shall do all I can."

Tsi left the apartment, and shortly afterwards the prince entered. He was a stout, corpulent man, somewhere in the neighborhood of forty years of age, and though he was not uncouth to look upon, yet there was a lurking spirit in his eye, and an expression upon his thick lips, that would serve to awaken distrust in the mind of an unprejudiced observer. His dress was rich and costly, but somewhat travel-worn and dusty. The princess arose as he entered, and saluted him with a low bow, and after this the prince bade her be seated.

"And now how fares my Niao?" he asked, as he took a seat by her side.

"I am well," returned the wife.

"But you do not look well, nor do you speak as though you were at ease. I think I shall send for the physician."

"No, no, my lord. Let me still have your love, and I ask no more. In your smiles I could find the best medicine. I am not sick, though your absence sometimes makes me sad."

A frown gathered upon the brow of the prince, and he turned away to hide it.

"You are foolish," he said, "to be sad because business calls me away."

"Business?" repeated Niao, in a careful, pleading tone. "And is it all business that takes you from me? Is it business that makes you

cold and stern? Is it business that has frozen up the current of your love?"

Kong-ti started, and an angry flush passed over his features. He gazed into the face of his wife, and for a while he seemed to be endeavoring to read her thoughts—as though he would have found out if her fears were based upon any positive knowledge. But he could read nothing there save the record of hopes that were not realized, and the sadness of a desponding heart.

"You accuse me strangely," he said, with a sort of offended tone, but which was yet too cold for much real feeling. "I was not aware that my love had grown cold; but still it has become an old affair, and the warm impulses of youth are wearing off. Did you think they were going to last for a life-time?"

"If true love is an impulse, then I see not why it would become dim with age. Ah, my husband, in my heart there is no such thing as the growing old of love. It is a lasting principle, and belongs to the soul. It is as eternal as the heavens, and knows nothing of time or age. The love I once felt for you only gains strength upon the shoulder of time."

The prince bit his lip and turned away his head. There was a power in the language of the princess that he could not wholly overcome, and yet he showed by his very manner that he did not like it. He remembered the time when he had loved her fondly and strongly, but it had been with the passions of impulsive youth, and now that age crept upon him the avenues of that love were closing up. At length, however, he drove away the emotions that had moved him, and in an abrupt tone he said:

"We will not speak of this now. At some other time I may be happy to receive a lesson on love, since you have stored yours up so faithfully. But I have come now to attend to another matter. I am confident you are not well, and I feel sure that a change of place would suit you. You know I own a place some few leagues north of here. It is a lovely spot, and I have thought you would be more contented there."

"Give me your love and I shall be contented anywhere," returned Niao. "Of course you will sometimes keep me company there?"

"Certainly. Very often." And as the prince spoke there was a spark in his eye which the wife did not see. "I shall be with you much," he continued, "and I think you will soon forget the troubles you have experienced here. As

soon as you can prepare, I will accompany you thither."

"It will take me but a short time to do that. By the day after to-morrow I can be ready. I suppose I am only to pass the summer there?" she said, inquiringly.

"That is all."

As soon as this matter was arranged the spirits of the prince seemed to rise, for he talked some time, and his conversation was light and gay, though once in a while, when he found the eyes of his wife resting upon him with their light of joyous love, he would hesitate and tremble, and a slight change might have been seen in the color of the trembling lip. But his wife noticed it not—she fondly hoped that his love was yet hers, and she was blind to all else. Hers was not the bosom for quick suspicions, and a few kind words could perform almost wonders upon her feelings. When her husband at length left her she felt happier than before.

"O, good Tsi, I think he loves me yet," murmured the princess, after her maid had joined her again. "He spoke kindly to me, and he smiled."

"And so he hastened to your side with his love?"

"Yes," resumed Niao, with some hesitation. "But he did not at first show his love. He has bade me get ready to move to the country place which he owns out towards Kin-tchou, and my willingness to go has pleased him."

Tsi did not reply immediately, for she seemed to have found something about which to think. She was a keen, quick-witted girl, and one not easily deceived. She could speak words of encouragement for those she loved even when hope was against her, and she could be mistrustful, too, if there was occasion. She had been engaged in deep thought while the prince had been with her mistress, and perhaps that thought had amounted to something in her mind.

"Do you know, my lady, anything about this place to which you are going?" she at length asked, with considerable earnestness in her manner.

"Only that it is a very beautiful place," returned the princess.

"But I have heard that it is very sickly there. From the low marshes which surround it there comes up a foul malaria, especially at this season."

"Does my lord know of this?" asked Niao.

"Perhaps not," returned the maid, checking herself, and keeping back the fears she entertained. "Of course he would not send you there if he knew of it."

"Perhaps it is not so bad now," said the princess.

"Very likely," responded Tsi.

"But if it is yet dangerous we can come back here," added the princess.

"Certainly," assented Tsi, still deeply engaged in thought.

"You will go with me, Tsi, for you, at least, love me."

"I shall go where you go, my lady."

This was spoken with unusual resolution, and shortly afterwards the faithful maid was dismissed. She appeared to have something upon her

mind which she wished to speak, but she kept it to herself. She gave her mistress one long, earnest look, and then with a slight, sad shake of the head she moved away from the place. After she was gone the princess started up and leaned once more against the window. The evening breeze came in sweet and cool, and fanned her feverish brow, but still there was a burning sensation coming up from her heart. She had noticed the look of her handmaiden, and forebodings of ill were working in her mind. She tried to think that her husband loved her truly; and that he would not harm her—though it was no extraneous harm that she feared. If she could only have the love of her earthly lord, she cared for nothing else; but if that was gone, then every other thing was but as a blank to her soul.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE HEART'S PLEDGE.

We left Paul Ardeen and his new-found acquaintance regarding each other in silence, but the youth soon found his tongue, and his first desire was to find out why his fair companion was in so strange a place, and how she came there, and he asked her if she had any objections to telling him the story.

"No," she replied, without hesitation. "The story of my life is a very simple one, and I will tell it with pleasure."

"It would surely please me," resumed Paul, moving nearer to her side.

"Then you shall be pleased," she commenced with a smile. "My name is Yu-lu. Of my parents, I can only remember that they lived in Fo-chan when I was born, for I was very young when they died. After they were dead I went to live with my uncle, and he took me to the village that lies upon the great river near Nankin. There I lived with him until I was seventeen years old, and at that time the Prince of Nankin, Kong-ti, stopped there and saw me. I heard him talk with my uncle, and I knew that they were talking of me. After that the prince used to come to our house every month, and sometimes oftener, and frequently he would talk with me. I felt proud to be noticed by so noble a grandee, and I used to do all in my power to please him, little dreaming then what was to be

the end. In this way a year passed, and I was eighteen. One day my uncle came to me and told me that for the future the prince was going to take me under his charge. I was pleased with that, for I thought then that I should enjoy all sorts of privileges, and have the station of a lady.

"When the prince came to take me away it was late in the evening. I thought it strange, but I did not think there was anything to fear. I did not entertain any doubts until I found that we were not going to stop at Nankin. We only waited near the walls of the city until we were joined by Fan-king, and then we moved on again. At daylight we entered a small village, and there we stopped through the day, neither of us showing ourselves out of doors. I asked the prince what it all meant, but he only told me not to be alarmed—that he was going to find me a home where I should be very happy. As soon as it was dark again we set forward, riding very fast through the night, and before daylight we reached these ruins. I was conducted down to this place, and here the prince told me that he had had it furnished on purpose for me. Then it was that I learned his meaning. He meant to make me his wife as soon as I was twenty years of age, and until that time he meant that I should remain here and study of Fau-

king who would instruct me in all that a lady of high station ought to know.

"I wept when he told me this, for I did not wish to become his wife. He was growing old, and I knew that I could never love him. He tried to soothe me—he told me how happy he would make me, and how I should have everything that I could want for my comfort. But when I thought that I was to be shut up here for two years my heart almost broke. The prince said he did not dare to trust so fair a flower to exposure, for he feared he might lose it. He found that I would not be comforted, and when it was daylight he hastened away. The woman whom you have seen was here, and she tried to make me feel easy in my new position; but it was of no use. For long, long days I wept and sobbed, and it seemed as though I was imprisoned forever.

"At the end of a month the prince came again. I had grown calm, then, and he was very kind to me, but I was not happy. So time passed on, and every month, and once in a while oftener, he came to see me. He generally stops but one night, but sometimes more. He converses with me, and seems pleased that I have learned so much, for the eunuch was a learned man for all his hardness of heart. Gradually the sharper stings of my grief wore off—my sadness became a calm, dim melancholy, and I have now even become so habituated to the place, that I can treat the prince with something like regard. I fear him, for I know that his power is great; but yet he has ever respected my virtue, for he would have a virtuous wife. I think he loves me."

As Yu-lu ceased speaking, she raised her hand to her brow and sighed heavily. Paul was much affected by what he had heard.

"And did you never have the wish to escape from this place?" he asked, trembling as he spoke.

"O, yes, many times. But the opportunity never offered itself. I have been watched most narrowly, for when Fan-king slept Lan was always awake, and when she slept the eunuch was on the watch."

"But have you yet learned to love the prince?"

"To love him?" repeated the maiden, starting with sudden energy. "O, he seems an evil spirit in my path. He is to me what the great King of Darkness is to the souls of the lost. I fear him."

"I see not why he should have placed you in such a place as this," said the youth, speaking

as though he were keeping back the emotions that were most striving for utterance.

"He said he did it for fear that he might lose me if I were where others could see me."

"And do you think he had this place excavated on purpose for your reception?"

"No. I have heard, from the conversation of Lan and the eunuch, that a poor peasant discovered the secret of this place, and communicated it to the prince. The peasant has never since been seen! Perhaps the prince liked not to trust him living with the secret. This must have been some retreat of the Buddhist bonzes, and perhaps was prepared for the purpose of furthering some designs upon the superstitions of the people. The prince only had the apartments furnished, and after they were done the four men who had done the work were killed here, and their bodies sunk in the mud of the river! I have learned these things by listening to my keepers when they thought I slept. — Love the prince! O, O!"

"I think the prince of Nankin has a wife!" whispered Paul, laying one hand upon Yu-lu's arm. His hand trembled when he placed it there, and his voice was tremulous with the most powerful emotion.

"Alas!" murmured the maiden, with a fearful shudder, "I know he has. Lan told me that she was sickly, and could not live long! O, God forbid that he should—"

"What?" whispered Paul, drawing still nearer to the hesitating girl.

"'Tis too dreadful to think upon; but his hands are already stained with blood, and I know not what he may do. In one month I shall be twenty years of age, and then he says I shall be his wife. Heaven knows how his present wife is to die!"

Yu-lu spoke with a heart-bursting expression, and her head sank forward upon her hands. For some moments Paul did not dare to speak. He gazed upon the fair cheek that was turned towards him, and he saw that there was a tear upon it. At that moment his heart burst the last bond that held it, and the flame burned up bright and strong. He knew that he loved the beautiful being—that every emotion of his soul centered upon her. The love may have been born suddenly, and its life may have come quickly, but his soul was strangely prepared for it. The dim visions of the past were, but realized—the trembling hopes of the dreamer had but found their fruition. His was a soul all impulse and animation, and he gave himself now a



ready prisoner to the gentle god that had been shooting his darts upon him.

"Yu-lu," he said, "you may call me Paul—Paul Ardeen."

"Paul?" she repeated, speaking the name very correctly, and at the same time raising her eyes with an expression which showed that she had lost a part, at least, of the thoughts that made her shudder so but a few moments before. "Paul Ardeen? It is a strange name. I never heard a name exactly like it in sound before."

"No, I suppose not. My parents were of a country over which the Chinese emperor has no control. It is a better country than this. Women are not slaves there—they marry whom they love, and with the husbands of their choice they govern the home of their happiness as seems to them best. In that country mothers educate their offspring, and plant in their tender bosoms the first seeds of goodness and virtue. It is a great and powerful nation—one of the most powerful on earth, and yet at this very moment one of your own sex sits upon the throne and sways the regal sceptre. The people all love her, and she loves them. Do you not think you could be happy in such a land?"

Yu-lu gazed up with a wondering expression, but with nothing of doubt. Her eyes beamed with a speaking light, and a rich glow was gradually suffusing her countenance.

"O," she murmured, "I should be very happy in such a home—where I could be free—where my soul could expand with every virtuous desire. O, 'tis hard to be a slave—to feel the holy impulses that God has given me cramped and strangled at their birth. But alas! fate has marked out my prison-path."

"No, no," exclaimed the youth, speaking with ardent passion. "Fate has not yet fixed your destiny. In your own hands yet lays the power of snapping in sunder the foul bonds that bind you. The flower of your youth is not faded—the holy aspirations of your soul are not yet confined—the virtue of your being is not fled, nor has the hand of the destroyer yet crushed you."

"There is music in your words," softly murmured the maiden. "But still there is a power hanging over me that can do all this."

"By the powers above us, there is not," cried Paul, impulsively drawing the beautiful being close upon his bosom. "But there is a power near to save you. O, listen to me for a moment ere you fasten your belief so fatally. The way is even now open. I will save you. Go with

me, and we will flee from this place. The power of the wicked prince shall be over you no more, for I will take you to a home where he dares not come save as a cringing suppliant. Will you not go with me?"

The maiden gazed first up into the face of her companion, and then she bent her eyes to the floor. She did not tremble, but her cheek turned pale, and her heart seemed almost to have ceased to beat. For full two minutes she remained thus, and then she once more turned her gaze upon the face of the youth.

"Paul," she said, speaking very strangely, and resting one of her small white hands upon his arm. "I do not know your full meaning."

"Can you not read it in my face?" quickly returned our hero, looking a look of love that could not be mistaken. "Yu-lu, until now my heart has been my own, but it is no longer so. I love you, and with my love I would protect you. I would find some home where you should light the atmosphere with your smiles, and where my wealth should make me blessed only so far as it helped to make you happy. I would make you my wife—to you I would give all my love, and I would only feel happy when you could share the feeling. Speak to me, and tell me if you understand me now."

"I think I understand you," the maiden whispered, beginning now to tremble.

"And what further can you answer me?" asked Paul, drawing Yu-lu's head upon his bosom. "O, I hope you do not fear me—I hope you will not wonder if my words are true. Only look to your own heart, and if you find there an answering emotion to the words I have spoken, then let me know it, for heaven itself is not more true than is the heart I offer you. Will you not go?"

"If you can open the way, I will flee from here, and then—"

"Speak on. Let me know all, for I will take you from here even though I have to break my heart in separating from you afterwards. Do not hesitate."

"I will flee from here," repeated Yu-lu, hiding her face in the young man's bosom, "and then we may learn more of each other. We will flee far from here—we shall be together sometime. Then you will know more of me, and then—I will answer you further."

Paul raised the fair girl's head and gazed into her face, and he found her weeping. He pressed his lips upon her pure white brow and kissed her, and then he said:

"I will ask you no more, though I am sure that years of acquaintance can only strengthen the sentiments I already feel. If I have read your face wrongly, then I will never attempt to read a face again. But I will wait, for in time you may know me better, and be the more sure of my faith; but I hope you will learn to love me."

"You teach me well, and I fear I am learning faster than becomes a maiden upon a first acquaintance; but we will wait."

Paul knew very well that the fair maiden's heart was turning with love towards him, and the knowledge made him most happy. He strained her to his bosom, and she did not shrink from him. He kissed her, and she only blushed. He whispered to her again of his love, and her eyes beamed with a joyous light. He told her again of the happy home he would make for her, and she wept in the fullness of joy.

But time was passing swiftly away, and the youth was ere long recalled to a sense of present realities. The transition was by no means a pleasing or grateful one, but stern necessity demanded it.

"Now when shall we go?" he asked.

"As soon as possible," returned Yu-lu, drying her eyes, and setting her thoughts upon the subject thus broached. "Of course I must have a disguise."

"Yes. You would certainly be safer with one. But shall we have time? When will the prince come again?"

"O, not for a week, at least, I feel sure."

"Then I will go at once among the peasants of the neighborhood, and I think I will get you a boy's dress. I will come again in the evening, and then we will take our final leave of this place. I ought not to stay longer now, for it must soon be daylight. But while I am gone you must show nothing of your feelings to Lan. Give her no chance to mistrust your mind nor my real character. Let your fullest confidence rest in me, and remember me as one whose love is all your own."

"O," murmured Yu-lu, laying her head once more upon the youth's bosom, "I shall not forget you, and I shall surely believe that you love me. How blessed am I in my trust, for love and liberty have come together. Paul, I shall not doubt you. O, I shall not let this first sweet emotion of my soul pass from me, so long as there is room for hope."

There were more words of love—more breathings of soul with soul—another pure kiss, and

then Lan was summoned. She came in and gazed inquisitively upon the couple before her, but she could discover no traces of anything to move her suspicions, though she could see that Yu-lu had been weeping.

"Good Lan," said Paul, speaking with calm confidence, "I must leave the place now, and you may conduct me out. I have business at Fou-tching-yo, but I shall return this evening. So if you will keep watch through the day, I will let you sleep to-night." And then turning to the maiden, he added:

"Yu-lu, you must keep up a good heart, for in one short month you will leave this place for the home of your prince, and perhaps you will be called away before. Ponder well upon what I have said, and do not forget that if you would secure your husband's love, you must let him see that you love him in return. Lead on, Lan."

The woman took her candle and led the way up to the interior of the pedestal, and here Paul stopped her.

"You will be very careful of the maiden," he said, "for the prince has much fear that her heart is not all his. Watch her narrowly, and see that she does not escape."

The woman promised obedience, and then Paul watched to see how she opened the secret passage. He saw her seize a brass ring above the moveable stone and give it a pull downwards. A sharp click accompanied this movement, and then she took hold of a second ring, which was beneath the first, and having given it a pull outwards, the stone slowly settled from its place.

When the youth once more stood alone among the ruins, he found that the first dim streaks of coming day were already in the east. He sank down upon a block of stone near the feet of the great joss, for he was overcome by the emotions that had found place in his soul. His love for the fair being he had just left was as strong as the pure affection of ages, and its roots were as deep in his heart; but it was the strangeness of the affair that worked most upon his nerves—the almost marvellous adventure he had experienced, and the sudden awakening of his whole being to a new work of faith and love. He sat there till his heart beat more quietly, and then he prayed for the safety and peace of the gentle maiden who had become as the very apple of his eye. He then went down to the river and bathed, and when the daylight had fairly come, he turned his steps towards the peasants' cots upon the hill, where he hoped to procure a disguise

## CHAPTER IX.

## A JOURNEY TOWARDS A NEW HOME.

WHEN Paul reached the cot of Lin-fou he found the family up, and though he ate breakfast with them, yet, he managed to evade the questions of the old peasant so as not to excite suspicion, and yet to satisfy their curiosity. After the meal was finished, our hero measured with his eye the size of Lin's eldest boy, and he thought his dress would fit Yu-lu well, and after he had taken his seat upon the bench outside to smoke with his host, he asked if the boy had another suit of clothes.

"One more suit," replied Lin—"a suit for the festivals, but he'll soon run away from it, for he grows fast. I wish they could make clothes that would grow, too. You see my two next children are girls, and it will be a long while before the little one can grow up to jump into his brother's garb. But we manage to wear them out."

"So I suppose. But now I happen to want a suit of boy's clothes, and I think your son's will be just the thing. I will take them of you, and pay you enough to buy new ones."

The peasant was so pleased with the offer that he forgot to ask any questions, so Paul was spared the necessity of deceiving him, and the conversation was soon changed to the subject of the ruined temples. At length Lin went in and fetched out the boy's clothes, and Paul found

them much better than he had expected. The vest was of blue linen, and neatly trimmed about the skirt; the shirt was white and clean, and the trowsers were a sort of light buff. There was also a cap and boots, and with the whole our hero was perfectly satisfied. He paid for them enough to purchase a new suit, taking care to throw in a little over; but before the business was wholly finished he was obliged to tell Lin that he might take a boy with him to Shanghai.

After this business was concluded the youth accepted an invitation to walk over the peasant's small patch of ground, and thus he passed the time until dinner was ready. He stopped to that meal, then smoked once more with Lin, and then, having tied up the clothes he had purchased, he took his way again towards the temples. His first impulse upon reaching the ruins was to seek the side of Yu-lu at once, but upon second thought he concluded it would be better to wait until evening, for were he to go then, Lan might read the secret of his heart; so he concealed the bundle of clothes, and then walked away down the valley, following the little river towards the distant town. He saw much upon the flowery banks of the stream that would, at another time, have afforded him keen satisfaction, but now his thoughts were elsewhere, and

he was longing only for the flight of the lazy minutes.

But time passed as it always passes, and in due time the shades of night were drawn over the temples. With a thrilling hope, Paul concealed the clothes under his own garb, and then knocked at the pedestal. The answer soon came, and he gave the signal of the whistle, and in a moment more the way was opened. The youth stepped in, and having closed the way behind him he followed Lan down the steps. He found Yu-lu looking pale and anxious, and as soon as Lan was gone he hastened forward and clasped the maiden to his bosom.

"You did not fear that I should remain away?" he said, as he imprinted a kiss upon her brow.

"No, I did not fear that," returned Yu-lu; "but yet I have been anxious all day long, and have hardly slept at all. O, the picture of my hopes seemed too bright for realization. And then Lan has been bidding me to be sure and love the prince, or I should have cause to regret it. She has kept his picture before me all the time when I have been awake, and when I have slept I have dreamed of him; and it seemed to me that he would come instead of you."

"But you see you have need for fear no more, dear Yu-lu. I am come, and I have a disguise with me which I am sure will suit you. Let us wait until Lan is asleep, and then we will open the way to love and liberty. Smile upon me, Yu-lu, and let me know that you are happy—let me know that your fears are gone."

Yu-lu did look up and smile, and then she bowed her head upon her lover's bosom and burst into tears. It was a strange, wild happiness which she felt—a happiness such as had never before found a home in her bosom, and one which she could not analyze. She only knew that some new impulses had entered her soul—that old fears and repinings had gone, and that a burning, thrilling tide was rolling over her heart.

"Those are not tears of grief, love," whispered Paul, winding both his arms about her fair form.

"No, my soul's best friend. I have no grief now. All is hope—bright hope. I know you do not deceive me, for if you do my own soul is false to me. If I weep, it is from too much of sudden joy. O, forgive me, Paul, if I love you too well so soon."

"Too well!" cried the enraptured youth, gazing down into the beautiful face of his fond companion. "O, that were impossible, for my soul can hold all your love, and that alone. Love me as well as you can—let every thought be mine—let every hope be centered in me, and you shall find how faithful is your trust."

They were both happy then—as happy as the first warm sunshine of youthful joys can make the soul that has just expanded with the genial warmth. They gazed upon each other, and they thought of no other heaven—they looked into each other's eyes, and they hoped not for brighter scenes. Yu-lu had forgotten the time of probation she had set, and with a bounding, bursting heart, she promised to be Paul's forever. The word was spoken—the magic charm was set, and those two hearts were one for life. The love that bound them was as strong and lasting as the pure principle upon which 'twas founded, and, as if by the touch of an angel's wand, their hopes and aspirations all turned into one channel. Henceforth they were to live for each other alone, and all their joys and sorrows were to be shared alike, though of sorrow they did not then think. They only thought of the joys that were to come, seeming to forget that even now they were encompassed round about by dangers, and that they were yet far, very far, from the full fruition of their hopes.

At length Yu-lu went softly to the room which Lan occupied, and found her asleep. She returned to her lover and communicated the fact. She removed the costly robes that enveloped her person, and upon donning the boy's clothes which Paul had brought, she found that they fitted her exactly. Her long tresses she tied up, and then placed the cap upon her head. After this she collected all the gold and jewels which she conceived of right belonged to her, and then she signified her readiness to start. Paul held a lighted candle in his hand, and without speaking he led the way to the stairs. Without noise they ascended, and the way was easily opened. The youth stepped out first, and then he assisted the maiden. Having done this he extinguished the light and threw it away, and then placing his hand within the aperture he gave the stone a strong lift, and it moved quickly up to its place.

Yu-lu was once more in the free, fresh air. She felt the soft, cool breeze upon her cheek, and she looked up and saw the stars of heaven smiling down upon her. For a while she was almost powerless from the emotions attendant

upon such a transition, but she soon overcame it, and with a wildly beating heart she clung to her lover's arm.

"Stop," said Paul, ere he had started to move away; "I would like to fasten this door upon the outside, for Lan may soon discover our flight, and give the alarm."

But the thing was not so easily done, for in the first place it was too dark to see plainly, and in the next place there was hardly an opportunity to do the work, even had there been light, for the carving upon the rock was not deep, and it would have required a nice fit to brace a fastening between the gentle angles of the raised figures.

"I fear we must give it up," he resumed, after he had examined the place.

"It will not make much difference," said Yu-lu, who betrayed an anxiety to flee from the spot. "I do not think there is any one near here to whom Lan could look for help. The prince is surely in Nankin, and I am confident that he has given his secret to none who do not follow his person."

Paul did not wait long to ponder upon the matter, but drawing the arm of his companion within his own, he hastened away towards the bridge. This he crossed, and then took his way up the hill beyond, keeping the same road he had come, until he had reached the eastern plain. By this time it was ten o'clock, and the moon arose. Now the way was more clear, and the travellers moved along with more confidence. Paul had made up his mind to take the same road back that he had travelled in coming, for that ran far away from Nankin, and he knew all its peculiarities. Often on the way did our hero stop for his fair companion to rest, but she did not detain him much. She was anxious to get along as fast as possible, and her strength served her well. Just at daylight they reached the small village where Paul had made his last stop, and here they rested a few hours and obtained breakfast. Here our hero managed to procure two respectable horses, and before noon he set forward again. They rode the rest of the day, and it was not until late in the evening that they stopped. They had reached a small, out-of-the-way hamlet, where a few poor tea-growers lived upon the banks of a small stream, and here they found a hospitable reception. The good people thought it strange that Paul should choose to sleep in the shed with the horses, while the boy slept in the house; but the youth explained it

by asserting that he was afraid the horses would break loose if left alone in a strange place.

Very early in the morning, Paul was up, and after much persuasion and driving he managed to get an early breakfast, so that the sun was not more than half an hour high when he again set forth. The two companions rode side by side, and now that their fears of being overtaken were somewhat abated they conversed more freely. Paul found that he had not half-estimated Yu-lu's true worth, for on every point her mind was clear and strong, and under the utmost fatigue her heart still dwelt with gentleness and sweet, yielding sacrifice. She was more beautiful, too, with exercise, and as the blood coursed more freely through her veins her whole being, both mental and physical, seemed to gain strength and harmony.

And Yu-lu, too, seemed to love Paul Ardeen more and more, for she knew now that he was generous and kind, noble and honest, and scrupulously delicate and faithful. Her very tones and glances told how he was winning upon her deeper love, by opening more and more of his noble traits to her understanding, and by that insensible, electric influence which flows from the companionship of genial souls. She had loved him before, but now she had learned to look up to him as one worthy of all her confidence and esteem.

And thus they loved, and as they rode they talked of their love, and painted bright pictures which were to have a being in the future.

"Your home is far away from here?" said Yu-lu, after Paul had been telling her of the peace they should there find.

"Yes—very far," returned her lover, with a glance of quiet hope into her glowing features.

"Were you born there?"

"Yes, Yu-lu," he said, without hesitation. "I have not meant to deceive you. I was born and reared in a far distant land."

"What is it called?"

"England."

"England?" repeated the maiden, with a sudden glow upon her beautiful face. "Then I know that there I shall be safe, for that country is very powerful, and our prince—or our emperor, even, will not dare to molest me there. We all have heard of your country, then, for it was your people who opened our closed ports to their vessels, and even brought the great emperor to sue for peace."

"You will love me none the less now that you know I am not of your own country?"

"O, it seems to me that I shall love you more, for here woman is but a poor slave at best. Some of them—most of them, perhaps—know not that they are capable of any higher station than the mere slave of man, but I could never feel so, for I know that God has given me impulses which war with such relations and sentiments. O, if you can give me the home you promise, I cannot be else but very happy. I am not for the wealth of the world—I only ask for the wealth of true love, and the right to think and act as though I had a soul."

"You shall surely have all this," Paul returned. "You shall learn my language, and then we can speak more sweetly of our love," he added, enthusiastically.

Yu-lu gazed up into her lover's face with a wondering expression, and at length she asked him to speak to her some words of his own. He did so, and she smiled as she tried to pronounce them; but she spoke them well, though, and ere half an hour had elapsed she asked Paul in his own language, if he loved her, if he would ever be faithful to her, and if he was happy in his love; and then in the same tongue she confessed her own love, and the bright, joyous smile that accompanied each effort, was more than enough to pay the willing teacher for all his pains. Yu-lu was an apt scholar, and she learned very rapidly. She pronounced with surprising accuracy, and love lent strength to her purpose. Before night she could repeat the Lord's prayer and translate all its meaning, and in the effort she had learned much of the pure religion which Paul held in his heart.

That evening they found shelter at the house of a peasant, and on the following morning they set forward again. They did not ride so fast now, for Yu-lu found it fatiguing work, though at a slow pace she could ride very comfortably. This day, too, Paul spent in teaching his companion to speak his own language, and the oc-

cupation was so congenial to both that the day slipped away without a thought of the danger they might have to apprehend.

Early on the succeeding evening they reached the western shore of the great Tai-hou lake, and here Paul stopped at the very same inn where he had before spent the night. He would have preferred to stop at some other place, but he had no other choice, and he resolved to make the best of it. He would have engaged separate apartments for himself and companion, but he feared to indulge in any such seeming eccentricity where there was chance for so much observation, and where suspicions might be aroused, so he arranged that they should take one room, and that while Yu-lu reposed upon the couch he should make himself up a place of rest upon the floor. As soon as they had eaten their supper they retired to their room, and sat down by the window which overlooked the yard.

The dusky shades of evening were beginning to fall upon the earth, and one by one the distant objects were blended into the dim background. Paul had just heard his sweet companion recite one of her newly acquired lessons, when he was startled by the sound of a horse's footfall. The tramp was quick and strong, and the animal was evidently coming on at a dashing, headlong pace, and that, too, from the point whence he and Yu-lu had come. He gazed eagerly out into the gathering gloom, and in a few moments more the horse dashed up into the yard, and the rider dismounted. A sharp, quick utterance of pain escaped from our hero's lips, and a sudden tremor shook his frame, for in the newcomer he had recognized the *Juggler of Nankin*! Again the fear of that strange man had come over him, but it was a stronger, deeper fear than he had felt before, for now he had a dim dread for another beside himself—another whom he loved better than himself—and when he saw the dark man enter the inn, he turned quickly towards Yu-lu as though he would save her from some impending, fearful danger.

## CHAPTER X.

## GLIMMERINGS OF A DARK PLOT.

THE country estate of the Prince Kong-ti was situated about fifteen miles north of Nankin. It had been originally a tea garden, and was a sort of island rising up from a low, marshy district through which ran two or three sluggish creeks, and over which the water stood a part of the year. The buildings were spacious and comfortable, but the prince had never lived there from the very fact that the place was exceedingly unhealthy. He had bought and improved it for a sort of sporting residence, and sometimes he did go up there in the heat of summer and spend a few weeks at catching fish in a neighboring lake. On the evening that Paul and Yu-lu arrived at the inn by the Tai-hou lake, the Princess Niao and her faithful Tsi took up their abode at this place. The prince accompanied them thither, and saw everything arranged for their comfort.

"Do you not think you shall be contented here?" asked Kong-ti, taking a seat by the side of his fair wife.

"O, yes. Though I hope you will come and see me often," replied the princess, raising her eyes tremblingly to her husband's face.

"Yes, I shall come and see you very often now. But for a few days you must be very careful of yourself, for the cool, damp air from the distant lake will be new to you. Do not expose yourself, now, for the world. As soon as

you become habituated to the atmosphere you will find it bracing and health-giving, but a too sudden exposure might prove fatal in a very short time. I have known people to be taken away by death in a very few days in this vicinity; but it was because they had no such means of protection as you have. Be careful of yourself, Niao."

"I shall be very careful," said the wife, "for I wish to live to enjoy your love."

"But I do not think you look well, even now," returned the prince, looking Niao sharply in the face. "You look very pale, and I think your pulse is weak. Let me feel."

The wife put out her wrist, and the prince pressed his finger upon it. The fair hand trembled, and the excitement of the moment had touched the beating of her heart.

"It is weak," the prince said, "and you must be very careful. Let your maid watch you well, and you must try to rest to-night as much as possible. In a day or two I shall come to see you, and perhaps spend some time with you. You will be strong then."

"But can you not stop to-night?"

"No, that were impossible, for I have business in the city. I am sorry, but it cannot be helped. And I must hurry away, too, or I shall be late."

Shortly afterwards the prince took his leave,

and when he had gone Tsi brought in candles to the apartment of her mistress, and also went at work to build a fire in the bronze frame that was built out from the chimney, for the air was really damp and cold. When this was done, she came to ask if there was anything else she could do for her mistress.

"Nothing but to sit down and keep me company," returned the princess. "I do not feel well."

"Why—what is the matter?" quickly inquired the maid, gazing up into Niao's face.

"I'm sure I do not know; but I do not feel well. The prince noticed it first, and he said that I must be very careful. But perhaps it may have been only his natural fear for my safety."

Tsi turned away her head, for strange suspicions were running through her mind, and she did not care that the princess should see them. She was not blinded by any love for Kong-ti, and she consequently looked upon his movements with more distrust, and yet without unjust prejudice.

"Cheer up, my lady," she at length said, in a cheerful tone. "I do not think you are sick at all, though the excitement of the occasion may have made you feel somewhat fatigued. I would give no thought to such things."

Ere long, beneath the kind and gentle attention of her faithful maid the princess recovered her wonted peace of mind, though ever and anon a thought of her husband would flit across the mirror of her thoughts, and for the moment she would feel sad. At a comparatively early hour Niao retired to her sleeping apartment, and, as was already her custom, she had a bowl of tea placed upon the stand by her bed, for she often felt thirsty in the night—more from habit, perhaps, than from any constitutional want.

The apartment which Tsi was to occupy was adjoining that of the princess, and only separated by a single door of bamboo and silk. The maid saw her mistress safely in bed, and having set the tea where it could be handily reached she went down to see that the domestics were all cared for, and when this had been attended to, she went back and retired to her own room. She looked in once to see if her mistress wanted anything, but finding her already asleep she went to her own bed. After she had laid down, she reflected long upon what had passed. Until within a very few days she had had no such thing as a suspicion against the faith of the prince, but since then she had heard and seen

things that aroused a quick spirit within her. As we have before said, she possessed an uncommonly quick intelligence, and her perceptions were keen in the extreme. Added to this she was discreet and wary, and possessed good judgment enough to guide her clear of anything like recklessness or undue haste. Now her suspicions were aroused, but they of course had no definite point, save that she feared evil was meant to her loved mistress. There was a dim thought floating through her mind that Kong-ti had set his love upon another woman, and that he desired the death of his present wife! She dared not attempt to give the thought any palpable form, for it was too fearful, too terrible. She only held it as a sort of dream which she endeavored to shake off when it came to her. But be matters as they might she was resolved to keep her eyes about her, and watch with a jealous eye all that transpired.

At length Tsi fell asleep, and she slept sometime, but how long she could not tell exactly, though when she was awakened she knew it must be long past midnight, for the moon had risen, and was shining into her chamber. She had been aroused by a strange sound from the chamber of her mistress, and slipping noiselessly from her bed she glided to the silken door and listened. She distinctly heard a noise within, and she felt sure that it was not the princess. It was a sort of grating, rumbling sound, just loud enough to reach her ears. It might have been the wind moving the vines against the lattice of the window, but then there was no rustling such as the leaves would naturally have made under such circumstances, and the maid determined to look in. She opened the door very slowly and carefully, and she was not a little startled at seeing the form of a man just disappearing through an aperture near the head of the bed. She did not cry out, nor make the least motion, though the sight startled her not a little. She saw the dusky form disappear, and then she saw the place close up. The pale beams of the moon afforded her light enough to see all this, for the candle which her mistress had left burning was extinguished. Tsi listened attentively, and heard low footsteps receding from the place, and they sounded as though they were descending a stairway.

As soon as the sound was gone, Tsi moved softly into the chamber and noiselessly approached the bed. The princess was sleeping soundly, and seemed not to have been disturbed. The

maid looked about the room, and everything seemed as she had left it. What had that man been doing here? It was a question she asked herself, and she sank into a chair to think. All her former suspicions passed quickly through her mind. "Harm must be meant to Niao," thought Tsi. "But how? She is not surely harmed now. There is a plot in this, and I must know it."

Again the faithful maid cast her eyes about the room, and at length they rested upon the gilded porcelain bowl that stood by the bedside. Quick as the sent arrow finds its mark went the thought to her mind that the danger might be brewing there! There was nothing strange in the thought, nor was it remarkable that she should have entertained it, for circumstances surely pointed that way. Tsi went to the stand and took the bowl up. None of the tea had been drank, nor did the beverage look differently from what it should. She took it to the window where the moonbeams could shine full upon it, and she thought she could detect an oily substance floating upon the top. It was in little globules, not larger than the head of a small pin, but yet they could be distinctly seen. Of course Tsi knew that she had put nothing into the tea that could produce such an appearance, and her suspicions were well nigh confirmed.

"I'll keep this," she murmured to herself, "and see if I cannot find out its virtue. At least, my noble mistress shall not drink it."

Her murmuring was louder than she thought, and it reached the ears of the sleeper, and with one or two low moans she awoke.

"Who is that?" she tremblingly asked, as she saw the white robes of her maid in the moonlight.

"It is only your good Tsi," returned the attendant, setting the bowl down upon the flower-stool by the window, and then approaching the bed.

"Tsi," repeated the princess, rubbing her eyes, and then half raising herself upon her elbow. "I am glad it is you, for I feared something ill. I think I have been dreaming. But why did you come?"

"I heard a noise in your room, my lady—a

noise that I feared might disturb you, and I came in."

"Ah, I thought I heard something—or I dreamed it," said Niao, raising herself to a sitting posture. "And what did you find? Was it not me moaning in my sleep?"

"No," returned Tsi, speaking with easy confidence. "I found that a large, ugly bat had got into your room, and just as I opened the door he plunged into your bowl of tea. The little vampire must have been in here when you retired, for he had no chance to get in since; but I have thrown him out the window, and I will empty the tea and make you some more if you would like."

"No, no," said Niao, with a shudder. "I can get along without it. I am glad you came in, for I might have drank the tea and not discovered the ugly occupant of the bowl. I think I shall not be troubled again."

The maid kindly smoothed down the pillow of her mistress, and having taken up the bowl of tea she went back to her own room and lighted a candle. Among her things she found an empty phial, and with a spoon she skimmed off the oily particles which she had discovered upon the surface of the beverage. They were smaller now than they had appeared when first noticed, and she was soon convinced that ere long they would have entirely disappeared. As soon as she had filled her phial she poured the rest of the tea away, and having carefully rinsed the bowl she placed the phial in a place of safety, and then went once more to her bed. She was not sorry that she had deceived her mistress, for she was determined to know the whole truth before she revealed any part of her discovery, or hinted at any of her suspicions. She knew that she could watch over the safety of the unfortunate princess, and that there would be less danger of her knowledge being discovered if she kept it all to herself. Still she was in no enviable state of mind, for she knew how powerful the enemy was, and how utterly weak was the victim. But her own soul was strong and determined, and she resolutely placed her life at stake in the undertaking, and prayed that God would enable her to save her beloved mistress.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE NIGHT-WATCH, AND THE SERPENT.

On the following morning the princess arose early, and in company with Tsi she walked out into the garden, but she did not remain long, for the air that came up from the low, damp marsh in the distance was not only chilly, but its vapors were disagreeable and penetrating. As they returned to the house they were met by Li, the prince's confidential valet and attendant. He was a young man, somewhere about thirty years of age, with a quick, intelligent look, but yet with an evil expression about his strongly marked features. It was he who always accompanied the prince on his long journeys, and he was often closetted with Kong-ti for hours together. Now the princess had a strange dread of this man, not because she ever entertained the fear that he would harm her, but because it seemed to her that her husband loved him better than he did herself.

Li saluted the women as he met them, and Tsi noticed that he eyed the face of the princess very sharply. She did not like the movement. She wondered why he had been left there, and she naturally came to the conclusion that it was for no good cause. She made up her mind to watch him.

Shortly after they returned to the house breakfast was ready, and it was served in the spacious drawing-room which connected with their cham-

bers. After the meal was finished, and the dishes cleared away, Tsi asked to be spared for a while, and her mistress gave a ready assent. The maid went to her chamber and got the phial which she had filled from the tea-bowl, and having hid it beneath the folds of her dress she went down into the garden.

In one corner of the enclosure was a small building, erected over an artificial pond, in which were kept two cormorants—a sort of water-raven which feeds on fish. These two birds had been trained to catch fish for their master, and they were very tame and kind. Tsi entered the building and caught one of them, and having secured it between her knees she pressed open its beak and poured nearly half the contents of the phial down its throat. She marked the one she had thus treated, and then let it go. The bird flew back to its perch, but seemed to betray no indignation at the liberal treatment it had received. Tsi watched it for some minutes, but finding that the tea produced no immediate effect, she left the place, thinking she would go again during the day and see if the dose had any baneful effects.

Through the day the princess occupied herself mostly in reading the *Chi-King*, a collection of ancient poems by Confucius. She found much there to interest her, and the day wore away



without much sadness or despondency. Several times during the afternoon Li made it in his way to request an interview with the princess, for the purpose, he said, of ascertaining how her health was; for the prince had left particular directions that he should be summoned immediately if the change of residence was likely to operate unfavorably! Poor Niao was pleased with this seeming solicitude on the part of her husband, and she did not notice the quick, eager glances which Li cast upon her. But Tsi noticed them. She saw how restless was his eye, and how searching was the gaze he fastened upon her mistress, and she believed he was watching for a sign which he had reason to expect, but which she had overthrown.

Towards the latter part of the afternoon Tsi stole out from the house and went once more to the place where the cormorants were kept. She opened the door and went in. Both birds were upon the perch, but she saw that the eyes of the one she had operated upon were closed, and that its head was hanging upon its breast. She took a long stick which stood in one corner and gave the bird a gentle stroke upon the breast. It raised its head part way up and uttered a low, rattling moan, but did not open its eyes. Again Tsi struck it, harder than before, and this time it partly opened its eyes and made a motion as though it would have extended its wings. It swayed to and fro for a moment, and the girl could see that its hold upon the perch was beginning to loosen. In a moment more the bird uttered another moan-like sound—it half opened its eyes, just enough to show that their brightness was all gone—it loosened its wings—its head started up with a quick gasp, and then it fell off into the water below. In an instant its mate leaped down upon it and began to tear it in pieces! Tsi waited to see no more. She had analyzed the liquid, and she knew now where to look for a part of the danger, at least. She walked back to the house very slowly, for she had much to think about, and she wished to have her thoughts somewhat settled before she saw her mistress. At length the expression of anxious thought disappeared from her face, and the light of a calm purpose appeared in its place.

When Tsi reached the drawing-room of the princess, she found that Li had again been admitted to her presence. The girl saw him gaze into the face of her mistress, and she could see that while he spoke he was eagerly watching every movement of her countenance. But Niao

never appeared to better advantage than she did then, for Li was telling her how anxious her husband was that she should not only be happy, but that her health should be most scrupulously cared for. All this made the face of the unsuspecting princess glow with animation, and Li could detect not the first shadow of a circumstance upon which to rest the belief that she was unwell in the least.

The faithful maid watched him as he left the apartment, and shortly afterwards she heard the tramp of a horse. She looked out of the window, and saw Li riding off towards Nankin.

"I think my husband loves me," said the princess, arousing from a deep reverie into which she had fallen.

"I should think you would find happiness in such a thought," was the girl's reply.

"O, I should if I were sure of it."

"Then you are not wholly assured that he loves you?"

"At times I feel so; but then other thoughts come to cloud the happiness of the idea. If he loves me, why should he wish me here? I hope he loves me, and I wish I could secure the belief free from all doubt."

"Well," returned Tsi, "perhaps ere long all doubts will be removed, and until that time be as happy as you can. Do not worry your mind with useless surmises or groundless fears. And now let me ask of you a favor. I am very much fatigued—I slept but little last night, and I should like to lie down and obtain a little rest."

Of course the princess gladly granted the request, but the maid first obtained from her a promise that she would call her if Li returned, or if any one at all came from the city. It was now near five o'clock, and Tsi hoped that she might gain some hours of rest. She went into her own chamber, and having closed the door she softly entered the sleeping-room of her mistress. She knew the very spot where she had seen the man disappear on the night before, and thither she turned her attention. The wainscoting was all of camphor wood, and worked in deeply carved panels, each panel containing a hieroglyphic quotation from some religious book of maxims. Upon a close examination Tsi found that the panel next to the head of the bed was worn in one or two places, as though by friction in sliding against some other hard substance, and also that it was loose, though she could not move it from its place. She was confident, however, that it was a movable panel, and that she had

not been played upon by any wild hallucination, and having thus satisfied herself, she went back to her own chamber and lay down upon her bed. She was somewhat fatigued, and ere long she fell asleep.

It was ten o'clock when Tsi awoke, and hastening at once to the drawing-room, she found her mistress still sitting up.

"You should have called me before," she said, looking up at the dial with some surprise. "I did not mean to sleep so long."

"But you slept so soundly," returned the princess, with a kind smile, "that I would not awake you. I have not been fatigued."

"But you must have been sleepy?"

"A little, perhaps."

"Has any one visited you?"

"No. I have neither seen nor heard any one since you left me; except once when I entered your chamber."

Tsi was satisfied with this, and shortly afterwards she helped her mistress to undress.

"You will not sleep much, I am afraid," remarked Niao, after she had lain down.

"O, I shall not suffer on that account," returned Tsi. "I don't know but that my nap will make me more sleepy. I will go and prepare your tea, and then I will retire, and if you are disturbed in the night I shall be the more ready to attend to you."

The princess acknowledged her gratitude by a smile, and having placed one of the candles upon the side-board the maid went out to prepare the tea. When this was done she set the bowl upon the small stand by the bedside, and having arranged everything to her satisfaction she went out, closing the door after her. She had slept nearly five hours, and she knew that she should now be well able to watch through the night, for she had resolved that not another night should pass unwatched by her so long as there was a shadow of doubt or danger. She had made a small puncture through the silk of the door that separated her room from that of her mistress, and through this hole she could see all that transpired about the princess's bed.

An hour passed away, and a part of that time Tsi had spent near the silken door, and a part in the drawing-room. It was somewhere between eleven o'clock and midnight that she had taken her seat for a few moments at the window of the latter room. The window was partially open, for she felt oppressed and sought a breath of fresh air, little heeding for the few moments she

intended to sit thus the unwholesome dampness of the atmosphere. She had not been in this position more than a minute when she was attracted by the sound of low, stealthy footsteps upon the pavement of the court. She looked eagerly out into the gloom, and at length she was confident that she saw two dusky figures approaching the house. She watched them narrowly, and near a clump of tea-plants they stopped. She listened, and heard the low hum of voices, but she could neither understand what was said, nor distinguish the speakers. In a few moments the hum ceased, and the figures moved out into the main walk, and soon afterwards disappeared around an angle of the building.

Tsi was now all alive with excitement, but yet not unnerved. She waited a few moments to see if the lurking figures would re-appear, but seeing nothing of them she noiselessly closed the window, and then moved towards her own bedroom and stationed herself at the silken door. For two hours she watched there without seeing anything, and she had just moved to the side of her bed to sit down, when her quick ear caught the sound of a movement in Niao's chamber. She glided quickly to the door and peeped through the aperture she had made in the silk. The panel in the wainscoting was just being slowly moved from its place, and in a moment more Tsi saw the head and shoulders of a man. The face was concealed by a robe which was pulled up over the lower features, leaving the eyes alone visible. The girl's heart beat quick, and her breath came short and heavy, but her thoughts were clear, and her wits were at hand. The man, or a man it surely was—put his head into the room and gazed carefully about him. Then he bent his ears as if to listen, and seeming assured that the occupant of the bed slept soundly he noiselessly entered. He first moved towards the sideboard upon which the waxen taper was burning, and as he let the robe fall from his features in order to free his mouth, that he might extinguish the light, Tsi saw his face. A sudden faintness came over her, and an exclamation of horror came nigh escaping her lips, for she had seen the well-marked features of Prince Kong-ti!

Almost unable to credit the evidence of her own senses she gazed more intently upon the face of the intruder. That face was now close to the light, and every feature was revealed. There was no room for doubt—the terrible truth could not be hid. It was really and truly the prince! He extinguished the light, and his movements

were now guided by the pale beams of the newly risen moon. Tsi moved not from her place, nor did she even breathe aloud. The throbbing of her heart made more noise than did her breath, for over the heart she held not control—it would beat tumultuously in spite of her.

The prince moved to the bedside and looked for a moment upon the face of the sleeping wife, and then he drew a phial from his bosom. Tsi saw him shake it, and then she saw him pour its contents into the bowl of tea which the princess was to drink. He did this, and then with his finger he stirred the beverage. He placed the phial back into his bosom, gazed once more upon the sleeper's face—and then glided back from whence he had come, and closed the panel after him. Tsi listened until she was assured he was gone, and then she threw herself upon her own bed; but she remained there only for an instant, for even an instant lost might be fatal to her mistress. She went back to the silken door and opened it, and creeping softly in she took the bowl and carried it away. In the closet of the drawing-room she had left a second bowl of tea, and this she took and carried to the chamber of her mistress and placed it where the other one had been. None of the movements had yet awakened the princess. She slept on, totally unconscious of the terrible realities that were growing to life about her.

After all this had been done the faithful watcher went back to the drawing-room and sat down by the window where she had before been. This window looked towards the west, being on the opposite side of the building from the bed-chamber of the princess, and consequently was entirely shaded from the light of the rising moon, while the scene without was all plainly revealed. Tsi had not been there long before she saw the two figures come around the angle of the building, and she readily recognized them as the prince and his attendant, Li. They came into

the shade of the building, and stopped directly beneath the very window where the girl was sitting. She could hear the hum of their voices, but could not make out what they said, for they spoke very low and cautiously. She had moved the sash partly open, and she bent her head as far forward as possible. In this position she could occasionally catch a word that was spoken.

"She could not have drank any of it," the girl distinctly heard Li say; but the answer of the prince she could not understand.

"How much will it take?" Li asked.

"But very little. A few swallows will be sufficient," returned the prince. Tsi was sure that those were his words.

She tried to hear more, but though an occasional word came distinctly to her ears, yet she could not make out the connexion. At length the prince walked away, and Li turned and went around the building. The girl watched for some time longer, but as she saw nothing more of the men she arose from her seat. Before she did so, however, she heard the distant tramp of a horse upon the city road. She knew it was the prince returning to Nankin!

The handmaiden returned to her chamber and looked in upon the princess. Niao was just reaching forth for the bowl, but Tsi did not open the door nor give any signal of her presence. She saw her mistress drink and then lie down again. Then the girl left her post and sought her bed. She did not sleep, for she felt no desire to lose herself in slumber. She listened for any movement that might come from the adjoining chamber, and while she listened she reflected upon what had passed. She had a difficult task before her, for the princess must know what had transpired; but she did not shrink from the work now—she only felt sad and heart-sick to think of the blow that was to fall upon the sensitive soul of her beloved mistress.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A LONG PASSAGE.

AFTER Paul Ardeen had seen the juggler enter the inn he sought the side of Yu-lu. His mind was in a whirl of excitement, for he knew not what course to pursue. He feared to meet Ye-fo-hi, not that any personal danger could accrue to himself, but for fear that in some way he might be separated from his companion. Even the bare thought of this latter catastrophe filled his soul with pain, and in a measure incapacitated him for calm judgment. He knew well the promise he had given to the juggler, and he feared that even now the strange man was in pursuit of him. If such was the case, and he was discovered, he might be detained, and by being thus subject to scrutiny the secret of his companion's sex be revealed. A thousand dim, undefined fears whirled painfully through his mind, and at length he resolved to escape unobserved from the place if possible. He knew that he had pledged his word with the juggler, for the performance of a certain work, but the safety of Yu-lu was not for a single instant to be set at sacrifice for that. He tried to make it appear that there would be no danger—that he had better remain where he was, than attempt to escape, but he could not. The confidence which, at the ruins, he had felt in the juggler, was gone, and once more came the distrust—the dim dread of the strange man. Had he been

alone he would have given the man hardly a thought beyond the natural curiosity which his appearance excited, but it was for another now that his heart beat.

"Paul," said the fair maiden, looking up with sudden surprise, "you seem troubled. What is it?"

Paul sat down for a moment, and bowed his head. His thoughts were quickly framed, and returning his companion's look, he said:

"I think we had better leave this place."

"Leave it? Now?" uttered Yu-lu, in sudden alarm. "Is there danger?"

"I do not know that there is," returned the youth, speaking as cheerfully as possible; "but yet I would rather not remain here. The man who came into the yard a few minutes since will recognize me if he sees me, and I have no desire to run any risk. If we could get away unobserved, I think I should do so."

"O, Paul, if there be danger let us flee," cried Yu-lu, in terror.

"Do not be too much alarmed, for there may be no real danger."

"But who is this man?"

"Did you ever hear of Ye-fo-hi?"

"What—the Juggler of Nankin?" asked the maiden, starting.

"Yes."

"I have often heard of him. The prince has told me of him, and I think the prince feared him. He is a terrible man."

"In what is he terrible?" Paul asked, ready at any moment to seek information respecting the juggler's real character.

"His power is dreadful," answered Yu-lu, with a shudder. "I have heard my uncle speak of him, and the prince has told me of him. If he is here, and knows you, let us flee."

Again Paul considered, but by this time the idea had become firmly fixed in his mind that if the juggler discovered him, Yu-lu would be snatched from him. He forgot all his cooler judgment—he forgot all his natural boldness. Love had made him fearful, and in this frame of mind he resolved to flee. The juggler appeared only an evil spirit to his excited imagination, and he thought only of escaping from him.

"Yu-lu," he said, "did you ever mistrust why the prince feared Ye-fu-hi?"

"Yes, I have had my thoughts on the subject, though Kong-ti never told me distinctly, as of course he could not, since the very fact upon which the suspicion rests he wished to conceal from me. I think," the maiden continued, lowering her voice, and speaking tremulously, "that the juggler is some near connexion of the prince's wife. From words that I have heard fall from Kong-ti's lips, I should judge that such was the fact, and it may be that Ye-fu-hi possesses some clue to the prince's faithlessness, and seeks to expose him."

A beam of intelligence shot across Paul's mind. This was exactly in accordance with the juggler's words and manner in the ruined temple, and our hero thought now that he had a clue to the whole. He told Yu-lu of his meeting the strange man in the ruins, and of the promise which he himself then made.

"And," he added, "I have no doubt that the juggler wishes to get you into his hands as an evidence against the faithless prince."

And Yu-lu's fears ran in the same channel. It was, they both thought, a natural conclusion, and of course their minds were made up to get away from the place as quickly as possible.

Paul remembered that there was a back way leading to the stables, and that from the stables he could pass out into the garden. This way he resolved to try, and having examined his pistols, and helped Yu-lu arrange her dress, he went to the door and looked out into the passage. He could hear voices in the bar-room, but the way

to the stables seemed to be clear. He went back and took Yu-lu by the hand, and bade her be of good courage. She assured him that she should not falter, and with this assurance he set forth. He passed on by the head of the stairs that led down into the hall, and descended by a sort of ladder that was used by the servants. This led him to the back entry-way, and on opening the door at the foot of the ladder he found himself, as he supposed he should, in the passage leading to the stables.

"You will not take the horses, I suppose," whispered the maiden.

"No," returned Paul. "We could not get clear with them, and, besides, we do not want them. We must make our escape by water."

It was now quite dark, and our adventurers were quite secure from observation. They had no difficulty in making their way to the garden, and after some trouble in picking their way amongst the shrubbery they gained the road at a distance of some rods from the inn, and then started at once for the shore of the lake. Here they found quite a number of boats, and luckily Paul soon discovered the very one in which he had crossed the lake before, and on hailing the captain he found that he had remained upon that side of the lake ever since, only going out occasionally to fish. Our hero asked the fellow to take him and his companion on board and make sail at once, but to this very strong objections were raised.

"Wait till morning," urged the captain, "and then I'll start as early as you wish."

But Paul urged his business—he must be in Shanghai at such a time. Then the captain talked about the weather—he was fearful of a storm. At length Paul said something about gold, and the captain's ears were opened. An ounce of gold possessed the "Open sesame" upon the fellow's will, and in a few minutes the crew were called to get up the iron-wood anchor and make sail. They grumbled considerably at the order, and at first seemed unwilling to obey. Paul was anxious that there should be no disturbance, and slipping forward he placed a piece of silver in the hands of each, and from that moment they had no more objections. In half an hour the clumsy vessel was clear of the shore, and poking lazily through the water. The wind was from the south, and though not very fresh, was yet strong enough to fill the lumbering bamboo sails and shove the craft ahead at a fair walking pace.

"We are clear now," said Paul, as he sat by Yu-lu's side under the weather quarter rail; "and I am glad that the juggler came as he did, for it has been the means of hurrying us along in our journey."

"I hope we are safe," was Yu-lu's reply. She did not speak as one having any fear, but yet there was a tinge of anxiety in her tone.

"O, I am almost certain of safety now," quickly returned Paul, in a light, confident tone; "for when we reach the opposite shore we shall be only about a day's journey from Shanghai if we can obtain more horses, and when once in Shanghai we shall be most assuredly safe, for no power can take you from me then. Courage, my love, and let hope be your star to-night."

Yu-lu pressed her lover's hand, and in low tones she murmured her sweet hopes. Once more the dangers were forgotten, and together they wandered off into the heaven which their loves had made. An hour they passed there in holy, happy communion of soul with soul, riveting more firmly the bonds of affection, and probing more deeply into each other's heart. Deeper and stronger grew their love, and brighter and more peaceful opened their dreams of bliss. They seemed to touch the earth but lightly with their feet, for their dreams were of heaven, of a heaven which had grown out of their own souls, and into which the god of love had entered and built his throne. They thought not that such a thing as separation could come, for they thought only of the things of life; and a separation would have been death most surely.

At length, as the air grew more damp and chill, Paul conducted his sweet companion to the low, dingy cabin, where there were some half dozen bamboo frames suspended from the beams overhead, and in which were mattresses and blankets. Paul assisted Yu-lu to get into one of these swinging cots, and then he took possession of the one next to her. Yu-lu murmured the prayer which Paul had taught her, and having bade him good-night, she closed her eyes to sleep, and shortly afterwards the youth himself sank to slumber with a prayer upon his lips; it was a prayer for the gentle, confiding being who had trusted her whole of earthly care to his keeping—and he prayed that God would smile upon his faith, but cease to bless him when he should forget to live for Yu-lu. Before he slept he knew that the breeze was freshening, and this gave him more comfort, for he thought he was being wafted more swiftly towards his haven of safety.

Paul was dreaming a wild fantastic dream, in which Yu-lu, Ye-fu-hi, the prince and himself were strangely mixed up, when he experienced a shock that came nigh throwing him from his cot. He heard a loud crashing above his head, mingled with the shrieks and yells of the crew. As soon as he could fairly recover himself he sprang from his place of rest and spoke to Yu-lu. She was frightened, but Paul made her promise to remain where she was till he returned, and then he hastened on deck. He found that the mast had gone over the side, and that the one-sided bowsprit was also gone.

"Tien-tan have mercy!" cried the captain, flying about the deck like a crazy man, gazing first at the splintered stump of his mast, and then running to the bows to see how the deck was torn up where the heel of the bowsprit had come out.

It was some time before Paul could get the fellow to answer any questions, but when he had partially come to his senses our hero found that the vessel had struck a rock, and on following the direction of the captain's finger he saw a tall dark pyramid looming up just under the quarter. The rock was plainly in sight, lifting itself boldly from the water, and the craft had struck her bowsprit plump upon it. The mast had been a worm-eaten, rotten affair, and that had gone from the force of the concussion. Paul knew that the accident was the result of the most reckless neglect, and he berated the lubberly captain soundly, but the lesson had no more effect than it would had it been delivered to the wind, and Paul gave over the task. As soon as he found that there was no immediate danger he hastened below to set Yu-lu's fears at rest, and as soon as she learned all the particulars she accompanied her lover on deck.

Paul now set about the work of finding if there was any leak, and in this he had to take the lead, for the captain could only find time to bemoan the loss of his worthless spars. The hull of the vessel was found to have sustained no serious injury. There was one slight leak close by the stern, but it was stopped without much difficulty, and then Paul went to see if there were any means at hand by which the vessel could be kept upon her course. He found one solitary oar, and a long pole with a setting-pike in one end and a hook in the other. There was not a spare spar, nor was there such a thing as an inch of sail.

"What can we do?" asked the youth, after



he had made an examination of everything on board.

"Do nothing but trust to Buddha," replied the captain.

"But suppose Buddha will not help you?"

"Then I'll pray more."

"But if he does not listen then?"

"I'll burn gold paper for him."

"But if he refuses then?"

"I'll burn more."

"And suppose he is silent still?"

The Chinaman gazed up with a sort of bewildered expression, and after a few moments of thought he said:

"Perhaps you are so wicked that the great Buddha thinks I had no business to take you."

Paul could not but smile at the fellow's simple faith in the power of his Buddha, but the smile soon faded away, for he began to realize that he might have to spend a long time on board the lumbering wreck. There was no means of putting the hulk upon her course, and after considering upon every possible point our hero came to the sad conclusion that the vessel must have her own way. It was now about two o'clock in the morning, and the wind was still from the south. As near as Paul could calculate, they were being drifted through the water at the rate of about two miles an hour.

"It's hard," he said, addressing Yu-lu, after they had gone back to the cabin. "We may be two or three days knocking about here."

The maiden was greatly troubled when she saw that her lover was uneasy, for she trusted all to him. Paul saw this, and with an effort he threw off all appearance of fear and tried to make it appear that there was but little room yet for danger.

"I'm sorry to be thus detained," he said, drawing the maiden upon his bosom, "but we have not much to fear. As soon as we touch the shore we can find horses, and then set forward at full speed. Let us hope for the best."

Yu-lu did hope, and being fully assured that there was no immediate danger from the elements, she once more sought her rest.

When the daylight at length came, Paul went on deck and took a survey of the horizon, but he could see no signs of land. The wind still held from the southward, and at sunrise it seemed to freshen a little. The captain had recovered his self-possession in part, though he still bewailed his loss, but when Paul told him that he would give him enough to buy new spars and sails he became cheerful and happy.

That day passed away, and Paul spent the greater part of it in teaching Yu-lu to speak his own language. He was surprised at the progress she made, and as he redoubled his exertions she appreciated it by the increased attention which she gave to his instructions. On the next morning land was to be seen to the northward, but the wind died away almost to a calm, so that at night they had made but a few miles nearer to the distant shore. On the third morning they could see that the shore was considerably nearer, but the wind had hauled to the southward and eastward, and though it blew quite fresh, yet Paul did not like it, for it was blowing him in a way he had no wish to go. On the fourth morning the shore was not more than fifteen miles distant, but the wind was very low, and it was not until near evening that they managed to get off a boat from the shore by their signals. It was a small, skiff-like boat, with square bows and stern, which came off, and contained two men. The captain made known his wishes, and after much fuss and trouble a line was got from the bows of the hulk to the boat, and then the two shoremen began to pull at their oars. This helped the vessel some, for before dark she had been hauled alongside of a rough pier, and with thankful hearts Paul and Yu-lu stepped upon dry land. They had been four days and four nights on board the vessel, and those four days were all lost, for with a fair wind they might have crossed the lake in twelve hours at least. But it was too late now to repine, so they tried to forget what of misfortune had passed and hope for better fortune to come.

They had landed at the mouth of a small stream, and at a short distance there was quite a village which the natives called Ye-tchi. The captain of the vessel was acquainted in the place, and he conducted Paul to a small inn where were found very respectable accommodations. The youth did not dare now to trust himself away from Yu-lu, so he engaged a single room, making up his own bed upon the floor, while his companion occupied the bamboo couch.

Night came on, and Paul and Yu-lu joined their hands in silent prayer. The youth gazed out upon the starry heavens, and his eyes rested upon a point towards his native land. At that moment he thought of the fairy tales he used to read when he was a boy, and he even prayed that some kind genie would take him up with his love and carry him away to his island home. He was sorry that the age of the genii had passed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A RUPTURE IN THE PLOT.

WHILE Paul Ardeen and Yu-lu were upon the lake, let us look into the palace of the Prince Kong-ti at Nankin. It was on the very morning after the terrible discovery was made by Tsi at the house in the country. The prince was in one of his own private rooms drinking tea. It was well into the forenoon, and yet the grandee had but just risen. His face was pale and careworn, though ever and anon a flush would pass over his features, moving the muscles with quick, decided emotions. Several times he looked at his watch, and at length he left his tea and finished his morning's toilet. Ere long after this was done a page entered the room and informed him that two officers wished to see him. He ordered them to be shown to him, and ere long two fat, greasy-looking mandarins were ushered into the room.

"I knock my head to the great prince of Nankin," fervently uttered the first, making a bow almost to the floor.

"I shut my eyes in the presence of the illustrious brother of the great Son of Heaven," said the second, bowing lower than his companion.

"Tay-tsu, and you, Li-tsong, are both welcome," said the prince; and thereupon there succeeded any quantity of bowing of heads, swinging of hands, scraping of feet, and utterings of set phrases.

"You have sent for us," said Tay-tsu, after he had settled his obese body into a big chair.

"You have sent for us," repeated Li-tsong, accompanying the words with a motion that deposited his load of fat in a second chair.

"Yes, I have sent for you," said the prince, now seating himself. As he spoke he looked very grave and sad, and a tear was forced into his eyes. "I have sent for you," he continued, "to open to your ears a thing that will make the nation weep."

Kong-ti here stopped and wiped away the tear which had grown cold upon his cheek, and then he continued:

"I fear that the Great Spirit of heaven wants another soul to keep him company. Niao can live but a short time longer."

"The princess!" cried both the mandarins at a breath.

"Even so," said the prince. "The dark death-spirit has been at her side for many days and many nights, and I fear she cannot live to see the setting of this day's sun. I would have you prepare the people for the sad intelligence, and have the bonzes all at prayer continually. Let the drums in the temples be beat without ceasing, and let Buddha be propitiated with befitting gifts."

At this point the prince fairly wept, and the fat mandarins shook with well managed emotion.

"What form of disease threatens our illustrious lady?" at length asked Tay-tsu.

"Alas! I know not," groaned Kong-ti. "It is a strange eating away of life, such as I have never before seen. You may go now and do as I have bid. Let not the noise be too great, for I am sad and rolled in the dust of affliction."

The mandarins arose from their seats and bowed very low, and then they backed out from the apartment, and went away to perform their melancholy mission. As soon as the prince was left alone he arose from his seat and started across the room; but he was left not long to enjoy his own society undisturbed, for, shortly after the mandarins had left, Li entered his presence.

"Ah, good Li," uttered the grandee, "you are come in season. What of the princess?"

"I think all is well," returned the attendant.

"But I have prepared our people for her death. Think you it will follow?"

"Yes. After you left me last night I went around and ascended a tree near the window of her chamber. By the strong moonlight I could see the bed and the woman, for my position just admitted of that and no more. I saw her take the bowl and drink, and I think she must have drank considerable."

"A single swallow would prove fatal in time," said the prince, "and three swallows will kill her in less than from sun to sun. Did you see her this morning?"

"No, she had not arisen. I asked for her, but she was not up."

"Then the work is going on," said the prince, with a look and tone of relief. "I think she will see the last of this life before the day is done. She will be better off away from this earth."

"I think you will be well rid of her before the sun is set," added Li, with a congratulatory look, "and then nothing will be in your way."

The prince took two or three turns up and down the room, evidently in deep thought. He did not seem to be troubled at all by what he was doing, but only by what he should do after the darkest part of his work should be consummated. His idea of woman was not an exalted one. Like most of his countrymen he looked

upon the other sex as something only fashioned for his use and service, and he never realized that there were such things as mutual obligations between husband and wife. He was sorry that his laws would not allow him to marry as many wives as he pleased, for then he might have been spared the trouble of his present work. To be sure he might take to himself as many hand-maidens as he could afford to buy, but she whom he now sought could never be dragged to a position so degrading. The emotion uppermost in his bosom was, gratitude that the way to the possession of the matchless Yu-lu was now opened to him—he felt no sorrow for the terrible plan he was obliged to adopt to carry forward his purpose.

At length the prince stopped in his walk and looked at his attendant.

"Good Li," he said, "you may go at once and send off messengers to inform the relatives of Niao that she is surely dying. Have them informed that their kinswoman is seized with a dreadful malady, and—"

The prince was here broken in upon by a loud noise from the hall, and before he had time to take any steps to ascertain its cause the door of his apartment was burst open, and a woman, all dust-covered and toil-worn, rushed in. Half a dozen of the servants followed in hot haste to drag her back, but the prince had recognized the new-comer, and with a quick motion he drove his servants back. It was the woman Lan who had come. Kong-ti uttered an exclamation of wild astonishment when he saw her, and as soon as the room was clear, and he knew that the servants were out of hearing, he sank down into a chair.

"Lan—Lan," he cried, trembling violently, "why are you come?"

But it was some moments before the woman could reply, and a second time the prince asked the question. In time, however, she spoke:

"My master," she said, "did you know that Fau-king had left the place beneath the temples?" her voice deeply agitated.

"Left his post? Fau-king? Left the temples?" exclaimed the prince. "Has he dared to do it?"

"Then you did not send a young man there to take his place?" said the woman, speaking fearfully.

"Send a young man? By the great Spirit of heaven, woman, speak and tell me what you mean?" cried the prince, starting up from his seat and grasping the messenger by her arm.

"A few nights since, my master—on the very night after you were last there—a young man came down and told us you had sent him in Fau-king's place, and that we should see Fau-king no more."

"It's false! all, all false! By my great power I'll tear the liar limb from limb. But you should not have left him there, Lan."

"Ah, my master," returned the woman, recoiling as she spoke, "he fled before I came."

"But Yu-lu! you have not dared to leave her alone!"

The woman dared not speak. She moved still further back, but the prince followed her up.

"Speak!" he gasped, seizing her again by the arm. "Tell me all you know. Did you leave Yu-lu there alone?"

"She has fled!" whispered Lan; and as she spoke she sank down upon her knees and clasped her hands.

The prince recoiled a few steps like one who has received a death-stroke. He glared upon the woman before him, and with an instinctive movement he snatched his dagger from its sheath, but in a moment more he put it back again.

"Fled!" he at length uttered, in a deep, husky tone. "She fled, and you yet alive?"

"Alas, my master, I could not help it. Listen to me, and you shall see that I am not to blame. Fau-king is the one who must have been overcome."

The prince sat down and beckoned for Lan to proceed, while Li went to see that no one was near the doors. After this the woman went on and told her story. She told how Fau-king had left the subterranean apartments, and how, shortly afterwards she had given entrance to the young stranger without noticing that he was not the eunuch. She told how frankly he had spoken to her, and how he offered to watch during the night. On the next morning she had found herself alone. She went up among the ruins and searched them all through, and when she found they were gone, she had hastened at once to Nankin.

"And Fau-king?" uttered the prince, when the woman had closed her story.

"I have seen nothing of him."

Kong-ti was stricken with a fearful emotion. It was not all anger, nor was it all sorrow. It was a sort of wild, tumultuous thrill of varied passion, and for a while he seemed totally unable to think or act.

"Prince," said Li, seeing how his master was situated, "she has evidently fled, and can only be caught by quick pursuit. Some one must have lain in wait at the ruins and discovered your secret, and thus gained access to the place. Perhaps it was some one who had known her before."

"Lan," exclaimed the prince, at this juncture, "did you see them together—this young man and Yu-lu?"

"For a few moments."

"How did they appear?"

"Once she had been weeping, I am sure. I did not think of it then, but the thought has come since that there was much love between them."

"By the throne of heaven's great Spirit!" cried the prince, striking his breast with both his hands. "I'll scour the empire but I find them. You know not which way they went?"

"I know they came this way as far as the hamlet of Leao, and from thence they must have struck off further to the southward," replied Lan. "There, at the hamlet, I heard of a young man and a boy. The man I know must have been the same one who came to our retreat, and the boy must have been Yu-lu."

A few moments the prince thought while he walked up and down the room, and when he stopped he seemed to have regained his strength of mind.

"Li," he said, "I cannot leave my palace now, for I must be here. I wish my wife were not quite so sick. But we have faithful men. Send off three detachments of three men each. Take my old guard. You take such men as you please and go direct to Tai-ping, and from thence follow on towards the Tai-hou lake. Let the others keep further to the southward. O, bring them to me and you shall groan beneath the weight of the wealth I will heap upon you. Let the others think this is a hand-maiden of mine, and beware that you do not unguardedly tell too much. Perhaps you can find her, Li."

"The country shall be well searched, at all events," was Li's reply. "If I can but once get upon their track I will have them."

"Do not spare horse-flesh," cried the excited grandee.

"Never fear but that I shall take every means of motive power within my reach," confidently returned Li. "I am not in the habit of hesitating at trifles."

Li then turned to the woman and obtained a minute description of the young man's person, and when he had gained this point he set out to make his arrangements for departure, while the prince thought it safe to confine Lan where she could hold no communication with any of the servants.

In half an hour from that time Li rode out from the palace-court, followed by eleven men, two of whom he meant for his own companions, while the other nine were to be divided as the prince had directed. Kong-ti saw them depart, and when they were gone a cold, damp chill seemed to settle about his heart. Until the present time nothing had occurred to disturb the current of his base hopes, but now the waters were moved, and the turmoil made him uneasy, for a dim fear settled down over his soul that this might not be the last of his troubles.

## CHAPTER XIV.

TSI REPEATS HER EXPERIMENT, AND HAS A WITNESS.

From her bed on the morning following Tsi's night watch, it was quite late when the princess arose. She felt much refreshed by her rest and her appetite for breakfast was keen, and as soon as she had performed her toilet she sat down to her meal. Whileshe ate she noticed that her attendant was very downcast and thoughtful, and she inquired its cause.

"If you knew," returned Tsi, "you would not wonder that I am sad. O, I have had such dreams during the past night—such strange, terrible dreams, that I have not got over them. It must have been because I slept so much in the afternoon and evening. Of course I must have been restless through the night."

"But what were your dreams?" earnestly inquired the princess.

"I will tell you when we sit down this forenoon. O, they were very strange dreams. Perhaps you can interpret them for me; and who knows but they may be good dreams after all. I hope they may."

"So do I, for your sake," said Niao.

"But one of them was such a marvellous dream," resumed the maid, endeavoring to appear as free as possible. "I dreamed that I made a certain kind of a beverage which I gave to a dog, and the effect was wonderful beyond measure. So strongly did that dream impress

me that I have even prepared the drink this morning, and have resolved to catch one of the dogs that belong about the place, and try the effect upon him. Do not think me foolish, lady."

"O, I shall not call you a fool, my good Tsi," returned the princess, with a smile, "but I do think this smacks a little of folly."

"Yet you are willing I should try the experiment. I will bring the dog up here and try it in your presence. O, the dream was so vivid."

"You say you have the beverage all prepared?" said the princess.

"Yes. It's a curious compound, and after I have tried the experiment, I will tell you how it was made."

Now the princess knew that Tsi was not one to be idly moved by mere whims, and she felt considerable curiosity to see the strange experiment tried—she felt more curiosity than she would have wished her maid to know of; so as soon as the breakfast things were cleared away, she told her maid that she might go down and get the dog. Tsi hastened away below, and there she found any quantity of small dogs the domestics had collected about the place by means of the waste bits of food they had thrown out. She called one of the smallest of the pack, and without difficulty took it in her arms. It

was a very small, red-eyed, white-haired animal, of the lap-dog species, and hastening away to be clear from observation, she took it up to her lady's room.

"I hope your concoction will not hurt the little fellow," said the princess, as she stroked the fine hair of the animal.

"I don't know," returned Tsi, hiding her face; "but surely the ingredients I put in ought not to do him harm."

The maid left the dog with her mistress, and then went and brought the bowl of tea she had set away in her closet. She took the dog in her lap, and the little fellow placed his nose to the beverage, but would not drink. The princess would have urged that the brute should be set at liberty, but her curiosity was now fully excited and she did not interrupt the girl's movements. As soon as Tsi became satisfied that the dog would not drink she went to the closet and fetched a spoon, and having secured the animal's legs she placed his head between her knees.

"It is curious," she said, looking up at her mistress. "I think I dreamed that the beverage was not drunk at first. But wait, my lady, and I am sure we shall see some strange result."

As Tsi ceased speaking she commenced to feed the dog from the bowl with her spoon, nor did she stop until full half of the tea was gone. After this she set the animal down and let him run at liberty upon the floor. He did not seem to like the treatment he had received, but after one or two quite savage growls, and an innumerable number of quaint evolutions, he lay down and began to play with the silken tassels of one of the window curtains.

"How long before you think your charm will begin to operate?" asked the princess, with an incredulous smile.

"I cannot tell," returned the girl, watching the dog narrowly. "I am not sure that it will operate at all, but I think it will. If it does not I will never trust to a dream again."

For nearly half an hour the dog lay there and played with the tassels, but at the end of that time he uttered a quick, low whine, and stretched himself out at full length upon the carpet. For a few moments he remained in that position, and then he sprang to his feet and darted across the room. After this he made several circles in his movements, and once more he lay down upon the carpet. His eyes were very bright, and they were fixed on the girl who had given him the drink, with a wild, glaring gaze.

"It begins its work," whispered Tsi, with a shudder.

"It surely does," answered the princess, gazing fixedly on the dog. "But do you not think he suffers?"

Tsi made no reply, for her attention was now wholly taken up by the dog. The little fellow had reached his fore paws forward to their full extent, and his head was resting sideways upon them. It could be seen that his breathing was short, quick and weak, and that his eyes were losing their brightness. Once he made a motion as though he would have arisen, but the effort failed. His limbs were now drawn up, and the motion of his chest grew less and less. There was another low whine—one more movement of the head from side to side—a convulsive heaving of the breast—a nervous gathering up of the feet, and a low struggle, as though he were trying to hold upon his departing breath. A moment he remained thus, and then there was a sudden relaxing of his muscles—his head dropped, he rolled over upon his side, and with one or two slight movements of his sides he settled into rest. There was no more movement—no more gazing of the eyes, for they were half closed and lead-like. The princess started from her chair and approached the spot, and with her foot she moved the inanimate body, but there were no signs of life. Then she stooped down and raised the animal's head in her hands, and a moment's gaze gave the truth to her mind.

"Tsi," she said, in a sad tone, "*the dog is dead!*"

The maid covered her face with her hands, but made no reply.

"It was a cruel experiment," the princess continued, "for I would not harm even a dog. I am sorry you did it, but it cannot be helped now, so you need not mourn over it. Come—I did not mean to chide you. I do not blame you, good Tsi. Do not let it affect you so."

The girl raised her head and looked into her lady's face.

"Come," resumed Niao, in a kind, persuasive tone, "you need not feel bad about it, but tell me now what was your dream?"

"O, it was a terrible dream," uttered Tsi, again covering her face, and shuddering.

"But what was the nature of the drink you prepared?"

"Wait a moment, and I will tell you," said the girl. She looked up as she spoke, and after gazing for a moment upon her mistress she look-

ed upon the dog. She was evidently trying to gather strength for the task before her. She was determined to hold the fearful secret no longer, for it was now time that the whole should be known.

"Lady," she said, moving close up to her mistress, and speaking almost in a whisper, "you must prepare your soul for a story that will come upon you terribly. Since we have been in this house I have watched every movement. I slept last evening so that I might watch through the night. I did watch. That bowl which stands there upon the table is the same one which I carried into your chamber when you retired last night!"

The princess stretched forth her hand and laid it upon her companion's arm.

"I drank from that bowl!" she whispered, turning pale as death.

"No," quickly returned Tsi. "You have not tasted that beverage. I changed your bowl before you drank. There was danger about you, but my eye was not removed from you till you were safe."

Niao trembled violently, but the color came back to her face. For some moments she gazed into her companion's face without speaking. She seemed to be fearful of trusting her speech. She dared not ask the question that trembled upon her lips, for she was fearful that the truth might be more dreadful than the suspicion she already tried to entertain. She tried to think of some one whom she had wronged, and who might thus be led to seek revenge, but she could not remember of a living being who had ever received wrong at her hands.

"Tsi," she at length said, with all the power she could command, "tell me what you have seen."

"You are strong—and will not sink beneath the knowledge, for you are safe."

"Speak on. I am ready."

Tsi hesitated but for a moment, and then she told what she had seen on the first night—of the departure of a man from the chamber—of her suspicions respecting the tea, and of her subsequent experiment upon the cormorant. Then she told of all that she had seen on the night last past, save that she did not mention the name of the man who had done the deed.

"I removed the tea as soon as I could," she said in conclusion, "and in its place I put some which I had prepared for the purpose. I kept the beverage which I took from your side, for I

was resolved that there should be no room for doubt. You have seen its power, and you know what would have been the result had you drank it."

The princess was not thunder-struck, nor was she filled with terror. She seemed to have no feeling beyond a dull, painful fear—a fear that seemed rather to suspend mental action and leave a chill upon the soul.

"You saw not the man's features?" she at length whispered, gazing half timidly up into her companion's face.

"Yes, I saw them plainly."

"Ah. Did you recognize them?"

"Yes."

"And were not mistaken?"

"There was no room for mistake, for the rays of the light shone full upon them."

"Could you tell me who it was?"

"If you would wish to know."

"Tell me."

"It was—the Prince Kong-ti!"

"My husband?"

"Yes."

"There could be no mistake?"

"No, mistake were impossible. It was he who poisoned your tea, and whom I afterwards heard conversing with Li beneath the window of this room."

The princess arose from her chair and stood over her maid. There was at first something almost like a smile upon her lips, but in a moment more 'twas gone, and the features grew rigid as marble. She laid her hands upon Tsi's head, and attempted to speak, but could not. Then a low, sharp cry broke from her lips, and she sank down upon the floor utterly insensible. The faithful maid sprang to her side and lifted her up, and with considerable exertion she raised her upon a silken couch that stood beneath the window. She did not call for help, for she dared not trust the secret with others, so she resolved to do the work of resuscitation herself.

After she had placed her mistress upon the couch she hastened for water, and by repeated exertions she at length succeeded in bringing the unfortunate woman back to life. Niao opened her eyes and looked up, and made signs to be raised to a sitting posture. After this she gazed upon her attendant with a wild, haggard look.

"Are you better?" asked Tsi, still bathing the lady's temples.

"Better?" repeated the princess, casting her eyes slowly about the room, as though she sought something which she had not yet forgotten. They at length rested upon the body of the ill-fated dog. "It is all real!" she continued, speaking in a hoarse whisper. "I heard it all aright. There was poison, Tsi—poison in my drink—and—my husband put it there!"

"He did, most surely," said the maid, bending down and smoothing back the hair from the sufferer's pale brow. "And now we must act. As soon as you can grow calm we will think the matter over. Of course you now know that the prince wishes you out of the way."

"Yes. He loves another!" groaned the heart-stricken wife.

"Perhaps he does. But let that pass now. Do you not think it would be best to flee from this place as soon as possible? You know the prince's power, and you know now what his will is in regard to yourself. If you can make your escape you may at least live."

It was sometime before the princess spoke, but when she did speak she had grown more calm, and her voice, though weak and low, was yet firm and decided.

"Alas, my good, faithful friend," she said, "you have saved me, and to your judgment I will trust. Do as you think best, and I shall not object. I have nothing to live for now, but life was given me as a blessing by a power I dare not thwart, and I will not throw it away. Though all is dark as the grave to me now, and though the remainder of my life must be spent in the valley of sorrow and sadness, yet I would not die, but I will live and pray for him who has so basely wronged me. What shall we do?"

"I will tell you," replied the maid, who was much relieved at finding her mistress so calm. "All day yesterday, Li was watching you most nervously, and he was most assuredly looking for the effect of the poison that had been placed by your bedside. This morning he came to me and wished to see you, but I told him you had not yet arisen, and rather gave him to understand that you were not well. Now there will evidently be a watch set upon you to-day. You shall retire to your bed, and if you are called for, I will state that you are not well enough to be seen. I will give out that you are seized with a

wonderful malady, and that the very sight of visitors turns your brain. If we can thus keep matters along until to-night, we will take the cover of the darkness and flee."

The princess promised to be governed entirely by the faithful Tsi's will, and shortly afterwards she allowed herself to be undressed and assisted to her bed. After this the maid concealed the body of the dog, and then set about preparing for the object she had in view.

During the forenoon three messengers arrived at different times from Nankin to inquire after the health of the princess, and to each one Tsi gave the same answer: Her mistress could not be seen, for she was very sick. Towards the middle of the afternoon the prince himself came, and to him Tsi gave the same answer.

"You had better not think of seeing my poor lady," she urged, tearing her hair in great grief, "for the very sight of any one makes her worse. Perhaps in the morning she may be better. Will you not come then?"

Kong-ti was not very strenuous. He tried to make it appear that he wept, and after bidding the girl be very careful and attentive he took his leave.

The day wore slowly away, and when the shades of night had fairly settled around the great building Tsi sought the side of her mistress. Niao was very calm now, and she arose from her bed and put on the garb of a fisherman her companion had procured. Tsi was clothed in a dress of the same description, and thus disguised they moved out into the drawing-room. Here Niao took what money she had, and then noiselessly followed her maid from the apartment. They reached the hall without notice, and with quickly beating hearts they crept through an open window upon the low verandah, and from thence they stepped down into the garden.

The stars were shining brightly in the clear heavens, and the fresh breeze was playing mildly with the flower-decked foliage. The two women noticed not the dampness that came up chill from the marsh—they only bent their ears eagerly for a few moments to be assured that no one watched them from behind, and that the way was clear ahead, and then they glided swiftly away by one of the hedge-grown walks that led towards the road.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AN UNLUCKY TRADE.

ON the next morning after Paul had landed from the dismayed vessel he arose very early, and having obtained from Yu-lu a promise that she would not leave the room until he came back he went forth to see if he could find suitable horses for his journey. Anything, almost, with fair strength, would answer for himself, but he wanted an easy, gentle beast for Yu-lu. He went out first into the stable, but he found nothing there for sale. The man, however who had charge of the place, and who, for a wonder, was awake, directed him to the house of a man who would be likely to have some beasts for sale, and at the same time gave the information that said man, whose name was Fou-chang, was the only person in the place who kept horses. The house was pointed out to our hero, it being in sight, and about half a mile distant, and with quick steps he hastened away. He was not long in reaching the place, and as he approached the open yard in front of the building he saw a man holding two horses by the bridles.

"Is this Fou-chang?" asked the youth, as he came up and looked, first at the two horses, and then at him who held them. The animals were good-looking beasts, and took our hero's eye at once.

"Suppose I am Fou-chang?" returned the man, eyeing Paul sharply.

"Why, I have been directed to you as one who might sell me horses."

"Ah, yes. And how many would you want?"

"Two will answer."

"Well, I've got horses. Here's two, for instance. If you want them very much, perhaps I might accommodate you."

"I do want them very much, and I should like them at once. Are these animals kind?"

"One of them is. That one, now, a woman could ride—just the most gentle creature living."

"Just what I want. I want one for myself, and one for a boy who is with me."

"Well, there isn't much difference between a boy and a woman as far as horses are concerned," said the man, with something like a smile upon his features. "But suppose we can trade, when should you want them?"

"Immediately."

"Then you want to be on the road at once?"

"Yes. The horses will evidently suit, and you may set your price."

"O, you'd better try them first. Never make a blind bargain, sir, especially in horse-flesh. Now suppose you just mount this one—this kindest one, and I'll take the other—you came from the inn?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll ride down there, and that will

tell you something what they are. Just you hold the reins while I run in and tell the folks where I am going."

Paul took charge of the horses, and the man hurried into the house, but he soon returned, and then our hero mounted the animal which had been pointed out to him as the most kind and gentle. He found the beast to be all he could wish, and he could not but congratulate himself on the success of his errand for he was resolved to buy both the horses let the price be what it might, knowing that he could sell them again at Shanghai.

When they reached the door of the inn Paul dismounted, and the horse-dealer did the same.

"I will take them if your price is not too exorbitant," the youth said.

"O, there won't be any trouble about the price," returned the other. "But suppose your boy comes out and tries his beast? Then you'll be sure, you know."

"Never mind that," said Paul, rather tartly, for he began to be anxious to get rid of the fellow. "I want the horses, and if you will sell them I will buy them."

"Certainly I'll sell them. For that which you rode I want three golden ounces, and for the other I want two golden ounces and five pieces of silver."

Paul at once accepted the offer, and having paid the money, he led the horses around to the stable, and there gave orders for them to be kept in readiness, as he should want them in a very short time. He took no more notice of the fellow of whom he had bought the animals, but as soon as he had seen them safely cared for, he hastened to the room where he had left Yu-lu. He found her there, but she was pale as marble, and trembled fearfully.

"Yu-lu—my love—what has happened?" cried the youth, springing forward and laying his hand upon the maiden's arm.

"Lost! lost!" she groaned. "O, Paul, my own dear Paul, we are lost!"

The youth started up in terror. He saw that Yu-lu could have no groundless fears, and his own heart began to sink within him.

"What is it?" he asked. "What has happened since I have been away?"

"Li! Li is here!" she replied, gazing furtively about as she spoke.

"Li here?" repeated Paul. "Do you mean the prince's own man?"

"Yes. He is Kong-ti's only male confidant.

O, Paul, you did not know him?"

"I have not seen him."

"Not seen him!" uttered Yu-lu, gazing up in astonishment. "That was he who rode by your side!"

"What! but now?"

"Yes."

"And of him I bought the horses—and to him I spoke of my boy!" groaned the youth, sinking into a chair. "But," he added, in a moment afterwards, "perhaps he does not know me."

But such a hope was not long to remain with Paul Ardeen, for he well remembered how the man had eyed him, and how he had hung about him. Yet that circumstance, be it as it might, could have no effect. He must escape from the place as quickly as possible, and that, too, without being seen by Li, for he would surely recognize Yu-lu if he were to see her face. His greatest fear was, that he should not be able to get at his horses, for he had reason to believe that Li was watching in the stable. He told his thoughts to his companion, and she urged him to flee from the place at once.

Paul pondered upon the subject a few moments, and then he crept out into the narrow hall, for from the back window of this place he could see the stable. He looked out and saw Li still standing there, and he could now see that the fellow was anxiously watching for something. He saw at once that to attempt to obtain his horses would be not only useless but really dangerous, so he returned to Yu-lu and bade her prepare at once to set off.

"It is no use," he said, "to think of obtaining our beasts, for Li is on the watch there. We must glide carefully out at the front door, and hasten off towards the wood which flanks the edge of the lake beyond the little river. Perhaps we may yet escape."

Yu-lu made no reply, but with quick movements she prepared herself, and in a few moments she was ready. The youth examined his pistols very carefully, and having seen that the caps were dry and clean, and that the tubes were filled, he placed them so that they could be easily reached, and then moved carefully out into the narrow hall. Yu-lu clung closely to his arm, and he could almost hear the quick beating of her heart, for he plainly felt its pulsations against his arm. He looked down the steep, ladder-like stairs, and saw that the way was clear.

"Courage," he whispered, as he began to

descend the stairs. "Let us hope for the best, but have our hearts prepared for the worst. If we can only get clear from this house."

"I am strong," returned Yu-lu. "Look only to yourself, and lead the way."

Paul returned a look of gratitude, and with a steady step he kept on. The lower hall was reached, and yet they were alone and unobserved. The yard was clear, and our hero stepped forth from the door. The stable was back of the house, so that they could not be seen from that source, and if Li only remained by the horses, as he probably would, the chances of escape were almost equal with those of detection. The road, which was only a few yards from the house, was flanked by hedges of yellow rose-trees, and under cover of this hedge Paul hoped to make his way. A single instant he stopped in the yard to see that he was not noticed, and then he glided forth to the road. The hedge was reached, and keeping close beneath it the fugitives hastened on. The path that led to the river was reached, the river itself was crossed, and in fifteen minutes more they were under cover of the thick wood that lined a section of the shore of the lake. Here they stopped to take breath and listen, but no following footsteps were heard.

Paul considered a few moments upon the subject of the direction he should take. He saw a path that led up through the woods from the lake, but he dared not take it, for in case of pursuit that path would be sure to be followed, so he struck off through the trackless wild, taking his course about northeast. There was little underbush, and with care they made comparatively easy progress. At the distance of about five miles they came to an open section through which ran the imperial canal. They had to walk over a mile before they found a bridge by which they could cross, and after crossing this they had no more woods to conceal them, save now and then a clump of tallow trees that were cultivated by the neighboring peasants. A number of low huts were seen scattered about over the even country, but Paul chose not to trust to any of them for shelter, hoping that he might find some safer retreat before noon.

Nearly three hours must now have elapsed since they left the inn, and Paul judged that he was at least ten miles from the place of departure; but the way ahead looked not so inviting as he could have wished, for the whole country, for miles around, was nearly level, and even were he to leave the road and strike off into the fields,

it would not avail him anything towards concealment. But with a brave heart he kept on, and Yu-lu assured him that she was not yet fatigued.

Another hour passed, and yet no pursuers were seen, and Paul almost began to hope that there might have been some mistake.

"Yu-lu," he said, "are you sure that it was Li whom you saw at the inn this morning?"

"Of course I am," the maiden replied. "There is no mistaking him."

"I had feared we should have been followed ere this, if such had been the case."

"It was surely Li," Yu-lu repeated. "But," she added, with a sudden beam of hope, "perhaps he did not, after all, hold any suspicions concerning you."

"Perhaps not," added Paul. "And yet," he continued, in a thoughtful mood, "why should he have sold me the horses? A man in his position would not surely be trading horses about the country. If that was Li he must surely have had some suspicions. The intelligence of our flight could only have come from the woman Lan, and of course the pursuers would have a description of my person. They must be after us ere this, but have probably taken the wrong track."

Just as Paul ceased speaking a sharp cry broke from Yu-lu, and with a trembling movement she pointed towards the canal. The youth looked back and saw two horsemen upon the bridge he had crossed. They were at least five miles distant, and though they seemed but mere moving specks, yet there was no doubt that they were horsemen. Paul knew that himself and companion could not be seen at that distance, and there was yet time for concealment. At the distance of less than a quarter of a mile, and standing some rods from the road, there was a peasant's cot. It was the only place in view that could possibly be reached in season, for the horsemen were surely on the road they were travelling, and towards that cot they started. When they reached it they found no one there save an old woman, who informed them that her husband and son, the only other occupants, were at a distant garden by the canal at work in a tea-patch.

Paul had no time for extended consideration, and he knew that the woman would be governed more rigidly by gratitude than by any fear that could be forced upon her.

"My good woman," he said, speaking frankly and quickly, "we are two unfortunate peo-



ple who have had the misfortune to be persecuted because we helped to rescue a poor girl from the hands of a villain. We are even now pursued. Give us a shelter, and save us from the villains who would capture us, and your reward shall be ample. We will give you gold—four pieces of bright, pure gold."

The woman's eyes sparkled, and she put forth her shrivelled hand. Paul valued not the gold, but he would be sure of the woman's meaning before he gave it to her.

"Will you conceal us?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman returned.

"And if our enemies should come and inquire for us, what would you tell them?"

"That would depend upon what kind of men they were, and how they should ask. For four golden pieces I can afford to tell a lie, for then I can pay for Buddha's pardon."

Paul was satisfied that the woman meant to do the best she could, and without further questioning he asked her to lead the way to a place of concealment. She thought a few moments, and then she went to a place in the floor where there was a joint in the rough boards, and raised a small trap-door.

"Here," she said, "is a small cellar under here which we use for keeping tallow. As soon as you are down I will pull an old reed mat over the place, and they will never find it, for I don't know of another such place about here."

There was a rough ladder led down to the bottom of the place, and having descended first himself, Paul turned and assisted his companion. The door was then replaced, and then our hero heard the mat drawn over. It was utterly dark there, but by no means damp or uncomfortable. Our friends found places to sit down, and ere long afterwards they heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard. Soon there came the tramp of feet upon the floor overhead—the feet of two men, certainly—and Paul and Yu-lu could hear every word plainly. The first speaker was at first recognized as Li.

"Hi, woman," he cried, "have you seen two persons go by here this morning?"

"Yes, I think there have been a number by," returned the woman.

"Ah, who were they?"

"Some folks that work down by the canal."

"But have you seen none go the other way? Haven't you seen two people—a young man and a boy—go the other way?"

"No, sir."

"Nor there have not any such called here?"

"Yes. There were two such called here about an hour ago. They stopped and got some water, and then went off towards the great river."

"Towards Kiang-yin?"

"No. They left the road, and crossed the marsh, back of us here, and kept on to the northward. They were in a great hurry."

"They were on foot, were they?"

"Yes, and looked very tired. Poor folks! if you could overtake them and give them a ride 'twould be a blessing, for they looked like innocent youths."

"Innocent like snakes!" growled Li.

"But they wasn't surely wicked people," said the old woman, with perfect assurance.

"Never mind," said Li. "Right off to the northward, you say?"

"Yes. Across the marsh by the left hand path. They must be half way to the river by this time. But you are not going yet."

"Yes, my good woman."

"But stop and eat something."

"No."

"I've got some wine."

"We well taste a bit of that."

"That's right," said the woman, arising and moving across the floor. "Poor dear youths! They wanted me, if any body came and inquired after them, to detain 'em as long as I could."

"They did, eh?" cried Li. "But never mind. Hurry with your wine, and we'll make up for the lost time."

The wine was soon brought, and quickly drank, and in a few moments more Paul heard the horses gallop away. As soon as the sound died away in the distance the trap-door was raised, and Paul and his companion came up. He thanked the old woman for the service she had done him, and after paying her the gold he had promised, he asked for some kind of refreshment. This she brought quickly forward and placed upon a small table where the wine already stood, and Paul and Yu-lu sat down.

"Hi-yah! There are three paths over the marsh, old woman. Which one did—"

The voice stopped short. Paul leaped from his chair, and saw Li standing at the window! Quick as thought he snatched a pistol from his bosom, and raised it, but Li detected the movement and dodged out of sight.

"We are lost!" groaned Yu-lu, clinging half frantically to her lover's bosom.

"Not yet," uttered Paul. "Courage, dearest. Let me have my arms free."

Yu-lu sprang back, for she saw that she was encumbering her lover's arms, and on the next instant the door that led to the entry was seen to open just a crack. Paul would have darted towards it, but at the same moment there came the sharp report of a pistol, and the youth felt a sudden pang in his head. It was a sharp, ringing, burning sensation, and while he strained his eyes towards the door a thousand varied lights

seemed dancing before him. He staggered forward a few paces, and then he knew that Yu-lu had caught him in her arms.

"Paul! Paul!" she cried. "Speak to me—O, speak!"

But he could utter no words. He had a dim sense of pain in his head, and a faint confused idea of soft arms clasping him about. Again he heard the sound of that sweet voice in his ear, and then he knew that he was sinking down upon the floor. Another quick succession of sparkling lights seemed to flash before his eyes, and after that everything was dark and cold.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## IN PRISON.

WHEN Paul Ardeen came to himself he was in a very small place, and the light came to him through a grated door. The walls of the room were of wood, and the ceiling and floor were of the same materials. He knew that he was in a prison, and from the din that came rumbling through the air he concluded that he must be in a large city. His first movement, as soon as he had fully recovered his senses, was to feel of his head, for he felt a dull pain there. He found it bandaged, and after considerable reflection and examination he found that he was not seriously injured. He remembered the firing of the pistol through the crack of the door, and of the subsequent sensations he had experienced. The ball must have hit his skull just above and back of the temple, and glanced off without penetrating the bone. There must have been considerable contusion, but Paul knew from the sensations he experienced that he was in no danger. As soon as his mind was satisfied upon this point he turned his attention to other matters.

At first there came a sort of dream-like vision before him, and when his mind struggled forth into the reality he remembered the maiden who had been with him during his exciting flight. With both hands pressed hard upon his brow he sat back upon the little frame that served him as a bed, and sobbed deeply. Physical weakness

had taken away much of his strength of nerve, and his bitter sorrow ran riot in his soul. He thought of Yu-lu—of how she had smiled upon and trusted him—of how she had shone like a torch of heaven in his path—and he felt how much he had lost. He remembered—he felt—how mighty was his love for that gentle being—how it had penetrated every avenue of his thoughts and feelings—how it had entered into his very life, and become part of his soul. He thought of all this, and utter wretchedness overwhelmed him like an angry sea. He was sunk in a darkness so dense and deep that not even a thought of day came to bless him. If his thoughts did at length turn to where hope should have had a home, he thought only of the almost unlimited power of him who had stricken him with the blow.

It might have been half an hour after Paul had fully recovered himself that he heard footsteps approaching his cell, and ere long an armed soldier stopped in front of the grated door and looked in. He was a filthy, greasy-looking fellow, and on his shoulder he carried a gun-like contrivance that might at first sight have been taken for a small iron cannon which had been rusted down to about half its original size, and then set in a stock.

"Hi!" the fellow exclaimed, setting down his

heavy piece of ordnance, and looking in upon the youth. "So you're up again. What a time you've had."

Paul arose from his couch and approached the door, and the Chinaman made a motion as though he would bring his weapon to a favorable position for shooting.

"Where am I?" was Paul's first question.

"In prison, I think," replied the guard.

"But in what place?"

"Close by the canal of Yang-tchi."

"But am I in Nankin?"

"Yes."

"And how long have I been here?"

"This is the third day," said the fellow, after counting the great yellow buttons upon his vest.

"Has the prince seen me?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what he means to do with me?"

The fellow grinned a sort of grim, dubious grin, and bobbed his head like a game-cock—and that was all the answer he gave. Paul repeated the question, but it was only answered by another bob of the head. A third time he asked the same question, and this time the Chinaman seemed indignant that his silent answer had not been understood, for with an angry grunt he bobbed his head once more, and then drew his hand significantly across his throat. He stopped just long enough to see that he was now understood, and then moved along.

After the sentinel was gone, Paul went back to his couch and sat down. He now knew the fate that was intended for him, but it was not the coming of death that moved him the most. The dread of the executioner was overcome by another emotion. He could only see the pale face of Yu-lu, and think that she, too, was suffering. After a while the youth went to the door and looked out through the grated aperture. He could see that he was some distance from the ground, and that opposite to him, about a dozen yards distant, was a blank, massive wall. He had seen many Chinese prisons, where all the cells looked into a common yard, and he knew that he was now in no common prison, for he was cut off from all view of his fellows, save the single sentry that guarded him, and it was evidently intended that he should have no opportunity for communication. It was surely a dismal prospect.

It must have been late in the afternoon when

reason had come to Paul's mind, for ere long after he had left the door the shades of night began to settle over the prison, and just at the time when the dusk begins to grow thicker with darkness the sentinel stopped at the door and handed in a bottle and a cake of rice bread. The former he found to contain water, and the bread he was obliged to soak before he could eat it, and even then it was fulsome stuff. He only forced down what nature actually required, and then sat the remainder upon the floor. He had hardly taken his seat upon the edge of the cot ere he heard the sound of steps approaching his cell, and shortly afterwards his door was opened. The last glimmer of evening just revealed the outlines of the intruder, and in the tall straight form that stood against the background of space made by the open door, Paul recognized the Juggler of Nankin.

"Is this Paul Ardeen?" the juggler asked, as he approached the cot.

The prisoner answered in the affirmative. He spoke tremblingly, for he felt like one who had done wrong, and for the first time the thought came to him that his having evaded the juggler was the direct cause of all he had since suffered.

"Do you remember when you stopped at the small inn on the western shore of the Tai-hou lake?"

"Yes," returned the youth.

"You had a boy with you?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that I was there at the same time?"

Paul hesitated for a moment, but it was not his nature to deliberately falsify, and he admitted the truth.

"Then you saw me, and went away on purpose to escape me?" said Ye-fo-hi.

"I confess that I did."

"Alas, Paul, you know not what you have done!" The old man spoke in a very strange, sad, tone, and as he spoke he sat down upon the cot by Paul's side. "Do you not remember the promise you made me?" he continued. "Do you not remember the compact you made with me?"

"Yes."

"Then why should you have fled from me?"

"Because I feared you," answered the youth, after a moment's thought.

"Feared me! And what have I ever done that you should fear me? What have I said in your presence, or what suggested, that could



have awakened such a thought in your bosom?"

"I cannot explain, sir," replied Paul, with evident embarrassment. "I can only tell you that I saw you come into the yard, and that both I and my companion feared you. For myself, sir, I should have had no fear, but for another's sake I even broke my promise with you—for that other's sake I would have even given up life itself."

"I have heard of your mishap," said Ye-fu-hi, "and I know whom you had with you."

"You do?" uttered Paul, starting up with excitement.

"Yes."

"And can you tell me what has become of my companion?"

"She is with the Prince of Nankin."

Paul Ardeen only groaned aloud, and sank back upon the cot. He covered his face with his hands, and the old man could hear that he was sobbing heavily.

"Paul," spoke the juggler, at the same time laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "you have wronged me most deeply, but I will not chide you, for I know how much you now suffer. When I set you to watch over the movements of the prince, I hoped you would be faithful to the trust I reposed in you. Had you done that, all would have been well. I could have led you clear from all danger, and you should have lost nothing that you could have hoped to gain. It was a hold upon the prince I wanted, and even had I gained possession of the maiden you found, and even had I led her into the very presence of the prince, you should not have lost her."

"O, sir! Can you not save her now?" cried Paul, springing up and clasping his hands.

"I do not know. The prince is very powerful, and he now holds the maiden in his own hands. His own wife, I have heard, is dead. If he makes Yu-lu his wife your hopes of her are gone."

"O, heaven have mercy!"

"And then your own situation is not at all enviable," resumed the juggler.

Paul started at the words, and for a while his mind was drawn to the subject thus broached.

"Do you know what my fate is to be?" he whispered.

"It is not hard to guess," returned the other.

"You are placed here to die. I know well what silent language these walls speak. When you are led forth from here it will be to die, and you

will have but little warning of the coming fate."

"And is there no power to save me?" the youth asked. "O, if you could but get word to my countrymen at Shanghai, they would come and take me away. Can you not send them intelligence of my situation?"

"It would take nearly a week, at least, to bring the English here," said the juggler; "and your fate will surely be decided before that time. But let that rest for the present. I will help you if I can. I have gained admittance here by working upon the superstition of the guard, but I could not get you out, for the poor soldiers will not sacrifice their lives even to me. But for all that I may help you. Now tell me of what you found at the temples. Of course you cannot fear to trust me now."

Paul knew full well that no harm could come of his revealing the truth to his companion, and he hoped that if he was frank now it might work to his own good, so he commenced and related all that he had seen and done at the ruined temples, even to his first interview with Yu-lu, and the growing of the love which had taken such a hold upon his heart. He could not see the juggler's face, but he could tell that he was much affected, for ever and anon sharp, ejaculatory sentences would break from his lips.

"Kong-ti is a great villain!" uttered Ye-fu-hi, after Paul had concluded. "O, I wish you had trusted me, for then we might have thwarted him."

"Do not blame me," groaned the youth. "It was for Yu-lu's sake I acted as I did, for she feared you. We both of us had an instinctive fear that to answer your own ends you might place her again within grasp of the wicked prince."

"It is passed now," resumed the juggler, "and we must do the best we can. I do truly wish to save you, and I will if I can."

"And Yu-lu?" whispered Paul.

"If the Princess Niao lives I can save her, but if the princess be truly dead, then I fear there is little hope. But we must trust to time."

"Do you know Yu-lu?" the youth asked.

"I have seen her."

"And do you know the princess?"

"Well."

"The princess is related to you?"

"Ah, who told you that?"

"I heard it so whispered."

"I meant not that such a fact should have leaked out. But it can make no difference now."

Niao is a noble woman, and she has been most basely wronged, and if it lies in my power she shall be revenged."

"Are you going to leave me?"

"I must, for my time has expired. But do not give up in total despair, for I think I can save your life. If it came within the reach of my power, even though half the soldiers in Nankin died in consequence, I would lead you forth from here now; but I cannot. The guard is very strong and resolute, and they are not to be overcome by any art of mine. Be assured that I will not lose sight of you."

Paul started up from the cot and seized the juggler by the arm.

"Save Yu-lu if you can!" he cried, with all the energy of his soul. "O, save her, and then my own liberty will be worth the having."

"You may hope for yourself," returned Ye-fu-hi.

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"But Yu-lu is more than myself. She is the light of my soul—the joy of my heart, and without light and joy life were but little else than a burden."

The juggler made no reply. Paul would have given much to have seen his face even, but the darkness hid it, and its emotions were all hid, and in a moment more the youth was alone. He heard the retreating footsteps of his visitor, and when they at length died away he threw himself upon his hard couch. For a while he pondered upon what had passed, but he did not ponder long, for the emotions he had experienced worked hard upon his mind, and weakness overcame him. His sorrows and his cares were lost in unconsciousness. He felt a wild, dizzy sensation, but no pain, and with the attempt to grasp a phantom which imagination had hung in the air before him, he sank back into the rest of forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE PLOT IS ON ITS LEGS AGAIN.

THE Prince of Nankin walked up and down his apartment with quick, nervous strides. He was much agitated, and a casual observer would have needed no interpreter to tell that the powerful grandee was suffering from more than usual anxiety. His face was pale, and his lips were compressed with a powerful effort to keep back the feelings that welled up from his soul. The beautiful Yu-lu was once more in his power, but he was far from satisfied with the position in which he was placed. His plot had been interrupted—it had not worked as he had intended. A few days ago, and he thought his plans were all moving smoothly on, but now a storm had come, and the fabric of his long cherished plot was in danger of tumbling in pieces about his ears. He still held the tottering fragments up, but they bore hard upon him.

Thus was he pacing to and fro across his apartment, when Li entered his presence. He stopped as soon as he noticed his devoted servant and started towards him.

"Ha! Back so soon?" he uttered.

"Yes," returned Li, moving to a seat and placing his body in it.

"And what of Niao? Have you gained any trace of her?"

"Yes."

The prince started at this answer—a quick

flush suffused his face, and then he also sat down.

"Speak," he said, in breathless anxiety. "Tell me what you have learned."

"Last night," commenced Li, "I went to the house where we left her, but none of the servants had heard from her. I searched through the neighborhood most of the night, and when I returned to the house this morning a letter had been left there for you. No one knew who left it, or at what hour it was left. It was found tied to the handle of the outer door by the porter, and he gave it to me. It was not sealed, and I read it, and I thought it best to place it in your hands as soon as possible."

As Li ceased speaking he drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to his master. It was written upon a piece of silk with India ink. The prince opened it and read as follows:

"To the most high and mighty Prince Kong-ti:—The good Princess Niao is dead! The very night after you last saw her she was seized upon by an evil spirit which stole away her reason. In this mood she arose from her bed and rushed from the house. I followed her, but she would not listen. She went to the great lake, and there she raved as one having a heavy soul, nor would she suffer me to approach her. She spoke

to Tien-tan to take her spirit, and to Tee-tan she gave her body. She threw herself into the lake, and the dark waters closed over her. We shall see her no more. I would have come to you, but I feared your wrath. This is written by your most unworthy slave, Tsi."

"Do you believe that?" uttered the prince, after he had read the missive through the second time.

"It may be true," returned Li. "I think it is true. The beverage she drank may have made her crazy."

"Very likely," said Kong-ti; and then, while a look of relief passed upon his features, he added: "I am glad this is so, for now her blood rests not on my hands. She took her own life. By the Imperial Joss, the thing shall be made public. Poor woman! She is gone, and I am left without a wife!"

Li smiled as he heard these words, but the prince was sober. Kong-ti did not speak as with the meaning of a joke, but with the thought of the hypocrite. He was rehearsing the part he was to play before the world.

"You may go," he said to Li, "and tell the sad news to my people. Give orders to the mandarins that all amusements in the city be stopped, and have the temples opened to the mourners. It is a sad blow, Li—a sad blow. She was a good woman—too good to live. Go, and leave me alone in my sorrow. Tell the servants that no one shall see me to-day, for I will not be disturbed in my grief."

The attendant withdrew, and as soon as the prince was left alone he started up from his seat and clapped his hands upon his head.

"Not all lost yet!" he exclaimed, while an exulting look broke over his features. "By the Child of the Sun, this thing works well. Now to Yu-lu—and then for the finishing of that bold youth who would have snatched her from me."

Yu-lu sat within a sumptuously furnished apartment, and near her stood her former keeper, Lan. The maiden was pale and wan, and the livid hue about her eyes told how long and freely she had wept. Her fair features were all wrought in agony, and her brow was pencilled with the pain that worked in the brain. She sat there with her head resting upon her hands when she was startled by the entrance of the prince. She shuddered when she saw him, and a groan

of despair broke from her lips. Kong-ti motioned for Lan to leave the room, and then he sat down by the maiden's side.

"Bright sunlight of my life," he said, in a low, melancholy tone, "the blow has come, and where shall I look for joy or hope, but in you? Niao is dead!"

Yu-lu covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

"Read this," continued the prince, handing her the silken missive which Li had brought.

The maiden took it, and with trembling hands she held it. She read it, and still she shuddered. She thought it possible that the ill-fated princess had taken her own life, but she felt sure, also, that the husband's cruelty had driven her to the act.

"Dear Yu-lu," resumed the prince, after he had received back the letter, "this blow has not come upon me so hard as it would had I not been prepared for this. Niao had long been subject to these fits, and I expected she would have died long ago, but some mysterious power has held her up. I think it was the direct will of Heaven that she should live until you were prepared to take her place. You will soon be called upon now to assume the station for which I have had you fitted."

"Let me follow Niao!" groaned the maiden, "and I will bless you."

"So you shall, sweet Yu-lu. You shall commence to follow where she commenced a score of years ago."

"No, no. Be kind, and let me die now!"

"Not until you are my wife."

"That I can never be."

"That you shall be!"

"O, be merciful!"

"I mean to be."

"Let me not suffer such a curse."

"Beware that you do not suffer a greater!"

Yu-lu started, for these last words were spoken strangely and fearfully.

"You should know me by this time," the prince added, with a meaning shake of the head. "You are mine—all mine—and I will make you my wife if you will. If you like not that, then be what other women are, who live as mothers, but not as wives!"

The maiden shrank back and burst into tears. They were hot, scalding tears, for they came from a heart that was bursting with indignation; but she dared not show all her feelings. She

had been so long subject to the power of the prince that the bond seemed almost by nature her portion, and she feared to awaken the wrath of one who seemed to be in truth her master. But aside from all this the terrible threat last made had sank to her soul more deeply than all else. She shrank from such a fate as shrinks a child from the blood-stained hand of the midnight murderer. She was bound hand and foot, and even her speech she dared not use. She would have asked concerning Paul Ardeen, but she dared not do it. Once she had mentioned his name, and the fearful storm of passion which it called up had frightened her from repeating it.

"Yu-lu," spoke the prince, after a few moments of reflection, "I hope we may have no more conversation of this kind. I forgive you for attempting to escape from me, and freely take you back to my love. Beware that you do not lose it. Now when my season of mourning is passed, I shall give to you the station you are so well qualified to fill, and for which I have expended so much to have you fitted. I am sorry that poor Niao is dead, but it was not in my power to prevent it. It was the will of the great Tien-tan, and his will must be done. I bow to the decree, and I hope I am resigned."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE SACK!

Yu-lu looked up into the face of the prince as he spoke thus, and she knew that he was playing the hypocrite; she knew that his words were false, and that his heart was black, and yet she dared not tell him so. She only dared to shudder in his presence, and that she could not avoid, for his very breath seemed poisonous. At length, however, she was relieved of his company, for he arose, and having imprinted a kiss upon her brow he turned and left the apartment, and in a moment more Lan returned.

"Lan," exclaimed the maiden, starting towards the woman and clasping her hands, "you will at least be kind to me?"

"I hope so, my lady," returned Lan, gazing with surprise upon the sudden movement of the girl.

"Then tell me what has become of Paul Ardeen?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said the woman, speaking in a low tone, and at the same time casting her eyes furtively about her. "But you must not speak that name in this place. If the prince hears it he will be very angry."

"But have you not heard something of him?" pursued Yu-lu. "Do you know if he has recovered from the wound he received?"

"I know nothing about him," persisted Lan; "nothing at all. But I would advise you to let

him rest, and trouble yourself no more about him."

"Alas! you never loved."

"If I could not love the prince better than a poor wandering *fau-kwei*, I should never wish to love."

"*Fau-kwei*!" repeated Yu-lu, starting with alarm. "How do you know that?"

"O, he betrayed himself while he raved in the prison."

"He! then he is in a prison!" cried the maiden. "Ah, Lan, you know more than that. Tell me all—tell me what is to be his fate."

The woman had exposed herself in part, but she would tell no more, and Yu-lu was forced to feed upon her own imagination—and that imagination painted the picture in colors as terrible as the reality could possibly have been. She saw her lover in the power of a heartless, relentless, revengeful prince, and she felt sure that death would be his portion. After she had conjured up the fatal picture she tried hard to dispel it, but it would not leave her. She had to entertain the terrible thought, now that she had once let it into her bosom, and it fastened her misery upon her with a firmer hold than ever. She forgot all about her own sufferings, and while her heart beat with renewed agony it was for one whom she loved better than herself.

When the morning dawned Paul had once more recovered his reason. He saw the first beams of the golden sun that came and danced upon the opposite wall, and for the while he felt invigorated and refreshed; but soon the full sense of his situation came back to him, and he leaned against the post of the grated door to commune with his grief. He was not then the Paul Ardeen of a week before. The flush of youthful health was gone—the blooming of his hopes was faded away—the flashing light of those dark eyes had gone out, and the form that had been erect and noble was bent and emaciated by torture and suffering. But all these symptoms gave but little index to the sharp pangs that dwelt in his heart. Man can bear physical pain, for he hopes 'twill not always last, but few are the souls that can bear that utter loneliness which succeeds the tearing away of what is loved and cherished. O, no man can know, but from bitter experience, the terrible sorrow of such a calamity. It is not the pain of a few nerves, or the twinging of sensitive muscles, but it is the utter tearing in sunder of those subtle cords that bind the heart to joy and hope, it is the trampling down of all the green shoots of life, and the withering up of all its blossoms and flowers—it is the utter midnight of the soul—a midnight so deep and black that even hope itself flies shrieking away, and the wreck of earth is left only a shattered mass with no compass or beacon to guide it through the drear darkness!

Such is the man who has lost the treasure of his soul's purest love, and such was Paul Ardeen. He groaned in the bitterness of his grief, and when he had groaned till he could groan no more he went back to his cot and sat down.

The day passed slowly away, and the youth ate all that was left of the food that had been brought him the day before; but he received no more. Twilight came with its cool breath and misty shadows, but no sentinel had yet made his appearance at the door. Paul wanted no more food, but he began to feel the need of drink. All the water in the bottle was gone, and his lips and tongue were becoming parched and hot. He listened for the coming of a visitor, but he listened in vain. He remembered that his food came not on the day before until night, and so he still hoped he should not be forgotten in his wants; but it grew dark, and still he was alone—night had fairly come, but no messenger had arrived.

It was now that new fears began to take pos-

session of the ill-fated youth's mind; but these fears, dark as they were, lifted his heart up from the utter darkness into which it had fallen. These fears were of death—and death was not so terrible as the fate he had been brooding over. He even hoped—it was a wild, strange hope, to be sure, and it came without his bidding—he even hoped that he might die, and that Yu-lu might flee from earth at the same moment. Such a hope almost made a smile upon his pale face, for it pointed its quivering finger towards heaven and re-union.

So passed the hours away. Gradually the din and bustle of the great city died away—one after another the kite-suspended lanterns disappeared from the air, and at length the silence of midnight gathered its quiet influence about the place. Paul felt of the bars of his door, and they were damp with the night-dew. He gathered off the tiny drops with his tongue, and they refreshed him. They helped to allay the heat of his thirst, and his lips were not so parched as before.

After this—after the torturing thirst had been partly stayed—Paul thought of sleep. He had reached the cot, and was just in the act of sitting down, when he heard footsteps upon the narrow walk that led to his door. He started up and went towards the grating, and he saw the rays of a light flashing through the darkness. Soon afterwards his door was opened, and two men entered. One of them bore a lantern, and the other carried in his arms a coil of rope and a large hempen sack. They were both of them stout men, and Paul could see by the very expression upon their countenances that they had come for some stern purpose. He who carried the lantern set it down, and then turned towards the prisoner.

"Are you not tired of remaining here?" he asked, in a tone which possessed but little meaning.

"It is not very pleasant here," returned Paul, shuddering as his eyes wandered instinctively to the cord and sack.

"So we thought," resumed the first speaker, "and we have come to take you away. You wouldn't have stayed here so long as you have, only you were weak, and we took pity on you."

"And whither do you mean to carry me?"

"Never mind. You shall see when we arrive at our journey's end."

"Has the prince sent you to me?"

"Very likely."

"And he has sent you to take away my life?"

"You are shrewd at guessing."

"Because I have good grounds upon which to make my surmises."

"Well, perhaps you have; but you needn't worry yourself. You will be taken good care of. Are you able to walk?"

"I think so."

"Then we will go. We will lead you, for it is quite dark, and you might not find your way alone."

"One moment," uttered Paul, as the fellow was about to take him by the arm. "Let me see the prince. Lead me to him if it is only for one moment."

"We cannot do it, sir," returned the man, as he stooped down and picked up his lantern. "The prince is plunged into mourning, and he sees no one."

"Mourning!" repeated the youth.

"Yes. His wife is dead, and he mourns for her bitterly."

"O, how base is the hypocrite! And you serve the prince?"

"Yes."

"Then you serve the blackest villain that God ever suffered to live!"

"Beware, young man."

"Of what shall I beware? You say the Princess Niao is dead?"

"She is."

"And before God I will make my oath that she died by her husband's own hand. O, if you love virtue—if you would expose the blackest vice that ever darkened your city, then tell to your fellows the true character of the man you serve. For two years he has had a defenceless maiden concealed away among the ruins of some distant temple, and thither has he gone every month to visit her. She was beautiful, and he would make her his wife. But yet he had a wife living. The living wife must die to make way for one younger and more beautiful! It was for attempting to liberate the poor maiden from his fell power that I am suffering. But she is once more in his grasp—even now in his palace—and his Niao has died to give her room in his arms! Go tell the people the true character of their prince, and let them know what blackness dwells in his heart."

Both the men had once or twice made a movement as though they would have stopped the youth from speaking, but they had suffered him to go on, for they seemed curious to know what

he would say. When he ceased speaking they regarded each other for some moments in silence. At length he with the rope and sack asked:

"Do you know where the prince kept this girl?"

"Yes," returned Paul. "It was in a secret place beneath the old temples of Fou-tching-yo."

The men looked at each other again, and then the one with the lantern spoke:

"Who guarded the place?"

"A eunuch named Fau-king, and a woman named Lan."

The fellows regarded each other again, and quick glances of intelligence passed between them.

"You will tell this to the people," said Paul.

"When we are tired of life we'll tell it," said one of them, with a meaning motion of his head; "but as long as we wish to live I think we had better keep it to ourselves. By the great joss, my young fellow, that's a dangerous secret for a man to hold. 'But come, you must go with us now.'"

"Whither?" asked Paul, starting, as the dread idea came back to him.

"You shall see."

The men took him, one by each arm, and led him out from the cell. It was a narrow gallery upon which they now stood, and was guarded upon the outside by a low railing. Along this the men led the prisoner, and when they stopped it was before a stout door which seemed to open into the main part of the prison. Through this they passed, and then Paul found himself in a high vaulted apartment from the arched roof of which hung a single lantern. By a rough altar-like structure which was built on one side of the apartment stood two men. One of them was habited in the garb of a mandarin, and the other in the dark robes of a Buddhist priest. The men who led our hero stopped before this altar, and the mandarin stepped down towards them. He gazed upon the youth some moments in silence.

"Young man," he at length said, "it grieves me to be obliged to perform the duty which a mighty power has imposed upon me."

"If it is a duty which refers to me," quickly returned Paul, utterly disgusted with what he knew was heartless, fulsome sycophancy, "I beg that you will do it with as few words as possible."

The mandarin seemed for the moment to be nonplussed by this, but he soon recovered him-

self, and in a tone of unmistakable chagrin he resumed:

"There is a charge resting upon your shoulders which leads you to death. Your last hour on earth has come, and I hope you realize how richly you merit the fate. It only remains for me to vest the authority in these men who lead you, and they are now instructed to do with you as they have been directed. But before you die you may have the chance to ask the great Buddha to take your soul to himself and carry it to the skies. This priest will speak for you."

"I want nothing of your priest, nor of your Buddha," bitterly exclaimed the youth.

The bonze struck his hands upon his breast with holy horror, and the mandarin went back to the altar.

"In the God of justice and truth I have placed my trust," continued Paul, "and to him alone will I look for help. I ask none of your prayers nor any of your sympathy, for the one is heartless, and the other is false. I know my fate, and I am prepared."

The mandarin and the bonze were not a little surprised at the youth's manner, and after gazing upon him for some moments they turned and conversed together in low, inaudible tones. At length the former turned towards the man who held the lantern and handed him a small piece of parchment. Paul could see that the parchment bore written characters upon its face, and from one of the hieroglyphics which he noticed he made up his mind that it was a death-warrant!

"Come," said the fellow, as he rolled up the missive and placed it in his pocket, "we are ready now."

The mandarin went back and stood by the priest, and the two others led Paul from the place by a door nearly opposite to that through which he had entered. This led to a kind of open porch, and at a short distance further they came to a wide platform which was built out from the prison wall. Here they stopped. The youth looked over the edge of the form and he saw a smooth, black surface, in the still depths of which dwelt the images of the bright stars that twinkled overhead. It was water! In the distance he could see the tall buildings which flanked the opposite side of the wide canal, and from the absence of all vessels he judged that this was not a place where interlopers were allowed. The cool air swept gratefully across his fevered brow, and the stars of heaven looked down smilingly upon him.

Paul Ardeen knew that he had been brought out here to die! He remembered the words which the juggler had spoken, and he looked around to see if there were any signs of his presence, but he saw none. Now that grim death stared him in the face he began to look for succor. He tried to hope that Ye-fo-hi would keep his promise. He bent his ear to listen, but he could only hear the gentle ripple of the water as it struck upon the prison wall beneath the platform upon which he stood. He felt that he was all alone with the men of death!

"We are ready," said the man with the lantern. He blew out the light as he spoke, and set the lantern down.

It was not dark, for the heavens were clear, and the starlight was undimmed. The other man threw down the sack, and then uncoiled the rope which he carried. It was in several pieces, and as he separated them he hung them about his own neck. Once Paul tried to break from the grasp that held him and leap into the water, but he could not. One of the men kept a strong hand upon him, and they were watchful for any such movement. Had the youth been strong he would have struggled even to death, but his muscles were weak and his nerves unstrung.

As soon as the cords were cleared, Paul's arms were placed behind him and pinioned at the elbows. Then his ankles were lashed together, and next a strong cord was passed over his shoulders and from thence around the lashing of the feet, and this was drawn up until the chin and knees came together. The next movement was to take a heavy stone which lay near at hand and place it in the sack, and then the mouth of the capacious sack was held open by one of the men, while the other seized the bound youth and lifted him up in his arms.

"O, for the love of heaven," groaned Paul, "have mercy on me! Kill me at once, but doom me not to such a death!"

But neither of the executioners spoke. They forced the prisoner into the sack, and then they began to tie up the mouth. With one last effort Paul cast his eyes up, and he saw the bright stars looking down upon him. He caught the last breath of heaven's pure air—he heard the last ripple of the element that was waiting to receive him, and then the mouth of the sack was closed. He heard the grating of the cord as it was drawn tight and tied, and then he felt himself moved along upon the plank. There was a moment's pause—and then came the cold, dark chill of the watery grave!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A PROMISE AND A DISCOVERY.

On the evening that Paul Ardeen last spent in his prison Yu-lu sat in the chamber which had been assigned to her use in the palace. She was not so utterly miserable as when we saw her last, for she had been praying for strength to support her, and she had in a measure succeeded. The hours she had passed with Paul Ardeen seemed more like a dream to her now than a reality, but she could not but grieve that she had awakened from it. She expected never to see Paul again, and she feared that he even now might be dead. There was one other thing besides prayer that made her calm, and that was the hope of re-joining Paul in heaven. She sat there upon a broad, soft couch, and near her sat her constant guardian, Lan. The apartment was only lighted by a single lamp, so that objects in the distance were somewhat obscure.

At length the door was opened and a female attendant entered the room, who informed the inmates that a priest was in waiting. The prince had engaged an old priest to converse with Yu-lu, to make her understand the enormity of the sin she had committed, and also to impress upon her mind a sense of the duty she owed to him as her lord and master. The prince himself dared not visit her much now, for his season of mourning had commenced, and he was surrounded by his sympathizing court. But the priest took his

place, and he had already gained considerably upon the maiden's confidence.

Shortly after the messenger withdrew the priest entered. He was bent with age and infirmity, and it was with difficulty that he walked, even with the help of a stout staff. He motioned to Lan as he entered, and she at once withdrew, and after this he went and sat down by the maiden's side.

"How fares our sweet child this evening?" he asked, gazing most sharply and earnestly into her face.

Yu-lu gazed up into the old man's features, and a strange shade passed over her face, but she quickly answered:

"I am not happy, good father."

"And yet you have everything that men call happiness. What more could you ask?"

"For what call happiness—for that which I love. I love nothing here."

"You speak plainly."

"Because I speak the truth."

"And yet, my child, your love must be very strange. If I mistake not, you love the youth who took you from the power of the prince. Is it not so?"

"Ay, father."

"He is not of our country—he is of foreign blood. Can you love him better than even a prince of your own country?"

"So it is," murmured Yu-lu. "I found his heart pure and noble, and I loved him because I knew he loved me."

"But you will forget him now, my child."

The maiden bowed her head, and remained for some moments in silence. At length she spoke, and her words were very low and earnest.

"Most holy father," she said, "do not many of our people take their own lives?"

"Yes, Yu-lu."

"And do you think a person can be happy hereafter who does it?"

"That must depend upon why it is done. Sometimes the most noble martyrs dies in that way."

"But suppose life were all a useless burden—suppose the future of earth were nothing but blackness and gloom—"

"Stop, child. You are supposing now an impossibility."

"No, no, I am not," quickly cried the maiden. "O, heaven knows my own fate is all I have pictured. All is dark and drear, and sorrow alone lies before me on earth!"

"Then you never heard of God?"

"Of God?" murmured Yu-lu, looking wonderingly up.

"Ay—of that Being who made us, and who holds us at his will. There may be such a thing yet as hope. You are young, and life is before you."

Yu-lu looked more searchingly into her companion's face, for there was something in his words that struck strangely upon her ears. She had never heard him speak so before. He had always spoken to her of the prince and of the duty she owed to him—but never of God, and of hope yet to come. A few moments she gazed and then she tremblingly laid her hand upon his arm.

"Sir," she whispered, "you are not the same priest who has been here before."

"Ah. Did you think I was?" he replied.

"Most surely I did. But he spoke not as you speak. Yet you dress the same, and your beard is the same."

"Yes, for the good old priest lent them both to me. He is a friend of mine. I saw him to-day, and he told me he was coming here this evening to see you, and after much persuasion I succeeded in gaining his permission to my coming in his place; so I have come."

"But who are you?" uttered the maiden, slightly startled by this revelation.

"One who knows you well, and of whom you have often heard. But do not be alarmed."

"And who are you?"

"My name is Ye-fu-hi."

"*The Juggler of Nankin!*" uttered Yu-lu, starting with a strange emotion.

"Yes, my sweet child, and I have come here to serve you if I can."

How quickly the beam that bears the scales in which the human heart is placed can be turned! In an instant the maiden's confidence was given to the strange man by her side, and, as if by magic, she forgot all the mistrust she had fostered towards him. She was not "catching at straws," either, for she felt a wonderful degree of confidence in the juggler's power, and an innate voice whispered to her soul that she could fully trust him.

"Are you afraid to trust me?" he asked, after he had waited to witness the effect of the revelation.

"No, no—O, no," she said, "for something tells me that you can help me."

"I could have helped you once before if you had not been frightened and fled from me; but I know not that I can blame you, for I know that many people who know me not shrink from my presence when they hear my name."

"I remember," murmured Yu-lu. "I remember it well. I had a companion then." She hesitated and trembled; but in a moment more she continued, though in a husky, tremulous tone, "Paul Arden was with me then. Do you know where he is?"

"Yes."

"And does he live?"

"Yes."

"O, heaven be praised! He lives!" She bowed her head and wept.

"Yes—he lives," added the juggler, "but he is in the power of the prince."

Yu-lu started up and seized the old man by the arm. Her tears had ceased flowing, and her eyes gleamed with a powerful light.

"You can help him, too," she said, speaking with the whole force of her devoted soul.

"I have promised him that I would try."

"Then you have seen him?"

"Yes, I visited him in his prison."

"And was he suffering much?"

"More on your account than on his own. Of his own troubles he seemed to think but little—he only suffered because you were not safe."

"O, Paul, Paul!" ejaculated the maiden,

clasping her hands and lifting her eyes towards heaven, "you shall not trust in a heart that can forget its love. You will see him again—you will speak with him. O, tell him that I have not forgotten him—tell him that even now I would joyfully give up life itself to save him; and tell him, too, that if he falls beneath the revenge of the wicked prince I will soon join him in the world of spirits. You will tell him this?"

"Yes, if I see him; and of that I think there is no doubt. I will surely tell him all that you have said. He, poor silly fellow, would willingly die, I think, to save you, or to find you in the dim world beyond the grave, so I think I had better try and save you both; and in order to do this, I must have your aid. Let the rest of our interview for the present be business, for I have not long to stop. Now tell me if you know how long before the prince intends to marry you?"

"I cannot tell you that, though from what I have heard him say, I should think he meant to do it very soon. But what is the law on this subject?"

"O, there is no law that can govern Kong-ti, for I do not suppose that he means to have a public marriage at present. He will only make you legally his wife, and that he can do by acknowledgement as soon as he pleases. Do you think he will trouble you before two weeks have expired?"

"O, no—I do not think he will."

"Then you will have no trouble, for before that time I shall be here again. But if he should attempt to force you to the union you must find some way to overcome it."

"O, sir," uttered Yu-lu, her face all beaming with hope, "if you can promise me assistance at the end of two weeks I will save myself until that time. I have some power yet. One word of love will bend the strong prince mightily, for I know that he is wild with his passion for me. He thinks it is true love."

"And what would you term it?" asked the juggler.

"A base, withering, blighting passion. It has its home in the senses, and not in the soul—it is a part of the body, and not of the spirit—it is a passion which destroys instead of saving—it works death instead of life, and misery instead of joy. It takes its life from the outward form of beauty, and when a few short years shall have shed their frosts upon that beauty and caused it to fade with age, all the love will be gone. Niao was beautiful once—and the prince loved her.

She grew old—and he forgot his love, for he never loved but with the passion of the sensualist. Alas, poor Niao!"

The juggler gazed hard into the face of Yu-lu, and his dark eye sparkled with an intense fire. He stretched forth his hand and placed it upon her head, and in trembling accents he said:

"Sweet child, if I live you shall be saved. Have no fears—only remain free for two weeks. I shall see you again then—and then I can tell you more than at present. I had only feared that the prince would hasten this marriage. I must leave you now, or I may be discovered. Keep up a good heart, and trust in God, for to his blessed care I leave you."

The old man turned and moved towards the door, but Yu-lu suddenly sprang towards him and caught him by the arm.

"You will save Paul!" she whispered.

"So you may hope," returned the juggler.

The maiden whispered her thanks, and having kissed the hand which she held she allowed her strange visitor to depart.

Ye-fu-hi gathered the folds of his long robe about him, and having bent his tall form, and set his staff heavily upon the floor, he took his way out into the upper hall, and down the broad staircase. It was now quite late in the evening, and as the lower hall was only lighted by a single lantern the place was not wholly free from gloom. When the old man had gone about half way down the stairs he heard a door open below, and instinctively he crouched away into the shade of the high parapet that guarded the outside of the stairway. He saw a man come out into the hall whom he knew to be the prince, and he was followed by an old mandarin. They passed through the hall and went out into the upper court, and the juggler determined to follow them, for he had the best of reasons for wishing to gain as much knowledge as possible respecting the grandee's movements; so he glided down the stairs as quickly as possible, and on reaching the court he saw the prince and the mandarin just passing behind a clump of rose bushes that grew in front of a vine-covered arbor. He crept softly up and listened, and he plainly heard them speak.

"I have set upon to-night," said the prince.

"Just as your highness pleases," responded the mandarin.

"Let it be done at midnight, and be sure that it is done most secretly."

"It shall be as you say."



"Because," explained the prince, "if the English devils at Shanghai should know of it they might make us trouble. Set the two most faithful men you have to do the work."

"I have two just such men as you need. They hear nothing and know nothing but their duty."

"It is well. Go now, and have the business progressing. Sack him in the prison channel, and be sure that he has weight enough to keep him down. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Then here is the warrant; and now you may be off."

The mandarin walked towards the street, and the prince turned back into his own dwelling. The juggler waited until they had both gone from sight and hearing, and then he glided away from his hiding-place. He thanked God that he had learned the plan of the base grandee, for now he could have a hand himself at shaping the snare of the dark plot.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ANOTHER BREAK IN THE GRANDEE'S PLOT.

COLDLY and terribly wrapped the icy flood about young Ardeen's form, but yet he prayed. He had yet sense enough left to know that he had not sunk, but that he was still swaying in the water. Strange! The stone was very heavy, and yet the sack went not to the bottom. Paul felt a movement. It was not down—it was upward! His body came in contact with something hard—it was not the prison wall, nor was it the bottom of the channel. Every muscle was already strained to its utmost—he must open his mouth and let the flood in upon his exhausted lungs, or the distended blood-vessels must burst. One gasp, and a strange sensation came over him. His face was cold as ice—the water settled away from his head, and the wet sack clung close to his cheeks and temples. He breathed—and it was fresh air that came to his lungs! Up—up, he moved—slowly and painfully, for his limbs were in contact with something that bruised them. He spoke not, and move he could not. At length his body was balanced, as though upon the edge of a plank, and in a moment more he felt himself laid upon a hard, solid resting-place. He knew that the mouth of the sack was being untied—that the top was drawn down—that the fresh air struck upon his brow—and then he opened his eyes.

"—sh!" he heard some one whisper in his

ear. "Speak softly. Are you as yet alive?"

"Yes," returned Paul.

"Then make no noise."

It was Ye-fu-hi who spoke, and Paul felt more gratitude than he could express in words. Carefully the juggler drew the wet sack off, and then he cut the cords with which the youth was bound. Paul felt himself free once more, and he stretched his limbs out with a grateful emotion. He found himself in a small boat, and on looking up he saw that he was directly beneath the platform from which he had been thrown.

"Do not speak," whispered the juggler, "for we may not yet be out of danger. Remain perfectly quiet, and we will soon escape from this."

Paul's mind was clear, and he comprehended all that had transpired. He knew that Ye-fu-hi must have been beneath the platform all the while, and caught him the moment he touched the water, which the darkness would enable him to do without being detected by those overhead. He listened attentively but he could hear no sound above him.

"Are they not gone?" he asked, in an undertone. "I can hear no sound."

"Yes—they have gone in, but they may come out again. See, through that crevice, there is a ray of light. We will wait until that is gone."

Paul looked in the direction pointed out, and

he saw through one of the cracks of the platform a crevice in the door beyond through which he had been led. Both of them watched the place, and ere long the door was opened, and some three or four men came out and looked over the edge of the platform. One whom Paul recognized as the old mandarin spoke:

"The water is all quiet," he said.

"Ay," answered the bonze, "and so must the *fau-kwei* be by this time."

"He will not tell his marvellous story again," said one of the executioners. "By the gilded joss, but his tongue did bear a strange story upon its point. I knew 'twas strange, though I could not understand it."

"I think our work is done," added the second executioner.

"Yes," said the mandarin. "All is quiet and safe. The fishes will dispose of him now. Your work is done, and I will so report it to our princely master. There is no need that we should waste more time here, so we will wish the departed one a safe journey on his dark road, and then be off to our homes."

There seemed to be a general assent to this proposition, and then all four of the men went back into the building and closed the door after them. It was not long after this before the light disappeared, and after waiting a reasonable time to make security doubly sure, Ye-fo-hi pushed his boat slowly and noiselessly out from beneath the platform. He did not venture out into the channel for a long distance, but he kept within the shade of the high walls that flanked the water, and pushed his boat along with his hands. At length, however, he came to a place where the shore was open, and taking a broad-bladed paddle from the thwarts he paddled out into the stream, and ere long they approached the moorings of the junks. Still the boat went on, nor did the juggler stop until he had reached a landing some two miles distant from the prison.

"We may land here," he said, as he reached forth and seized hold upon a ring which hung from an iron-wood post.

The boat was hauled close in to the stairs, and the juggler got out first, and then assisted Paul. After this the boat was made fast, and then the old man led the way up towards the town.

By the dim starlight, and by the still more dim light of the dusky lanterns that hung at the street corners, our hero could see that he was in

that part of the city which was mostly in ruins, and when he entered the first street beyond the head of the long canal he found that it was literally filled with dirt and rubbish.

"Never mind," said Ye-fo-hi, as he picked his way over the thickly disposed obstacles, "this is not so bad but that it might be worse. It is surely better than lying at the bottom of the canal."

"Surely it is," uttered the youth, treading lightly over the rubbish, and forgetting all his pains. "Two hours ago I could not even have hoped for life, but now I feel that I am safe."

"You will be safe if you do not repeat your wild freak of running away from me; but if you choose to try that again I cannot answer for your safety."

"Ah, there is no danger of that," murmured Paul. "But," he added, in a sad tone, "I am not now where I was then."

"No, you were upon the Tai-hou then, and now you are in Nankin."

"Alas! I meant not that. I meant that I had a companion then."

"So you did—a sweet companion."

"Do you know anything of her?"

"Wait until we reach a stopping-place, and I will then tell you what I know. There may be ears about when we least suspect it. Here—take my arm. We shall not be long now."

Paul took the proffered arm, and without asking more questions he kept on. Some half-dozen short streets were passed, and at length they came to a section of the city where the houses were in a better condition, and where the streets were less encumbered. The juggler led the way up a narrow court, around the angle of a dilapidated wall, and finally he stopped before a low building the door of which was some two feet below the level of the plank walk that led to it. At this door he knocked, and after a delay of some minutes it was opened by an old man who held a lighted candle in his hand.

"Ah, good Lin, be not afraid," said the juggler. "Your eyes are not so old but that they can serve you with my identity."

"I know you," answered the old man. "I know Ye-fo-hi."

"Then let me come in; and you see I have a companion who also claims your hospitality. It is all as I have stated."

The old man did not speak in reply, but he retreated from the door and beckoned for the two visitors to follow him. After they had en-

tered the hall he fastened the door, and then led the way to a small but neatly furnished room, which had only one window.

"Now, good Lin," said the juggler, "I know that my young companion must be very hungry, and his garments are also wet and uncomfortable. I will go with you and help you select dry clothes for him, and then you can prepare some food. Remember, my gold is good—and my friendship is better still."

"Speak not of gold," replied Lin, as he moved towards an inner door, "but come and get what you want."

Ye-fo-hi bade Paul to remain where he was, and then he followed the host from the apartment. When our hero was left alone he began to reflect upon what had transpired. The whole scene was before him, but it appeared only as a wild, terrible dream, and once did his mind wander so darkly that he even started up from his seat as though he would assure himself that he was awake. Surely it was all real! He had stood upon the very threshold of death, and the dark gate had been half-closed upon him, but a strange power had snatched him forth from the doom, and again he breathed and was free. "Free?" he murmured to himself, while his head was bowed upon his hands. "I think I am free, and yet I have a master. Upon my own arm I do not rest. But what is freedom now? Where is she upon whom my whole soul rests with all its hopes and joys? O, Yu-lu, if thou art nevermore to bless me, then why should I be free?"

He murmured thus, and while he murmured he held some lingering hope that the juggler would not stop in his work until he had made a trial, at least, in behalf of the maiden. At length his thoughts all centered upon the strange man who brought him forth from his death-doom. He held some vague ideas respecting the man, but even to himself he could not explain them—he could only feel sure that he was sorely puzzled, and that there was much yet to be known. Something whispered it to his belief that Ye-fo-hi was more than he appeared, for his every look and motion betokened a conscious power which springs only from legitimate inheritance. Yet Paul gathered no light from his surmises. He only bothered himself awhile, and then rested just where he began.

At the expiration of some fifteen minutes the juggler returned, and in his hands he brought dry clothing. Paul quickly divested himself of

his wet garments, and when he had put on the dry ones Lin brought in food and drink, and having satisfied himself that nothing more would be wanted, he withdrew, leaving the youth and Ye-fo-hi alone together. Paul looked up from his food and found the eyes of his strange companion fixed keenly upon him, and in spite of his assurance to the contrary of fear he could not repress a slight shudder. There was something in those eyes so dark and piercing, and their light was so deep and powerful, that they seemed to be penetrating his very soul.

"Paul Ardeen," the old man said, as the youth looked up at him for the fourth time, "I suppose you have wondered ere this how I happened to be so opportunely at hand to save you from death, and to save you the trouble of needless questions I will tell you all about it, if you would like to know."

"I should like to know," returned our hero, "for I have wondered, as you surmise."

"There was much of chance in your escape to-night," commenced the juggler, "for though I had determined to watch for your safety, yet I was not looking for your death so soon by some days, at least. I chanced to be at the palace of Prince Kong-ti, and I overheard him conversing with one of his mandarins. I heard just enough to convince me that you were to be placed in the sack and drowned, and I knew that the job would be done from the platform back of the prison, so I hastened away and took a boat, and having reached the prison I stationed myself beneath the plank staging, and there awaited the result. I heard them when they came out with you, and I watched for your descent. The moment you touched the water I seized the stout cord that confined the mouth of the sack, and having allowed you to sink out of sight I drew you carefully under the staging. You of course know the rest."

"Yes," murmured the youth, with a shudder.

"But," he added, after a few moments of thought, "you spoke of being at the palace of the prince. Did you learn if Yu-lu was there?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"Saw her!" repeated Paul, starting from his seat. "And did you speak with her?"

"Yes; and I have promised to try and save her from the fate that threatens her. I suppose your questions will soon reach that point, and I will anticipate you. I found the fair maiden well, but she was suffering much through fear. I consoled her, however, and when I left her she



was comparatively happy. Her heart is all your own, and her greatest suffering has been on your account. If you had been killed she would readily have taken her own life that she might have followed you. Such love as that is rare."

"O, Yu-lu—Yu-lu—bright, blessed being—Heaven bless you ever!" fervently ejaculated the youth, clasping his hands, and raising his eyes towards heaven. Big tears rolled down his cheeks, and his bosom heaved with a wild emotion. He arose to his feet and moved to the old man's side, and on the next instant he was upon his knees.

"Ye-fo-hi," he said, clasping the juggler's knees, "tell me what of hope I have. O, if you can save poor Yu-lu, God will bless you in the act. If you can gain admittance to the palace why can you not bring her forth from her prison?"

"That were now impossible," returned the old man, with tears in his eyes. "But get up from your knees. You need not ask of me any favors, for I will do all in my power without the asking. It was in the disguise of a priest that I gained entrance to the maiden, but I could not have brought her away. She is watched most narrowly, and every avenue leading to the palace is always watched. No, Paul, there is no hope of getting her away by force or stratagem, and yet I have undertaken the task. She is to remain in the palace two weeks, or nearly that, and you had better stay here during the same time. Old Lin is a good man, and he will be faithful. He knows enough of your case to appreciate your situation, and you need have no fears of trusting yourself with him. Of course there can be no danger so long as you do not expose yourself, for those who would wish to do you harm feel sure that you are past searching for. Now will you stay here until you see me again?"

The youth hesitated.

"Remember all the circumstances," added Ye-fo-hi. "In two weeks I will warrant your safety, but it might not be safe to expose yourself now. Will you remain here?"

"I will," said Paul.

"Then you are safe. Here you will have everything you can want, and all your comforts will be cared for. If I do not return as soon as two weeks you may know that I am no longer my own master, and under those circumstances you can do as you think fit, but until the expiration of that time you will remain here."

Paul was too grateful for favors already received to make himself impertinent by asking too many questions, and after arrangements were made with Lin, the juggler took his departure. It cannot be denied that the youth was all gratitude and thanks, but, strange as it may appear, no sooner was the wonderful man gone than our hero began to distrust him again. Perhaps it was not really distrust—it might better be said that he tried to study up grounds for distrust. In truth he could not fathom the man, and it was not his nature to accept with faith that which baffled his comprehension. Yet he resolved this time to keep his promise. The more he saw of old Lin the better he liked him, and after a few days of living beneath his roof he felt quite at home. He did not move out from the house, even in the evening, for he was resolved this time that if trouble came it should not be laid to his charge.

Time passed on, and Paul Ardeen grew more and more anxious. The name of Yu-lu was oftener upon his lips, and the dark, strange face of the juggler was oftener in his mind. Hope may not have grown any brighter, but his prayers were at least more fervent.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE GRANDEE'S PLOT IS ABOUT FINISHED.

DAY after day crept away, and Yu-lu remained beneath the roof of the Prince Kong-ti. She suffered some from his presence, and she suffered some through fear, for lately he had intimated that she was very soon to become his wife. The two weeks set apart by Ye-fo-hi had nearly drawn to a close when, late one evening, Yu-lu sat alone in her chamber. Lan had retired, and was now asleep in an adjoining room, and the maiden was left to seek her rest when she pleased, but she had not yet found her couch, for she knew that she could not sleep, so she chose to remain up and commune with her own thoughts. She had been thus alone for over an hour when she was startled by the sound of stealthy footsteps near her. She started up and listened, and she was sure that the sound came from one of the apartments upon her right. But what could any one be doing there? How could any one have got there? Those were the private apartments of the dead princess, and they were now closed, and no one allowed to enter them.

Yu-lu bent eagerly forward, and she was sure she heard the sound of feet there, and she also heard the opening of a door. Her eyes were fixed upon the silk-covered wall, and she saw a door open where she had never known there to be a door. It was opened slowly and noiselessly, and on the next moment a female form glided into her presence. It was a female robed

all in white, and Yu-lu sank back upon her couch and covered her face with her hands.

"Lady," spoke the mysterious presence, in a soft, sweet voice, "whoever you be, do not speak aloud nor cry out, for I have come to save you."

"You have come from Ye-fo-hi," said Yu-lu, re-assured in a moment.

"No—I have come from Paul Ardeen."

A quick, low cry broke from the maiden's lips, and she darted forward and caught her visitor by the arm.

"You are not deceiving me?" she said.

"No. I speak the truth."

"But you cannot lead me from this palace?"

"Yes, I can lead you by ways which they think not of guarding. But tell me first if there is danger of our being interrupted here?"

"No, not if we are still," returned Yu-lu.

The new-comer removed the white crape from her head, and the maiden saw her pale, wan features. She clasped her hands upon her bosom, and a groan burst from her lips.

"Not dead!" she whispered.

"Then you know me?"

"I have seen a picture hanging upon the wall in the next room. Are you not Niao?"

"Yes. I am the princess—Kong-ti's own wife; and I have come to take you away from here."

As soon as Yu-lu could overcome the wild emotions that raged through her soul at this astounding discovery, she laid her trembling hand upon the arm of the princess, and then pillowed her head upon her bosom.

"Ah," murmured Niao, as she felt the maiden's head resting upon her, "I do not wonder that Kong-ti loved you; but he shall not so wrong you as to tear your heart in sunder."

"And you will save me—you will lead me out from this place—you will carry me to Paul's presence?"

"Yes, sweet maiden."

"And how did you know Paul? how is it that you live? how—"

"Stop," interrupted the princess. "I know all this must seem very strange to you, but I can explain it." And thereupon she went on and related to Yu-lu all that had transpired in the dwelling upon the distant marsh, and of her escape from that place with her faithful Tsi, and she also told how Tsi had written an account of her death by drowning, and placed it where the prince would be sure to receive it. "For a long time," continued Niao, "we remained in the house of an honest peasant in perfect safety. At length I heard that you had been brought to the palace—Tsi learned it from some confidential source—and I resolved to come and save you, even if I had to expose myself. I was determined to punish the prince, and give to the people the truth of his character. So Tsi and myself started for the city, and we arrived last evening. We entered at one of the lower gates, and shortly after we had reached the first street we were met by a runaway horse. Tsi sprang forward to save me, and in so doing she was knocked down, and had one of her arms broken. I saw a narrow alley, or court, near at hand, and into that I assisted my unfortunate attendant. I went up the court because I wished to find a house somewhat retired, and I was fortunate enough to find such an one. It was inhabited by an old man named Lin, and he freely gave us welcome. This morning I found that there was also a young man in the house, and by degrees we found out each other's characters. Old Lin suspected me, and that probably helped on the matter. I found that youth to be named Paul Ardeen, and when he knew me he fell upon his knees and told me the whole story of his love for you, and also the story of his escape from the clutches of the cruel prince. It was he who told us how you suffered here, and I prom-

ised him that I would bring you to him. I knew that I could do this, for I knew of entrances to my own apartments in the palace which would not be guarded, and I had no doubt that I should be able to reach you. So I have come. You shall go with me, and when you are safe with the man you love, then I will return and confront that man who is my husband."

Yu-lu placed her arms about the neck of the princess and kissed her, and for a while they wept together, but they soon started up, for they knew that time was precious. The maiden hurried on such garments as she could command, and in a few moments she was ready. Niao led the way through the same secret door by which she had entered, and having closed this behind her without noise, she glided across the floor of her own room and gained a narrow corridor which led around to the artificial garden which had been built upon a platform raised on a level with the chamber windows. Into this garden they entered, and from thence they went down by a flight of stairs into a sort of aviary which had been closed for the past two weeks. From here the princess went out into the lower garden, and crossing over to the back side she found a postern which led to the bank of one of the canals. This postern she opened with a key which she carried in her pocket, and when that was passed they were clear of the palace grounds.

The females had taken but a few steps from the wall when they thought they heard loud voices from the palace, and on turning they saw lights flashing from the windows of the apartments they had just left.

"Those lights are in my rooms," said the princess.

"Then my escape must have been discovered," uttered Yu-lu, trembling like an aspen.

"Never mind," returned Niao. "Let us hurry on. The way is direct, and I can lead it straight. Courage, now, and keep close by me. Once beneath Lin's roof and you are free, for my presence will act as a charm over you."

With quick steps the women hastened on. Several times they heard steps behind them, and once Yu-lu was sure she heard the voice of the prince, but she faltered not. The presence of the princess was a tower of strength to her soul, and with hope bright-winged before her she hastened on through the deserted streets. They felt sure they were followed, but perhaps the followers were not after them. At length the princess turned up into the parrow court and

hurried on beyond the angle of the wall till she came to the low door of old Lin. Here she stopped and knocked, and the host himself answered the call. The females entered, and with a wildly beating heart Yu-lu followed her conductor into the small room towards which Lin had pointed. She passed the door—and she saw a human form moving towards her. A wild thrill shot through her frame—a dizzy blindness overcame her, and ere she could fairly comprehend objects about her, she felt a pair of strong arms encircling her—a kiss upon her upturned brow—a soft, sweet whisper in her ear, and a warm teardrop upon her cheek.

Gradually Yu-lu came back to the sphere of mental life, and she found herself resting upon the bosom of Paul Ardeen. A low, wild cry of joy broke from her lips, and she returned the fond embrace with all the energy of her soul. There was no need that they should tell more of their love, for every look and action spoke more than words could convey—and then they had heard from each other's love, even since they had been separated. With those two hearts it was a season when the tongue fails of doing duty to the heart—when the soul is frantic with its delirium of joy, and words would only clog the understanding.

The princess gazed upon the scene, and she fairly wept with sympathizing joy. She forgot for the time her own misfortunes, and only dwelt upon the happiness she had been the means of promoting in others.

But this scene was to be broken in upon. Paul had just led Yu-lu to a seat, and was bending his knee to the kind princess, when there came the sound of feet upon the plank walk in front of the dwelling, and in a moment more the front door was thrown open with a crash. Paul started to his feet and instinctively moved to Yu-lu's side, and on the next instant the door of their room was opened, and the Prince Kong-ti, followed by Li, entered the room!

The grandee's eyes fell first upon Yu-lu, and he had taken one step towards her when he saw Paul. He stopped, and for a moment the color fled from his face.

"What!" he at length exclaimed, starting back a pace. "You alive, and here! By the powers of heaven, there's been falsehood here, or else you have the powers of darkness to help you!"

"Not so, base man," quickly returned Paul,

for he felt at that moment a strange assurance. "It was the power of heaven itself that freed me from the death you had prepared for me."

"Then, by heavens! the next time you will call upon your power in vain, for I'll see the deed done myself. Look to him, Li while I secure this fly-away once more. Aha, my fair Yu-lu, you shall repent sorely of this."

He had advanced a single step towards the frightened maiden when he suddenly stopped and turned pale as death. His eyes had rested upon the pale face of the princess! His knees knocked together like reeds, and he laid his hand upon the back of a chair for support.

"You—you—here!" he gasped.

"Yes, Kong-ti," replied the wife, trembling fearfully, but yet maintaining herself with firmness.

"Does death haunt me here with its own subjects? Has the grave been opened to play the fool with me?"

"No, my lord. I have not yet been in the grave. That was but deception I practised upon you, and I never intended to see you again; but I heard that you had laid your foul hands upon a fair young maiden, and I resolved to come forth and save her, and punish yourself. O, my husband, I know your heart—I know how you would have rid yourself of my presence—I know of your secret visits to my chamber in that distant dwelling—and I know what you did there! Your midnight labors were watched. I did not drink the beverage you—"

"Stop! stop!" shouted the prince. "Speak but another word, and I'll cleave you where you stand! Your fate is fixed; and let me assure you that no power on earth can thwart me in my purpose. I am not to be made the toy of lying women."

"Ho, my master—some one is approaching," cried Li.

"Then let them approach!" exclaimed the prince, "for by the imperial crown there is not a soul in Nankin dares cross my path!"

"But they have stopped near the door, and there are many of them."

"Then go you to the outer door and tell them that the prince is here, and that he bids them disperse. It may be some of my guard who noticed my abrupt departure, and have come to protect me."

## CHAPTER XXII.

## CONCLUSION.

Li moved towards the door, but, before he reached it, it was thrown open, and a tall, stout man, habited in the rich garb of a British officer, strode into the apartments, and he was followed by half-a-dozen others, all of them officers, and wearing the same talismanic dress. One of them Paul noticed as Lord Archibald Sumpter, and sprang quickly towards him and extended his hand.

"How now?" exclaimed the tall man who had first entered, speaking the purest Chinese, "Are you here, Kong-ti?"

But the prince made no answer. He was thunderstruck at this wonderful presence, and his assurance all left him on the instant. He knew England's power, for his own emperor had been forced to bow to it.

"And you, too, fair maiden—you here?" continued the leader of the Britons.

Paul recognized that voice, and quickly leaving Lord Sumpter's side he approached the strange man; but Yu-lu was ahead of him, for with a bewildered look she gazed up into his face, and then she murmured:

"I am not deceived—Ye fo-hi!"

"THE JUGGLER OF NANKIN!" gasped the prince.

"Yes, my noble prince," returned he whom we have known as the juggler, with a look and

tone of the most ineffable scorn, "I have been long known as the Juggler of Nankin, but you may know me now as Lord William Buxton."

"Buxton!" uttered Paul, hardly able to credit the evidence of his own senses. "Lord William? Then I did not see you dead in the coffin at Hong Kong?"

"No, Paul," said Lord William, extending his hand and smiling. "That was my poor servant whom you saw there—or rather he was in the coffin, for I think the lid was not raised to show his mangled face."

"No—it was not. But yet people all said 'twas Sir William who lay there." Paul gazed wonderingly up into the nobleman's face as he spoke, and he was startled at the change which had taken place there. To be sure the features were still dark from long exposure, but the long braided moustache was gone, and the graceful, glossy curls of a well-fitting wig waved about his neck and temples. Then that noble dress possessed in itself a wonderful power of change.

"Yu-lu," spoke Sir William, approaching the trembling maiden and extending his hands. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke, and he trembled at every joint. The fair girl instinctively put forth her hands, and they rested in his. "Yu-lu," he repeated, the big tears rolling fast-

er and faster down his cheeks, "did you ever feel that this land could be your true home?"

"O, no, no!" she quickly cried; and as she did so she shook the hair back from her face and gazed up at the strange man with a look of almost painful intensity.

"Did you ever feel that you were of the same blood with those who have brought you up from infancy?" continued Sir William—his face all wet with tears, and still holding the maiden by both her hands.

Yu-lu disengaged one of her hands and pressed it hard upon her throbbing, aching brow. "Sir William," she slowly murmured to herself. "Lord Buxton," she added, still pondering deeply.

"CORA!" whispered the old man, in a deep, thrilling tone, again taking both her hands. "CORA!" he repeated, drawing her nearer to him.

The maiden started up from her pondering thoughts, and with a wild cry she uttered:

"So I was called once! and that same deep voice used to speak into my ear! O, great power of Heaven, what does it mean?"

"Cora, rest upon this bosom, for it was here you rested in infancy! Come to these arms, for they encircled you the day that you were born. Repose against my heart, for the blood that courses there is the fount from which your own life sprang!"

The maiden bowed her head, and it rested upon Sir William's bosom. Then she looked up, and whispered, "MY FATHER!" Then Sir William pressed her more fondly within his stout arms, and with a holy, happy light irradiating his features, he murmured:

"Heaven at last is opened, and my child—my angel child is restored to me. Yes, sweet one, you are not deceived. I am your father—your own true sire, and Heaven itself whispers the truth to your soul."

It would be hard to tell which of the spectators were the most affected by this strange scene. The princess seemed to feel only a calm, deep joy, as she stood with her hands clasped upon her bosom, and gazed with tearful eyes upon the father and child. Paul Ardeen was wonder-struck, but his wonder was not sufficient to keep back his tears. The prince Kong-ti gazed upon the scene with a mixture of strange, wild emotions, for he had thoughts that turned inward upon his own soul. Yet he was the first to speak:

"By the dark spirits of the pit," he uttered with his face all livid with mingled fear and rage, "I do not believe this marvellous tale."

"It matters little what you believe," returned the British nobleman, with darkly flashing eyes, "but for the sake of satisfying your wife, and, perhaps, yourself, I will explain the whole matter. It is now about seventeen years since I had difficulty at Canton with one of the wealthy merchants in that place. He cheated me most shamefully, and as I could gain no redress by law, I chastised him with my own hand. A few nights afterwards I had business with one of the ships in the harbor which detained me until morning, and when I returned to my dwelling at the factories I found that my wife and child had been stolen away from me! I gained entrance into the city, and the viceroy gave me some assistance in my search. One week afterwards my wife came back to me, but she brought not the child. She told me that about the middle of the night on which I was gone, three men had come to her chamber, and gagged and bound her, and then dragged her away, but the child was not carried with her, nor had she seen it. She had begged to have it brought to her, but her captors pretended to know nothing of it. She made her escape, but could not find her child. Our darling Cora was gone, and though I knew full well that the dishonest merchant had done the deed out of revenge for the punishment I had inflicted upon him, yet I could not prove it. The sad blow proved too much for my wife, and she died—and I was left alone!

"Some years afterwards I was sent for to attend at the bedside of a dying man, and I went. It was the merchant who had sent for me, and he confessed that it was himself who had stolen away my child, and he desired, before he died, to make all the reparation in his power. He told me where he had sent the child, and also gave me the assurance that she had been cared for and beloved by the family into whose hands she had fallen. As soon as I left the merchant's house I hastened to my own quarters, and having taken one of my servants to accompany me, I set out on my mission. It seems that on the very day I set forth there occurred a serious riot at the factories between the Chinese and English, in which a number of the natives were killed. It soon became known that I had gone out into the country, and a party of excited Chinese set out after me. They overtook me and my companion in a secluded spot, and at once set upon

us. My servant was killed, but I managed to make my escape. I afterwards learned that the assassins supposed they had killed me, and that having mutilated the body in a most shocking manner, they sent it to the factories. I also learned that my own countrymen supposed the body to be mine, and had buried it accordingly.

"I had found that my child had been removed from the place where she had been living, and that she had been taken a great distance to the northward. I was determined to seek her at all hazards, and as I felt it to be unsafe for an Englishman to travel about the country, I allowed the people at Canton and Hong Kong to suppose that I was really dead, and then I assumed the disguise I have since worn. I shaved my head, and painted my eyebrows. I spoke the Chinese language quite fluently then, but to hide what of proper intonation I lacked, I assumed an impediment of speech that effectually hid all the rest. I learned jugglers' tricks, purchased jugglers' implements, and then set out. I hailed from Nankin, and in Nankin I have spent much of my time. And so I travelled in search of my lost child. It was all I had on earth of treasure, and I set my life at forfeit in the enterprise. At length, after years of search, I got track of her, and I found a man who had passed as her uncle, and who really supposed he was her uncle, supposing her to have been the natural child of a dead brother. I had now so nearly conquered the peculiar intonations of the language that I threw off my impediment, and none suspected me.

"I hung upon this supposed uncle, for I knew that the girl who had been with him was my own Cora, but it was a long while before he would tell me the truth. At length, however, he confessed that he had sold her to the Prince of Nankin. Then I sat my watch upon the palace, and for months I hung about the place like a spectre, but it was only to find in the end that my child was not there. Next I noticed the journeys of the prince to the westward, and I turned my attention thitherward. I followed him several times, but lost him before he got to his journey's end. But I have found him now, and I have found my child, too. Ah, Cora, I think you will never flee from me again. Nor will you, Paul, either."

As Sir William closed his narrative his daughter once more rested upon his bosom, and this time Paul Ardeen came to his side and took his hand.

"Here, Paul," said Buxton, at the same time passing the hand of his sweet child over to his keeping, "you take charge of her for a while." And then turning to the prince he said, while the fire flashed in his dark eyes:

"Now, Prince of Nankin, I have but a word more to say to you. Below here, only a few miles, lies an English frigate. Her guns are all shotted, and her men are at their quarters, and for the while they are under my command. You have laid hands upon a British subject who has broken no law of your empire. I demand the person of Paul Ardeen to carry back with me, and of course I shall take my child. What say you?"

The prince started to his feet, and for a moment his hands were clutched nervously together. Then his eyes rested upon his Yu-lu—and then upon his wife—and then, with a deep groan, he sank back.

"Go," he said, "only never let me see your faces more."

"One word more I would speak," resumed Sir William. "There are men in the city who know how you have treated your own fair wife. If you take her back, and treat her well, they will be silent of the past, but if you repent not they will give the story of your infamy to the wind, and the whole empire shall know it. I have no more to say."

The gentle maiden glided to the side of the princess and wound her arms about her neck and kissed her, and in a low whisper she thanked and blessed her. Then she returned to her father, and ere long afterwards she was once more in the open street. In half an hour more she was upon the waters of the broad, deep river, and with a strangely beating heart she bade adieu to the great city of Nankin forever. She drew more closely to her father's side, but yet one of her hands reposed within the warm grasp of Paul Ardeen.

\* \* \* \* \*

In one month from the time of the scenes just recorded, there was a marriage ceremony on board a noble British frigate, and Paul Ardeen was the happy man who gained the wife. It was the blushing Yu-lu—the Cora who had been lost and found—that gave him her heart for aye, while the proud and happy father gave him her hand.

"Now for home!" cried Sir William, after the joyous deed was done. "Once more for Old England!"

And so the cry went through the noble ship—pealing forth from noble hearts—"Once more for Old England!"

Just as the anchor was apeak the deafening roar of gongs and drums came from the shore, and the Chinese flags upon the war-junks were lowered. Shortly afterwards a boat came off with the purser.

"What's to pay now?" asked Sir William Buxton.

"News has just come down that the Prince of Nankin is dead!" replied the purser.

Sir William turned away and joined his children, and to them he told the news he had heard.

"Dead!" murmured Cora, looking up with a moistened eye. "O, what a sad end must his have been. But he had my forgiveness, and I pray that God may be merciful to him. He will need mercy, for justice would be terrible."

Paul made no reply, for at that moment his thoughts were not such as could be expressed in words.

THE END

[FROM "THE FLAG OF OUR UNION."]

## THE GIPSY'S PREDICTION.

BY M. V. ST. LEON.

In one of the sunniest and most quiet spots of "Merrie England," on a high sloping bank overlooking a lovely interval through which a small river ran, was situated the ancient family mansion of the Eveleighs, and named "Hall i' th' Wood." When this mansion was first built, it was nearly imbedded in a grove, from which circumstance its name was derived, and though all that now remained of the grove were a few noble old sycamores in groups around the hall, and a double line on each side of the avenue, yet the thickly wooded hills and slopes which sheltered the interval, as well as a beautiful clustering line of elms on the little peninsula that stretched out on one side of the rustic bridge, prevented the name from becoming inappropriate. And the sheep and cattle on the meadow, quietly grazing, or standing in the river under the shade of the trees, the wavering heat of the sun's rays, and the quivering light through the green leaves, rendered the whole landscape fit for a painter's pencil.

The family at the hall consisted of Squire Richard Eveleigh and his daughter, Miss Helen, a beautiful young lady of twenty-two, and in the vacation they were enlivened by a visit from Master Harry Hazelton, the old squire's nephew,

a spirited, merry-hearted boy, nearly fifteen, and the idol of his uncle. The whole establishment was the beau ideal of a genuine English squire. The servants were numerous and always considerably treated, and the tenantry were objects of interest to their landlord. Was there sickness amongst them? Miss Helen was the first to know of it, and forthwith a basket from the hall was sure to make its appearance, containing precisely the things most needed.

Yes, it was a comfortable as well as a beautiful place, and Shapley Morgan realized it as he used to rest on his spade upon some green sunny slope. He was not the head gardener nominally, though in reality his opinion carried the day. Active, industrious and ingenious, far better educated than the generality of his class, and possessed of much kindness, he was looked up to by the servants more than his station would otherwise have commanded; he had a small but neat cottage, and a little kitchen garden which he found time to cultivate, besides a few rose bushes by the door, but the prettiest and most highly prized flower was his little daughter, Bessie, a bright and beautiful child of three years old. She was a perfect sprite, and when her father would try to scold her for some wild

prank, she would stand opposite to him, fold her little arms, and placing her head on one side, gaze archly with her roguish eyes from behind the clustering light curls which she had shaken over her face, and the chiding would end by her father's catching her up in his arms and flinging her toward the ceiling, declaring "she was his own little darling mischief of a Bessie!"

Miss Helen, too, took a great deal of interest in the little thing, and frequently would have her at the house for a week at a time, where she was petted and waited upon like a child of the family, and even the old squire himself would give up to her pretty waywardness. It was a wonder she was not utterly spoiled by such unbounded indulgence, for every one was tender to the motherless child; yet it seemed to have no injurious effect upon her, so she continued from year to year, twining herself into the affections of every one about the place.

When Bessie was six years old, among the visitors that summer at Eveleigh Hall, were the Earl and Countess of Allonby. His lordship was much pleased with the intelligence of Morgan, and it was finally settled that he should leave "Hall i' th' Wood" for the situation of head gardener at Allanton Park. The next morning after this arrangement, Miss Helen came down the rose walk with her easy, gentle step and manner, and stopping where Morgan was at work, said:

"And so you are going to leave us, I hear?"

"Yes, miss—it's not that I expect a pleasant home, for that would be hard to find, but it's natural for a man to be always looking to a little higher situation, you know, miss."

Miss Helen smiled. "O yes, I know Shapley—but your little girl, who will look after her? You will have to leave her behind."

At the mention of his pet, Shapley's face had looked disturbed, but at the mention of leaving her he eagerly exclaimed:

"O Miss Helen, I could not live without my little Bessie. She's my comfort and pet—but it's very grateful I am to you, miss, for the care and kindness you've shown to the poor child, and I'll never forget it, Miss Helen."

"Very well, Morgan, I know how it is, and it would be hard to deprive you of such a child, and she is all the little girl you have. I hope she may be spared to be a comfort to you in your old age."

"Thank you, miss—God bless her!" he ejaculated, as she turned down the next walk. "God

bless her and send her just the finest lord in the kingdom for a husband!"—and satisfied he had wished for her the greatest blessing on earth, he resumed his work with renewed vigor. Little did the worthy gardener suspect that had he wished for her partner in life the third son of a certain curate, it would have been much more heartily responded to by Miss Helen Eveleigh.

By another week, Shapley Morgan was installed at Allanton Park as head gardener. His son Leonard, a boy of fourteen, and little Bessie, were homesick at first, for they were not yet acquainted with any one on the estate, and Bessie would stand for hours on the splendid bridge with Moorish arches that spanned the lake at its narrowest part, gazing down upon the swans in the water below, and wishing for some playmate with whom to wander through this grove, that stretched out in a miniature headland, and that sunny green slope encircled by trees on all sides save that next the lake, and that sandy beach shelving down to the water.

One day while she was standing as usual on the bridge, she thought of Miss Helen, and wished some kind lady would come to her now and pet her as she had always been. While she was wishing, she saw a party of gentlemen and ladies come down to a little cove, attended by two servants, who unmoored a row boat, when the whole company entered and pushed into the lake. They were too far off for Bessie to distinguish their faces, but she hoped they would come nearer, which they presently did. Bessie did not know who any of them were, but she admired the easy grace with which one of the ladies held her parasol, and thought it must be a fine thing to be a great lady, and Miss Helen, who had hitherto been the standard of all gorgeous magnificence, fell far short of this lady, who dressed more for a morning sail than the former would have done for an evening party.

As the boat approached the bridge to pass beneath it, Bessie leant over to see them, when one of the ladies happening to glance upward, exclaimed:

"See, Clara, what a beautiful child!"

Covered with blushes and confusion at being detected in gazing at them, Bessie drew back from their sight and hid herself behind a projection. But the ladies, one of whom was the countess, wishing to speak to her, landed on the steps at the foot of the bridge, and advanced towards Bessie, who drew back to make way for them. But Lady Clara Allonby stopped, and

smoothing back the curls which had fallen over the child's face, said:

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Bessie Morgan," said the child, regaining her self-possession.

"Bessie Morgan," repeated her ladyship, "why your father is head gardener, and you are the little girl who used to be Miss Eveleigh's pet, are you not?"

"Yes, my lady. Miss Helen loved me, and used to let me come and stay with her a whole week at a time, but now I've nobody to pet me;" and she stopped and colored brightly, for she felt she was very bold to talk so freely to a stranger. But Lady Clara was pleased with the artless simplicity of the child, and said:

"You seem to be a very nice little girl, I think you must come home with me—would you like to, dear?"

Now Bessie and her brother had spent a deal of time wondering how Allanton House looked inside, Lenny always maintaining quite stoutly that he had no doubt it was as fine as Aladdin's palace, and believed there was even a roe's egg suspended in the drawing-room, which opinion he had striven hard to convince his sister was a veritable fact, but she had always been a little skeptical, and she now thought she should like to satisfy herself and be able to tell Lenny all about it, so she said she should like to go very much. Lady Clara took her by the hand, and she went gaily up to the splendid house that had always seemed a forbidden mystery to her.

In time the little Bessie became as great a favorite with the countess as she had been with Miss Helen, and even more, for Lady Clara's love of children amounted to a perfect passion, though she had none, and Bessie was petted and loved, almost as much as her own would have been. Surrounded by such influences, the child grew up a graceful, beautiful girl, rather slender for her age, with the sweetest, most thoughtful smile, and an easy elegance in every motion.

About this time, her father, from being a hale, hearty man, lively and affectionate, became thin and haggard, all his vivacity and spirits forsook him, and he grew morose, averse to companionship with anybody, never laughed or joked with his children as formerly, and poor Bessie, who was now thirteen, and Leonard a young man, were much troubled at this change. In vain did Bessie strive by unusual gayety to rouse her father from this melancholy state—her cheerfulness seemed to aggravate his gloom if possible.

While Bessie was thus burdened with care and sorrow, a ray of happiness shone forth to gladden her, and this new source of delight was the birth of a son at Allanton House. As the little fellow thrived and reached lusty babyhood, Bessie would frequently take some little trifle and trip across the secluded part of the grounds where her home was situated, to the boudoir of the countess, for an hour's romp with little Herbert. Notwithstanding the countess had now a child of her own, Bessie was still as welcome as ever, and frequently, when Lady Clara was without visitors, she would stay with her as a companion.

One morning as Lady Clara was sitting in an arbor, with Herbert (now three years old) in her lap, holding in his hand a pet goldfinch, while Bessie stood behind him, her golden curls not yet confined by a comb, shading her face, they became aware of another person's presence in the shape of a young and handsome man, whom Lady Clara welcomed with cordiality, and introduced to Bessie as Mr. Thornton. Mr. Thornton bowed and expressed much pleasure in making Miss Morgan's acquaintance, while Bessie felt an unaccountable aversion to this apparently fine man, which was not diminished by his perceptible admiration of her, and Bessie, glad of an opportunity to escape his frequent gaze, eagerly begged Lady Clara that she might be allowed to complete the visit she was then making at some future time, as Mr. Thornton had announced that a party of her ladyship's friends were on the way to Allanton Park, and, he had ridden forward to announce the fact. Lady Clara had always desired Bessie to remain at Allanton even when visitors were there, in spite of the disparity of rank, for she was very proud of her protegee, and although Bessie was now sixteen, still regarded her as a child, but Thornton's manner had opened her eyes to the fact that Bessie was a young and lovely girl, and she felt it was no real kindness to expose so beautiful a person to the notice of those with whom she could never associate as an equal, and thus perhaps unfit her for her station in life, and therefore much to Bessie's surprise and relief she was allowed to return home, Lady Clara saying she should most certainly claim her the instant she was alone again.

That afternoon the expected guests arrived, and they formed quite a medley. There was the Duke of Rothsay, a brilliant, noble-souled man, and an eloquent politician. The duchess, a cold,

haughty beauty, with a chilling atmosphere always surrounding her, and Lady Margaret Stuart, the duke's sister, a bright, sunny picture of happiness. The Hon. Marcus Broughton, a cool, calculating statesman, keen and glittering as a diamond, and with whom the generous, impulsive duke often disagreed in politics. Lady Eleanor Broughton, a dreamy, poetical looking woman; Lord Frederic Verisopht, a cousin of the duchess, and Mr. Plympton, a sort of humble friend to Mr. Thornton, a wily, sycophantic looking man, who always echoed his patron's sentiments, and whom Thornton called "Plym," for the short of it, as he always said.

When Thornton discovered that Bessie had returned home he was quite vexed, and when informed of her humble station, was quite amazed, but he determined to see the shy, provoking girl, if she had run away from him; she was the first woman that ever did, and she should not do so long—and with this laudable resolution he fortified himself. Accordingly Bessie was completely beset by her new acquaintance in all her walks, till finally she would not go out alone, as she did not wish to listen to the compliments, and receive the pointed attentions of Thornton.

In the course of a fortnight, a picnic was proposed by Lady Clara, and met with the approbation of her guests. Bessie had a fine musical talent which Lady Clara had encouraged and cultivated, and she therefore invited Bessie to join the party and entertain them with her singing. The order in which they were to drive to the picnic was as follows. The Earl and Countess of Allonby, Lady Margaret Stuart and Lord Frederic, in the earl's coach. Hon. Marcus Broughton and Lady Eleanor in a stanhope, while Mr. Thornton with his dashing currie, hastily desired Miss Morgan's acceptance of the spare seat, as Plympton was to ride on horseback, which statement Plympton immediately confirmed, though till that instant he had been perfectly ignorant of any such arrangement, but a desire of Thornton's had only to be expressed in order to be accomplished.

Bessie turned to where Lady Clara had been standing an instant before, to appeal for advice, but the countess had left the room, and poor Bessie with much repugnance accepted the offer of Thornton, who was chagrined at her manner, but fancied he should find means to alter it during the drive. Lady Clara on discovering this arrangement was much provoked, but with her usual quickness hit upon a remedy. Her

nearest neighbor, Sir Thomas Callowplush, a good-natured baronet—always excepting during fits of the gout—had a charming daughter in spite of her name, and an only son and heir, Waddilove Callowplush, a better-natured creature than whom never lived, but the most awkward fellow, forever attempting to help somebody to something, and as invariably spilling it all over them, or introducing some one to some other charming person between whom there was a most decided animosity of opinion, or endeavoring to give descriptions of places on the continent, and putting the Lake of Como in Sweden, and the Scandinavian Alps in the south of Italy, and when rectified by any one on these points, he would plead in excuse, "Well, there certainly were Alps in Switzerland, and a lake somewhere in Sweden, and he was not so far from right after all!" and his friends would then exclaim, "dear Waddy!" while the subject of these ejaculations would resume the tart he had held while speaking, with most perfect unconcern.

His face was round and florid, his hair a faint yellowish clay color, his eyes greenish, and his figure square. His coats were short-waisted, with a habit of hunching up, and the large collars were continually resting on his ears. His arms were always at right angles, and a back view of this young gentleman was quite a study for the ludicrous.

Lady Clara's plan was to invite Miss Callowplush and brother at the last minute, well knowing as Miss Louise could not ride horseback from timidity, and Bessie was quite fearless, the latter of course would be obliged to resign her seat in the currie to Miss Callowplush, and in accordance with this plan, Miss Louise and Waddilove arrived about half an hour before the party were ready to start. Lady Clara informed Thornton of the necessity for his changing partners, adding, he would no doubt find the new one much more agreeable. But Thornton was not at all of this opinion, and though he assented with as much politeness as he could, he inwardly resolved to manage one such overthrow for Miss Callowplush, as should frighten her from riding horseback for the remainder of her life. But Plympton seeing his patron's discomfiture, devised a plan in his own mind to remedy it by breaking the tire to one of the wheels, and when the company began filling the vehicles, it was discovered that Mr. Thornton's carriage was quite disabled, and would be obliged to follow in the course of the forenoon. Miss Louise



therefore took Lord Verisopht's place in the coach, and that gentleman, with Bessie and Waddilove, mounted and rode off. Plympton staid behind with his principal. So, much to Thornton's chagrin, the party of pleasure commenced anything but agreeably, and Plympton, who had remained to tell his patron of his cunning contrivance, found he had better have gone on and escaped being made the butt of Thornton's ill humor.

However, all things have an end, even vexation, and when Thornton arrived at the picnic, his temper was considerably improved. Bessie was playing and singing, while the company were listening with profound attention, all except Waddy, who was softly sliding round towards the baskets, peeping under the covering of one, and feeling gingerly of a paper bundle in another to form a probable guess as to its contents (and here let us say, *en parenthèse*, that on all subjects connected with good eating, Waddy was very clear headed), and during the last two verses had quietly and contentedly sat munching a sweet cake, listening with attention and exclaiming at its conclusion with a fresh mouthful, "Yes, very pretty—nice, come and get some of these maccaroons, Bessie."

Thornton's appearance was greeted with pleasure, and the demand for a song. Advancing to Bessie, who gave him the guitar, he received it with an earnest, yet smiling gaze, and unseen by all except Bessie, touched his lips to it as he bent down apparently to examine it. Bessie, although confused, endeavored to appear as if she had not seen the action, but immediately Thornton commenced the prelude to a song.

"The maid I love is young and fair,  
Though not as others be;  
'Tis not her beauty, but her air  
That makes her dear to me.

"It is her childlike confidence,  
Her soft, appealing eye;  
But ah, I'm in a sad suspense,  
The maiden's much too shy.

"I know not if she loveth me,  
Although the blushes rise  
Whene'er by fortune's fantasy,  
I chance to meet her eyes.

"No word for me she e'er doth speak,  
Save short replies to mine;  
Dear girl, how canst so cruel treat  
A heart so wholly thine?"

As Thornton sang the last lines, he fixed an ardent yet reproachful gaze on poor Bessie, who

had thought herself secure from his attentions while the song should continue, and found it converted into a source of annoyance. Lady Clara was vexed, Bessie embarrassed, and all the company began to see the drift of the song except Waddy, who, with his mouth half full, exclaimed, "Well, really I should think you meant Bessie, but though you didn't, she deserves to have a song made up about her, and I'll compose one myself, sometime."

The general laugh that followed somewhat surprised Waddy, who saw nothing laughable, but he joined in it as he always did in any mirth of such undoubted judges of wit, taking it for granted they knew best, and that there must be something very amusing going on.

"Weally you must have composed it yawself, it's so-aw vewey-miswarabley foolish."

An uproarious laugh followed this speech, and the Hon. Mr. Broughton whispered to Lady Margaret, "How much a fool that's been to roam, excels a fool that's staid at home!"

"Pon onaw, Lady Mawgawet, you aw keeping some excwuciatingly wich ideaw faw yaw pwivate edification. Pway infwam us what it is."

Lady Margaret replied "they were speaking of travelling," and Lord Frederic turned to Thornton, who was leaning against a tree that overhung the river.

"Vewy foine gwirl that pwotege of Lady Clawa's. Aw've a gweat mind to have some convawsat'ion with haw, but-aw don't you think Alcestaw, she's-aw-vewy wesewwed, wather hawd to come at?"

"Yes, very much puffed up at being raised above her station, she makes quite too much of herself."

"You expwess quite my sentiments on thaw subject—gweat pity—chawming gwirl othawwise—aw twied to talk with haw widing out heaw, but all the way she indiscwiminately lavished haw chawms on Callaw—aw thought she might have managed bettaw," and Lord Frederic smoothed down his moustache.

Just then Plympton came up to the party and announced that an old gipsy just the other side of the high wall at a little distance, said she would tell the fortunes of the lords and ladies if they would like. This announcement was received with many laughs and jests, but they all agreed for the sake of a joke to try her skill, the Earl of Allonby adding, "Of course the woman has taken means to ascertain who we all are, and we need be surprised at nothing she may

tell us, for these gipsies are shrewd and very artful."

As the old woman would only allow one at a time to come to her, they drew lots for their turns. The Countess of Allonby's first, and she returned, saying the woman was pleased to set herself up for a poetess, and repeated this rhymed couplet:

"Much joy, more years, of crosses fewer,  
To her who's kind to rich and poor."

A peal of laughter followed the recital of this doggerel, and Lady Margaret went to the gipsy. She rejoined them very shortly, and repeated:

"Thy path is, and shall be on roses, and yet  
There's one pricking thorn, Lady Margaret."

The duchess next sought the fortune-teller, and repeated with a scornful curl of her coral lip:

"Sorrow shall school the heart that's proud,  
And wreathe each pleasure with a shroud."

The next lot was drawn by Miss Louise. She came back laughing, and with mock solemnity recited:

"Though now a maiden fair to see,  
Yet thrice a widow thou shalt be."

"My dear young lady, I advise you never to enter into the state of matrimony with such dismal prospects before you," said the Earl of Allonby.

"Thaw's so many additional chances faw us," lisped and drawled Lord Frederic.

Lady Eleanor's turn came next, and the gipsy holding her hand an instant, said:

"The grave and long years have rolled o'er thy first love,  
But soon thou wilt meet him thou lovest, above."

Lady Eleanor turned pale and hastily departed, and on joining the company, said she did not think she could repeat the words exactly, and it would lose all interest if not told correctly.

Bessie now went. The place was on the further side of a plank fence, a high bank running at right angles with the fence and forming two walls, and in the corner stood the gipsy, a malicious, spiteful looking hag, whom Bessie recognized as belonging to a gipsy encampment that had been stationed on the common near Lord Allonby's estate several years. She held Bessie's hand a few moments without speaking, and then eyed her with such a murderous leer, that Bessie's gaze sank, and her heart beat quickly, but reflecting that no harm could possibly be intended her by a person whom she had never injured, she quietly awaited the old woman's

verse, but instead of the expected rhyme, the hag, without taking her eyes from her companion's face, said:

"Bessie Morgan, would you like to know the reason of your father's alteration?"

Bessie started, but controlling herself, replied:

"I should—but what light can you give me?"

"You shall judge for yourself. Will you promise not to scream or weep, and above all never to relate what I shall tell you?"

Her companion with a pale, eager face gave the required promise.

"Remember," said the gipsy, "you are not to utter a sound or cry. Listen. Shapley Morgan, your father, is a murderer!"

Bessie screamed nor fainted, but in a low, husky voice, and with trembling limbs, said:

"Have a care, woman—you must prove what you say."

"Ay, and that I can to your heart's content. See!"

Then she produced a large, rusty, garden-knife which was carved on the handle with the name, S. Morgan. Bessie with a shudder, recognized it as the mate to one her father owned, and remembered that this very knife had been lost three years ago, and that search was made for it, and she chokingly gasped:

"What of that knife?"

"Much, and more's to come, Bessie Morgan," and she held her companion's arm firmly; "I myself saw him do it!"

The woman's manner was not to be doubted, and Bessie felt a deadly chill creep over her.

"O, what shall I do, what shall I do?" groaned the poor girl.

"Do? I'll tell you. Marry some rich man and have the matter hushed up. No one cares to speak when they're paid for being silent. With your face and manner, you may surely do that—are you certain the chance is not even now before you?"

Bessie shuddered. "O, could she marry Thornton?" But the thought hardly flashed across her mind ere it was swept over by a flood of old cherished memories. "William Kennedy her playmate in childhood, her protector, and lover in girlhood—he was her only love, and his wife only would she be," and turning to the gipsy she inquired, "Why do you tell me this—why advise me?"

"For your own interest, and perhaps mine. I love gold, and I tell you unless I am paid a price that only a wealthy man can give, I will

reveal all without reservation, so take your choice—disgrace or Thornton."

Bessie did not, could not answer, and the woman added:

"You have a week to decide in—now go—and mind you betray no agitation to yon folks," and she menaced Bessie with her finger.

As the wretched girl joined the group, her face was pale, her hands icy, and her brain burning, yet she managed to conceal her emotion from all but Lady Clara, who said in a low tone:

"I hope, my child, you are too sensible to be affected by an idle fortune-teller," while the duchess remarked to Lady Margaret, "These low classes are always so superstitious!"

Now came the gentlemen's turn. Thornton went first, and had scarcely gained the enclosure, than he eagerly exclaimed:

"Have you succeeded?"

"I cannot tell—her emotions were not very flattering to you," drily answered the gipsy, "and I think you had better desist from further pursuit."

"Desist? Not I—that's a thing I never do. The foolish girl will find it useless to struggle against fate. But how do you think she will decide?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I should say the more you keep out of her sight, the more likely you will be to succeed."

Thornton bit his lips at this unpalatable advice, but resolved to follow it, if he could. He then returned to the company and was followed by the others, after which came lunch.

Thornton had by a circumstance too intricate to be here narrated, become acquainted with the fact of this old gipsy's having witnessed the murder committed by Bessie's father, and immediately devised what he thought would be a sure plan to obtain Bessie. The old woman's being on hand at the picnic, was a concerted measure, and she had agreed for a certain sum to play the part assigned her, that of threatening Bessie into Thornton's power.

In consequence of the gipsy's advice, Thornton's manner was quite altered. A distant, respectful air, instead of his former bold admiration, made him appear much better, yet Bessie's resolution never faltered. But that night as her weary head rested on its quiet pillow, she felt encompassed by a net, for though she could hardly believe her father guilty, she knew others would think less leniently, and it might be her duty to save her father by sacrificing herself. At

last a thought entered her mind—she would see Thornton—she would urge him to abandon his cruel persecution of her, for she felt persuaded, though why she could not tell, that he had instigated the gipsy to her threat. Accordingly the next day and several succeeding ones, she no longer avoided the spots where she had been annoyed by Thornton's joining her, and sought these places at the times she had been accustomed to, but all in vain, he whom she had always met when she did not wish to, now seemed to have vanished, and it was really so, for Thornton was following the gipsy's advice.

But one afternoon, unable longer to resist an impulse of curiosity to regard Bessie's movements, Thornton entered the shady path leading in the direction of Margaret's cottage. He had not advanced far when the sound of weeping reached his ear, and on listening, he heard his own name uttered in tones of reproach. The thick carpet of dry leaves prevented the approach of Thornton from being heard, who believing himself to be the cause of these tears, and that Bessie had repented of her conduct towards him, bent down, and placing his arm around her waist would have drawn her to him, but in the instant, the astonished girl stood before him with flashing eyes, and trembling with indignation, demanded:

"How dare you touch me, despicable wretch!"

Even Thornton's eyes sank beneath the lightning blaze of hers, but he replied:

"Why, what a storm about a trifle! I meant nothing, that you should resent it so. What's the matter?"

"Matter! Is it not enough matter that you not only insult and annoy an unoffending, defenceless girl, but you must threaten her with sorrow if she will not become your wife? Do you call yourself a man—a gentleman? and amuse yourself with attacking a feeble woman? What sort of a partner do you think a girl would make, who is forced into a marriage she loathes? How will she regard the man who obliges her to become his wife by compulsion?"

Bessie saw by the red flush which had mounted to Thornton's face as she commenced speaking, that her surmise was correct as to the part he played in the affair, but the covert, sinister smile which had passed over his features and gleamed out from his eyes, as she had alluded to his compelling her to be his wife, had not escaped her, and a terrible light flashed through her mind. Could it be it was not as a

wife he intended her? She determined to assure herself, and answered feebly to his question:

"Why would she not save herself so much misery?"

"I must ask my father's consent."

"No, no, my dear girl," for Thornton, thinking she was wavering, quite forgot his prudence, "not so, it must all be private to effect its object. My father would disinherit me if our marriage were to be known. But it will be no less a union for being kept secret—I can command the services of a young friend who has just taken orders to perform the ceremony, and then, dear Bessie, you will be mine—and you shall never regret it, my angel!"

And he again attempted to clasp Bessie in his arms, but with a calm content in manner and voice, she replied:

"Stand back! I have heard enough to convince me that there lives a creature so base, the very air he breathes is pollution. Alcester Thornton, you know it is not as a wife you seek me. Do your worst—bring shame and sorrow on those who never injured you or yours, destroy the good name of an innocent family if you will—but never look for another word from Bessie Morgan!"

And with an air of regal dignity no one could have believed her capable of, she swept by the amazed Thornton and disappeared.

"Gone, by Jove! Who would have thought it? And here I, fool that I was, imagined she was coming over to me, that I was sure of winning—" and the baffled, enraged villain gave way to a perfect storm of fury. But rising at last with an awful imprecation, and a threat of "paying off the little witch," he moodily returned to Allanton House.

Poor Bessie! Trouble seemed gathering around her whichever way she turned, yet one heavy load was taken off her conscience. It was clearly her duty now not to listen to Thornton, and all she could do was to remain quiet and await the progress of what she could not control. The storm burst at length in all its fury, and Shapley Morgan was imprisoned on the charge of murder. The whole neighborhood was astounded. His friends, and they were many, said his innocence would be proved, but his enemies, and his gloomy harshness for the last three years had created some, said his moroseness had not been for nothing, and they wagged their heads significantly. But when the trial came on, even his friends were appalled at the evidence of one of the witnesses—the old

woman before mentioned. Her story was as follows, divested of the inaccuracies of expression in the original.

"On the night of the 19th of March, 18—, now three years ago, I was out late in search of some herbs near the ruins of Dunraven. (Dunraven had formerly been the residence of the family of which the Allonbys were a branch. The ruins of this castle were on a distant part of the estate, and its solitude was seldom disturbed.) The moon was struggling through watery clouds, for there had been a heavy rain, and the wind yet whistled and blew quite high. Suddenly, as I looked up, I saw a glimmer in one of the windows of the underground apartments of the ruin. My curiosity was excited to know the reason of a light in a place so utterly deserted. I therefore advanced, and hidden by the dense masses of ivy I looked in, and saw in the middle of the apartment by an open trap door, Shapley Morgan, and a man well known in these parts, and whose mysterious disappearance three years ago caused so much wonder—James Wilcox. The former was holding a dark lantern, while Wilcox was standing in a trench which he had apparently just dug, and throwing up the earth under the flagging. Wilcox presently exclaimed, 'We've come to it at last,' and I heard a ringing sound as if something metal had been struck. 'The chest is so large it cannot be lifted—we shall have to open it and fill the bags with the money,' said Morgan. Wilcox opened the chest and commenced filling the bag which had been thrown down. At last he came out of the pit. They shovelled the earth back, replaced the flagging, and then sat down to divide the treasure. But now a dispute arose between them. Wilcox wished to divide equally, but Morgan was unwilling. High words were spoken, and from thence blows, till at last they grappled and fell, Wilcox underneath. Morgan struck him several blows, and at last a tremendous one caused Wilcox to utter a heavy groan, and fall back with a dull, heavy sound.

"Morgan sprang up, and having satisfied himself of Wilcox's death, took a pickaxe and commenced raising the flagging, intending to bury the body no doubt, when by a movement, I startled an owl in the ivy, who flew screeching to where Morgan was at work. Starting up in fright, and letting fall the pickaxe, he hastily clutched the bag and fled, overturning the lantern in his confusion. I remained quiet until all was still again, and then entered the ruin. On the floor lay the murdered man, and beside

him a knife, and several coins which he had dropped. (Here she produced them both.) I have kept them, as the coins are not such as are now used, and I dare not change them. I left the ruin and returned the next day, but the body had disappeared in the night, and all traces of it were gone. I suppose Morgan took care of it."

Morgan pleaded guilty to the murder, but denied all knowledge as to what became of the corpse. He was sentenced to be hung, but during the three months that intervened between his sentence and the execution of it, his children visited him frequently, and at last Bessie would enter the cell at morning, and stay till night, when Leonard came for her. Time passed, and the last day. Morgan ever was to see rose clear, warm and cloudless. The birds sang merrily, the leaves rustled in the breeze, and the air was filled with perfume. It seemed as if Nature had put on her brightest dress for the criminal's last gaze to rest upon. There wanted but half an hour to the time he was to be led forth to the scaffold, and Leonard and Bessie were with him, the latter clasped in his arms, while Morgan was counselling them with regard to their plans.

"When I am no more, do not remain in England, but go to the new, free country—to America. You are active and industrious, Leonard, and will find plenty of friends and employment, and Bessie will be safe from the pursuit of Thornton, besides, there will be no one to remind you of the disgraced name you bear. Promise me this, my children."

Leonard, deeply moved, yet in a firm voice, gave the required assurance.

In a few moments the officers came for Morgan, and poor Bessie, who had always been the pet and plaything of the old man's heart, was so overcome that she fainted in her brother's arms. Morgan was led forth and mounted the scaffold with a firm step. The clergyman in attendance had stepped aside, and the hangman prepared for his duty; as the cap was placed on Morgan's head a shudder passed over his frame, but in an instant he was firm again. There was a deathly silence amid the crowd which was gathered around.

"Stay, stay, I command you!" rang out a clear, hearty voice above the multitude, and a tall, stout man in a great coat, nimbly mounted the scaffold, and turning to the wondering crowd, pulled off his hat, and exclaimed:

"Does no one here know me?"

A loud cheer burst from the assembly, which rose and swelled like the roar of the ocean.

"Hurrah, hurrah, three cheers for Wilcox!"

Morgan, who had at the first sound of that voice snatched the cap from his head and gazed wildly around, now seized the new comer by the hand, while the tears poured down his aged cheeks. Wilcox, seeing Morgan's distress, attempted to cheer the old man by his lively exclamations:

"Why, man! I believe you're sorry to see me back! We'll have another bout yet, but it shall be a fairer one than the last. Cheer up and shake hands with an old friend—" and all the while the speaker drew the back of his hand across his eyes and face, to wipe the perspiration he said.

A happy day was that which had promised so much misery at its commencement, and the Morgans listened with eagerness while they almost questioned if it were not all a dream, as Wilcox related his adventures.

"The first thing I remember after that blow, which laid me senseless, and as you supposed dead, was a dull, heavy pain in every joint of my body; as I looked about I recollected where I was and what had passed, and on rising, found that although very lame and sore, no bones were broken. I went out of the ruin and was thinking how I should escape, for to show myself in the state I was in, would be sure to excite suspicion and reveal the night's employment, when an old horse belonging to the gipsy encampment passed by, and began to crop the herbage. As it was saddled, I instantly mounted and started for the next town. I arrived at dawn, and leaving old Dobbin to find his way back, went on board a schooner that was just leaving for America, and engaged to work my passage out. I staid in that country till I had earned enough to make myself comfortable, and then I determined to come back to old England, thinking Shapley, you might be worried by the thought of having killed me. What was my surprise to find when I reached here, that you were to be hung as my murderer. I hastened on, and arrived, as you know, just in time. And now let me advise you, young man," turning to Leonard, "to push on for America. It is a glorious country, plenty of rich, new land to be had almost for the asking. I've a strong notion of going back myself, as a sort of pioneer for you, if you'll agree to it?"

"It's the very thing we've been thinking of, Mr. Wilcox," said Leonard, "and we should be glad to have some one go who knows about the country, and perhaps the Kennedys will go with us, Bessie," he added, looking towards his sister, whose cheeks were instantly crimsoned with a blush.

"The more of us the better," answered Wilcox; "we'll make quite a settlement."

The Earl and Countess of Allonby were unwilling for the Morgans to go at first, but Shapley said, "the old place would never seem so pleasant again, as it once had," and they agreed with him, and although Lady Clara wished much to retain Bessie for a companion, she encouraged the project and aided them in it. On account of Thornton's persecution of Bessie, the party sailed sooner than they had intended. In the backwoods of America they found a happy and cheerful home, where contentment and prosperity blessed them to the end.

THE END.