
FERGUS
HUME
THE MANDARIN'S FAN

**Fergus Hume**

# The Mandarin's Fan

EAN 8596547331872

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

# CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

## The Advertisement

One July evening in the first year of the present century, two gentlemen were seated on the terrace of the mansion, known as Royabay. A small rose-wood table was placed between the deep arm-chairs, and thereon appeared wine, coffee, and a box of cigars. The young host smoked a briar and sipped coffee, but his guest, very wisely, devoted himself to superlative port and a fragrant cigar. Major Tidman was a battered old soldier of fortune, who appreciated good quarters and made the most of civilised luxuries, when other people paid for them. He had done full justice to a dinner admirably cooked and served, while Ainsleigh, the master of the feast had merely trifled with his food. Now, the wary Tidman gave himself up to the perfect enjoyment of wine, cigar and the quiet evening, while his host restlessly changed his position a dozen times in ten minutes and gloomed misanthropically at the beautiful surroundings.

And these were very beautiful. From the moss-grown terrace shallow steps descended to smooth lawns and rainbow-hued flower-beds, and solemn pines girdled the open space, wherein the house was set. And under the radiance of a

saffron coloured sky, stood the house, grey with centuries of wind and weather, bleaching sun and drenching rains. With its Tudor battlements, casements, diamond-paned and low oriel windows, half obliterated escutcheons; its drapery of green ivy, and heavy iron-clamped doors, it looked venerable, picturesque and peaceful. Tennyson sang in the Palace of Art of just such a quiet "English home the haunt of ancient peace."

On the left, the circle of trees receded to reveal the majestic ruins of an abbey, which had supplied the stones used to construct the mansion. Built by the weak but pious Henry III., the Norman-French name Royabbaye (King's Abbey) still designated the house of the courtier who had obtained the monastery from another Henry, less pious, and more prone to destroy than to build. The country folk had corrupted the name to Royabay, and its significance was almost lost. But the owner of this fair domain knew its meaning, and loved the ancient place, which had been in the Ainsleigh family for over three hundred years. And he loved it the more, as there was a possibility of its passing away from him altogether.

Rupert was the last of the old line, poor in relations, and poorer still in money. Till the reign of George the first the Ainsleighs had been rich and famous: but from the time of the Hanovarian advent their fortunes declined. Charles Ainsleigh had thrown in his lot with the unlucky Stewarts, and paid for his loyalty so largely as to cripple those who succeeded him. Augustus, the Regency buck, wasted still further the diminished property he inherited, and a Victorian Ainsleigh proved to be just such another spendthrift. Followed this wastrel, Gilbert more thrifty, who strove, but vainly, to restore the waning fortunes of his race. His son Markham, endeavouring to acquire wealth for the same purpose, went to the far East. But he died in China—

murdered according to family tradition—and on hearing the news, his widow sickened and died, leaving an only child to battle with the ancestral curse. For a curse there was, as dire as that which over-shadowed the House of Atreus, and the superstitious believed—and with much reason—that young Rupert as one of the Ainsleighs, had to bear the burden of the terrible anathema.

Major Tidman knew all these things very well, but being modern and sceptical and grossly material, he discredited such occult influence. Expressing his scornful surprise, that Rupert should trouble his head about such fantasies, he delivered his opinion in the loud free dictatorial speech, which was characteristic of the bluff soldier. "Bunkum," said the Major sipping his wine with relish, "because an old monk driven to his last fortifications, curses those who burnt him, you believe that his jabber has an effect on the Ainsleighs."

"They have been very unlucky since," said Rupert gloomily.

"Not a bit of it—not a bit. The curse of Abbot Raoul, didn't begin to work—if work it did, which I for one don't believe—until many a long day after this place came to your family. I was born in this neighbourhood sixty and more years ago" added the Major, "and I know the history of your family. The Ainsleighs were lucky enough till Anne's reign."

"Till the first George's reign," corrected the young man, "so far as money goes, that is. But not one of them died in his bed."

"Plenty have died in their beds since."

"But have lost all their money," retorted Rupert.

"It's better to lose money than life," said Tidman evasively.

"I'm not so certain of that Major. But you should talk with Mrs. Pettley about Abbot Raoul's curse. She believes in it."

"And you Ainsleigh?"

Rupert shrugged his shoulders. "We certainly seem to be most unlucky," said he, declining to commit himself to an opinion.

"Want of brains," snapped the Major, who was one of those men who have a reason for everything, "your people wasted their money, and refused to soil their hands with trade. Such pig-headedness brings about misfortune, without the aid of a silly old fool's curse."

"I don't think Abbot Raoul was a fool," protested the host mildly, "on the contrary, he is said to have been a learned and clever man. Aymas Ainsleiyh, received the abbey from Henry VIII., and burnt Abbot Raoul in his own cloisters," he nodded towards the ruins, "you can see the blackened square of grass yonder, as a proof of the curse. Herbage will not grow there, and never will, till the curse be lifted."

"Huh," said the Major with supreme contempt, "any chance of that?"

Rupert smiled. "A chance that will never occur I fear. The curse, or prophecy, or whatever you like to call it——"

"I call it rubbish," interpolated the sceptic.

"Well doubting Thomas, it runs like this—rude enough verse as you will see, but you can't expect a doomed man to be particular as to literary style," and Rupert recited slowly:—

> "My curse from the tyrants will never depart,
> For a sword in the hands of the angel flashes:
> Till Ainsleigh, poor, weds the poor maid of his heart,
> And gold be brought forth from the holy ashes."

"I spare you the ancient pronunciation Major."

Tidman filled another glass with wine, and laughed scornfully. "I expect the old monk made up the second line to rhyme with ashes," he said expanding his broad chest. "I've heard that rubbishy poetry before. But haven't the Ainsleighs always married poor girls?"

"Some did, but then they had money. It must be a poor Ainsleigh to wed a poor girl to fulfil the third line. My father and grandfather were both poor, but they married rich brides."

"And what became of the cash?"

"It went—I don't know how—but it went."

"Gold turns to dry leaves in the hands of fools," said Tidman sagely, "there's some sense in the old fairy tales. But the fourth line? how can you get gold from ashes?"

Young Ainsleigh rose and began to pace the terrace. "I'm sure I don't know," he said, "that's the curse. If I marry Miss Rayner, I certainly fulfil the third line. She is poor and I am a pauper. Perhaps when the enigma of the third line is solved by such a marriage the fourth line will be made clear."

"I shouldn't hang on to that poetry if I were you, Ainsleigh. Let some one else solve the third line, and the fourth also if he likes. My advice to you is to marry a dollar heiress."

Rupert looked savage. "I love Miss Rayner, and I marry her, or no one."

Tidman selected another cigar carefully. "I think you are wrong," said he decisively, "you have only a small income it's true, but you have this grand old place, a fine old name, and you ain't bad-looking. I guess Miss Jonathan of N'Yr'k would just jump at you."

"I love Olivia Rayner," repeated Ainsleigh doggedly.

"But the obstacles my dear Don Quixote," argued the Major lighting the cigar, "you are poor and she, at the most, will inherit only a few hundreds a year from that aunt of hers. And that mass of granite Miss Wharf, don't like you, nor does her companion, the Pewsey cat."

"Why do you call her a cat—the harmless creature."

"Because she *is* a cat," said Tidman sturdily, "she'd scratch if she got a chance for all her velvet paws. But she hates you as old Miss Wharf does. Then there's Lady Jabe—"

"Oh heavens," said Rupert and made a wry face.

"You may well say that. She's a bullying Amazon of uncertain age. But she'll do her best to catch Olivia for her nephew Chris Walker."

"Oh he's a nice enough fellow," said Rupert still pacing the terrace. "I've got nothing to say against him, except that he'd better keep out of my way. And after all Olivia would never marry a clerk in a tea merchant's firm."

"But he's nephew to Lady Jabe."

"What of that. She's only the widow of a knight and hasn't a penny to leave him. Why should she want him to marry Olivia?"

"Because Miss Wharf will leave Olivia five hundred a year. Lady Jabe will then live on the young couple. And see here Ainsleigh, if you marry Olivia with that income, you won't be taking to wife the poor girl mentioned in the curse."

"Oh hang the curse," said Rupert crossly.

"By all means," said Tidman serenely, "you didn't bring me here to talk of that did you?"

"No. I want to ask your advice?"

"I've given it—unasked. Marry a dollar-heiress, and let old Jabe make Olivia her niece-in-law. By doing so you will be released from your pecuniary difficulties, and will also escape the hatred of Miss Wharf and that Pewsey cat, who both hate you."

"I wonder why they do?"

"Hum," said Tidman discreetly. He knew pretty well why Miss Wharf hated his host, but he was too wise to speak, "something to do with a love affair."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Ask me another," replied Major Tidman vulgarly, for he was not going to tell a fiery young man like Rupert, that Markham Ainsleigh, Rupert's father, was mixed up in the romance, "and I wish you would sit down," he went on irritably "you're walking like a cat on hot bricks. What's the matter with you?"

"What's the matter," echoed Ainsleigh returning to the arm-chair. "I asked you here to tell you."

"Wait till I have another glass. Now fire ahead." But Rupert did not accept the invitation immediately. He looked at the lovely scene spread out before him, and up to the sky which was now of a pale primrose colour. There was a poetic vein in young Ainsleigh, but troubles from his earliest childhood had stultified it considerably. Ever since he left college had he battled to keep the old place, but now, it seemed as if all his trouble had been in vain. He explained his circumstances to the Major, and that astute warrior listened to a long tale of mortgages threatened to be foreclosed, of the sale of old and valuable furniture, and of the disposal of family jewels. "But this last mortgage will finish me," said Rupert in

conclusion. "I can't raise the money to pay it off. Miss Wharf will foreclose, and then all the creditors will come down on me. The deluge will come in spite of all I can do."

Major Tidman stared. "Do you mean to say that Miss Wharf —"

"She holds the mortgage."

"And she hates you," said Tidman, his eyes bulging, "huh! This is a nice kettle of fish."

Rupert threw himself back in the deep chair with an angry look. He was a tall finely built young man of twenty-five, of Saxon fairness, with clear blue eyes and a skin tanned by an out-door life. In spite of his poverty and perhaps because of it, he was accurately dressed by a crack London tailor, and looked singularly handsome in his well-fitting evening suit. Pulling his well-trimmed fair moustache, he eyed the tips of his neat, patent leather shoes gloomily, and waited to hear what the Major had to say.

That warrior ruminated, and puffed himself out like the frog in the fable. Tidman was thickset and stout, bald-headed and plethoric. He had a long grey moustache which he tugged at viciously, and on the whole looked a comfortable old gentleman, peaceful enough when let alone. But his face was that of a fighter and his grey eyes were hot and angry. All over the world had the Major fought, and his rank had been gained in South America. With enough to live on, he had returned to the cot where he was born, and was passing his declining days very pleasantly. Having known Rupert for many years and Rupert's father before him, he usually gave his advice when it was asked for, and knew more about the young man's affairs than anyone else did. But the extent of the ruin, as revealed by the late explanation, amazed him. "What's to be done?" he asked.

"That's what I wish you to suggest," said Rupert grimly, "things are coming to a climax, and perhaps when the last Ainsleigh is driven from home, Abbot Raoul will rest quiet in his grave. His ghost walks you know. Ask Mrs. Pettley. She's seen it, or him."

"Stuff-stuff-stuff," grumbled the Major staring, "let the ghost and the curse and all that rubbish alone. What's to be done?"

"Well," said the young man meditatively, "either I must sell up, and clear out to seek my fortune, leaving Olivia to marry young Walker, or—"

"Or what?" asked Tidman seeing Rupert hesitating.

For answer Ainsleigh took a pocket-book from the lower ledge of the table and produced therefrom a slip of printed paper.

"I cut that out of "The Daily Telegraph," said he handing it to the Major, "what do you make of it?"

Tidman mounted a gold pince-nez and read aloud, as follows:—

"The jade fan of Mandarin Lo-Keong, with the four and half beads and the yellow cord. Wealth and long life to the holder, who gives it to Hwei, but death and the doom of the god Kwang-ho to that one who refuses. Address Kan-su at the Joss-house of the Five Thousand Blessings, 43 Perry Street, Whitechapel."

"A mixture of the Far East and the Near West, isn't it?" asked Rupert, when the Major laid down the slip and stared.

"Lo-Keong," said Tidman searching his memory, "wasn't that the man your father knew?"

"The same. That is why I cut out the slip, and why I asked you to see me. You remember my father's expedition to China?"

"Of course. He went there twenty years ago when you were five years of age. I was home at the time—it was just before I went to fight in that Janjalla Republic war in South America. I wanted your father to come with me and see if he couldn't make money: but he was bent on China."

"Well," said Rupert, "I understood he knew of a gold-mine there."

"Yes, on the Hwei River," Major Tidman snatched the slip of print and read the lines again, "and here's the name, Hwei—that's strange."

"But what's stranger still," said Rupert, bending forward, "is, that I looked up some papers of my father and learn that the Hwei River is in the Kan-su province."

"Address Kan-su," murmured Tidman staring harder than ever. "Yes. It seems as though this had something to do with your father."

"It *must* have something to do with him," insisted Rupert, "my father found that gold-mine near the Hwei River in the Kan-su province, and Lo-Keong was the Boxer leader who protected my father from the enmity of the Chinese. I believe he sent my father's papers to England—at least so Dr. Forge says."

"Forge," cried Tidman rising, "quite so. He was with your father. Why not see him, and ask questions."

"I'll do so. Perhaps he may tell me something about this fan."

"What if he does?"

"I might find it."

"And if you do?" asked the Major, his eyes protruding.

Rupert sprang to his feet and took up the slip. "Wealth and long life to the holder who gives it to Hwei," he read: then replaced the slip in his pocket-book, "why shouldn't I find that fan and get enough money to pay off Miss Wharf and others and keep Royabay."

"But it's such a mad idea?"

"I don't see it. If it hadn't to do with my father it would be," said Ainsleigh lighting his pipe, "but my father knew Lo-Keong, and by the names Hwei and Kan-su, it seems as though the locality of the gold-mine had something to do with the matter. I'll see old Forge and try to find this fan." "Oh," said Tidman, a light breaking on him, "you think Lo-Keong may have given the fan to your father?"

"Yes, and Forge may know what luggage and papers were sent home, at the time my father died—"

"Was murdered you mean."

"We can't be sure of that," said Rupert his face flushing, "but I'll find that out, and get hold of the fan also. It's my chance to make money, and I believe Providence has opened this way to me."

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## CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

### Dr. Forge

Royabay was distant five miles from Marport, a rising watering place on the Essex coast. In fact so large was the town, and so many the visitors, that it might be said to be quite risen, though the inhabitants insisted that it had not yet attained the height it yet would reach. But be this as it may, Marport was popular and fashionable, and many retired gentlepeople lived in spacious houses along the cliffs and in the suburbs. The ancient town, which lay in a hollow, was left to holiday trippers, and these came in shoals during the summer months. There was the usual pier, the Kursaal, the theatre, many bathing machines and many boarding houses—in fact the usual sort of things which go to make up a popular watering-place. And the town had been in existence—the new part at all events—for only fifteen years. Like Jonah's gourd it had sprung up in a night: but it certainly showed no signs of withering. In fact its attractions increased yearly.

Major Tidman was a wise man, and had not travelled over the world with his eyes shut. He had seen colonial towns spring up and fade away, and knew how the value of land increases. Thus, when he returned to his own country with a certain sum of money, he expended the same in buying land, and in building thereon. This policy produced a lot of money, with which the Major bought more land and more houses. Now, he possessed an avenue of desirable villa residences in the suburbs which brought him in a good income, and which, by reason of their situation, were never empty. The Major did not live here himself. He was a bachelor and fond of company: therefore he took up his quarters in the Bristol Hotel, the most fashionable in Marport. As he had shares in the company which built it, he managed to obtain his rooms at a comparatively moderate rate. Here he lived all the year round, save when he took a trip to the Continent, and, as the Bristol was always full of people, the Major did not lack company. As he was a good-

humoured little man, with plenty of small talk and a fund of out-of-the-way information, he soon became immensely popular. In this way the crafty Major had all the comforts of home and the delights of society without bearing the burden of an establishment of his own. His sole attendant was a weather-beaten one-eyed man, who acted as his valet, and who knew how to hold his tongue.

Sometimes the Major would walk up town and inspect his property with great pride. It was balm to his proud heart to walk up and down the spacious avenue, and survey the red brick villas smiling amidst trim gardens. Tidman's birth was humble—his father had been a small tenant farmer of the Ainsleighs—and he had started life without even the proverbial shilling. For many years he was absent from his native land, and returned to find fortune waiting for him on the door step. To be sure he brought a nest-egg home with him. Nevertheless, but for his astuteness in buying land and in building he would not have acquired such a good income. So the Major had some cause for self congratulation, when he paced up and down Tidman's Avenue.

Two days after his dinner with Rupert Ainsleigh, the Major spick and span as usual—he always looked as though he had stepped out of a bandbox—was strutting up the Avenue. Half way along he came face to face with a withered little woman, who looked like the bad fairy of the old nursery tales. She wore a poke bonnet, a black dress and, strange to say, a scarlet shawl. Her age might have been about fifty-five, but she looked even older. With her dress picked up, and holding a flower in her hand, she came mincing along smiling at the world with a puckered face and out of a pair of very black and brilliant eyes. She looked a quaint old-fashioned gentlewoman of the sort likely to possess a good income, for it seemed that no pauper would have dared to dress in so shabby and old-fashioned a manner.

Consequently it was strange that the gallant Major should have showed a disposition to turn tail when he set eyes on her. She might indeed have been the veritable witch she looked, so pale turned Major Tidman's ruddy face. But the old dame was not going to let him escape in this way.

"Oh good morning," she said in a sharp voice like a saw, "how well you are looking dear Major Tidman—really so very well. I never saw you look younger. The rose in your button-hole is not more blooming. How do you keep your youth so? I remember you—"

But the Major cut her short. He had enough of flattering words which he guessed she did not mean, and didn't want her to remember anything, for he knew her memory extended disagreeably to the time when he had been a poor and humble nobody. "I'm in a hurry Miss Pewsey" he said twirling his stick, "good-morning ma'am—morning."

"If you're going to see Dr. Forge," said Miss Pewsey, her black eyes glittering like jet. "I've just come from his house. He is engaged."

"I can wait I suppose, Miss Pewsey," said Tidman bristling, "that is, supposing I am calling on the doctor."

"Then you really are: not on account of your health I'm sure. I do hope you aren't ill, dear Major. We all look forward to you shining at the ball, which is to take place at the Hotel Bristol."

"I may be there, Miss Pewsey. I may be there—in fact," the Major flourished his stick again, "I am one of the stewards."

Miss Pewsey clapped together a pair of small claws encased in shabby cotton gloves. "There," she cried in a shriller voice than ever. "I knew it. I said so to my Sophia. Of course you know I always call dear Miss Wharf my Sophia; we have

been friends for years—oh yes, for years. We grew on one stem and—"

"You'll excuse me, ma'am—"

"Oh yes—I know you are so busy. But I was saying, that you can give me a ticket for my nephew, Mr. Burgh—"

"The tickets are for sale at the hotel," said Tidman gruffly.

"Yes, but my poor nephew is poor. He also has come from foreign parts Major as you did, and just as poor. You must give him a ticket—oh really you must." Miss Pewsey spoke with an emphasis on every other word, and between her teeth as though she was trying to prevent the speech escaping too rapidly. "Now, Major," she coaxed.

"I'll see, ma'am—I'll see."

"Oh. I knew you would." She clasped her hands again, "come and see my Sophia—dear Miss Wharf, and then you can give Clarence—that's my nephew's name, sweet isn't it? —you can give him the ticket. But don't bring *him*," added Miss Pewsey jerking her old head backward in the direction of Dr. Forge's residence, "he's there."

"Who is there, ma'am?" demanded the Major with a start.

"Why that horrid Mr. Ainsleigh and—"

Miss Pewsey got no further. The Major uttered something naughty under his breath, and taking off his hat with a flourish, bowed his way along the road, pursued by the shrill injunctions of the lady not to forget the ticket.

Tidman walked more rapidly and less jauntily than usual, and stopped at Dr. Forge's gate to wipe his red face, which had now assumed its normal colour.

"By George" said the old soldier, "that woman will marry me, if I don't take care. She ain't safe—she shouldn't be allowed out. Pewsey—a cat—a cat—I always said so. Lavinia Pewsey cat, to Benjamin Tidman gentleman. Not if I know it—ugh—ugh," and he walked up the steps to ring the bell. While waiting, his thoughts went from Miss Pewsey to Rupert. "I thought he had gone to town about that fan business," said the Major fretting, "what's he doing calling on Forge without telling me," and Tidman seemed very much annoyed that Rupert should have taken such a liberty.

True enough, he found young Ainsleigh sitting with Dr. Forge. The doctor was a tall lean man with sad eyes, and a stiff manner. He was dressed in a loose white flannel suit, in a most unprofessional way. But everyone knew that Forge had money and did not practise, save when the fancy took him. With his watchful grey eyes and sad face and lantern jaws, Forge was not a prepossessing object or a medical attendant to be desired. Also his hands had a claw-like look, which, added to his thin hooked nose, made him look like a hawk. He spoke very little though, and what he did say was to the point: but he was not popular like the Major. A greater contrast than this mummy and handsome young Ainsleigh, can scarcely be imagined.

The Major came puffing into the room and looked around. It was a small apartment furnished with Chinese curiosities. Rice-paper painted in the conventional Chinese fashion adorned the walls: a many-tasseled lantern gay with colour, dangled from the roof, and in each corner of the room a fat mandarin squatted on a pedestal. The furniture was of bamboo, and straw matting covered the floor. A bookcase filled with medical volumes looked somewhat out of place in this eastern room, as did the doctor's writing table, a large one covered with papers and books, and strange looking Chinese scrips. The room was as queer as its owner, and the

atmosphere had that indescribable eastern smell, which the Major remembered to have sniffed up at Canton under disagreeable circumstances. Perhaps it was the revival of an unpleasant memory that made him sit down so suddenly, or it might have been the cold grey stony eyes of Forge.

"Well Major," said Rupert who looked handsome and gay in flannels, and who seemed to have lost his melancholy looks, "who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"I came to ask Forge to keep the exterior of his house a little more tidy," said the Major with dignity, "the steps have not been cleaned this morning, and there is straw in the garden, while the shrubs and flowers are dying for want of water."

Forge shrugged his thin shoulders, and nodded towards some egg-shell china cups and a quaint looking tea-pot. But he did not speak.

"No," replied the Major to the silent invitation. "I never drink tea in the afternoon—"

"Or at any time," said Forge in a melancholy way. "I know you of old. Ainsleigh, take another cup."

"Not in the Chinese fashion," said Rupert smiling, "you drink it too hot for my taste and I like milk and sugar. But now I've told you about the fan, I'll leave you to chat with Tidman."

"The fan," said Tidman sitting up as straight as his stoutness would let him, "ah yes—I forgot about that. Well?"

"Well," echoed Rupert lighting a cigarette, "I called at the joss house in Perry Street Whitechapel, and a nice sort of den it is. A Chinaman, heard my explanation about my father's connection with Lo-Keong, and then told me that the fan had been stolen from that gentleman, who is now a Mandarin."

"Lo-Keong was well on the way to the highest post when I saw him last" said Forge preparing a roll of tobacco, "he was much in favour at the court."

"But I thought he was a Boxer," said Tidman, "and surely ——"

"Oh he gave up the Boxers, and curried favour with the Dowager Empress. That was seven years ago, when I was last in China. I met you there Tidman."

Again the disagreeable recollection of Canton crossed the Major's memory, and he nodded. "What about the fan?" he asked Rupert again.

"It's of great value," said Ainsleigh, "at least this Chinaman told me so. Lo-Keong is now a Mandarin, and is high in favour with the Dowager Empress—"

"And consequently is hated by the Emperor," murmured Forge.

"I don't know, doctor, I'm not up in Chinese politics. However, the fan was lost by Lo-Keong some years ago, and being a sacred fan, he wants it back. This Chinaman Tung-Yu —"

"Oh," said the Major, "then you didn't see Hwei or Kan-su?"

"Those are names of a river and a province," said the doctor.

"I know," snapped Tidman, "but they were in the advertisement."

"Tung-yu explained that they were used only for the purpose of advertisement," said Rupert, "but to make a long story short, I told him that I had seen the fan—"

"You saw the fan," asked Tidman directing a side look at Forge.

"A dream—a dream," said the doctor.

"No," insisted the young man. "I feel sure I have seen that fan, I can't think where. Perhaps it is amongst my father's effects sent from China by Lo-Keong years ago——"

"Twenty years ago," said Dr. Forge, "and Lo-Keong would hardly send his own fan. I remember the things coming. I came home immediately before. A Chinaman brought your father's papers and luggage to Royabay. He left them with your mother and went away."

"Were you not with my father when he died?" asked Rupert, "I always understood you were."

"No. I was at Pekin at the time. Your father and I were working the mine together, and I went about some imperial concessions. While there I heard that your father was dead."

"Was he murdered?" asked Rupert earnestly.

"I really can't say, Lo-Keong said that he died of dysentery, but he was always a liar. He wouldn't be so high in favour with the Court if he wasn't. Lying is a fine art in the Far East, and—"

"Yes—Yes," said Tidman impatiently, "but what has all this to do with the fan?"

"I think it's all of a piece myself," said Rupert, "and I intend to get to the bottom of it. I have seen that fan somewhere—but I can't think—I can't," he reflected and shook his head, "no. But I have seen it doctor, so its no use your shrugging your shoulders. I want to find it and get that five thousand pounds."

"What?" cried the Major leaping up on his stout little legs.

"Lo-Keong is willing to give five thousand pounds for the return of his fan," said Ainsleigh, who had walked to the door, "and I intend to earn it."

"Against my advice," said Forge looking up oddly.

Rupert laughed. "Oh you are afraid," he said smiling.

"Of you, not of myself. I know what the Chinese are, and have studied the race for years. I know how to deal with them; but you will get into trouble if you meddle with this fan business."

"And so I say," cried Tidman emphatically.

"Why, what do you know of the Chinese, Major?" asked Rupert.

"More than I like to think of," said the little man wiping his bald head. "I went out to China for a trip seven years ago and met with an adventure in Canton—ugh!"

"What sort of an adventure?"

"Ugh!" grunted the Major again, "don't talk about it. It makes me cold to think of it. The Chinese are demons. Forge got me out of the trouble and I left China never to set foot in it again I hope. Ainsleigh, if you want that curse of yours to be realised, meddle with the fan. But if you want to keep your life and your skin, leave the matter alone."

"I'm going to get that five thousand pounds," said Rupert, obstinately, "as soon as I can recollect where I saw that fan. The memory will come back to me. I am sure it will. Doctor you won't help me."

"No," said Forge decisively. "I advise you to leave the matter alone."

"In that case I must search it out myself. Good-day," and Ainsleigh strolled out of the room, lightheartedly enough, as he whistled a gay tune. Major Tidman looked grimly at the closed door, and then still more grimly at the doctor, who was paring his nails.

"Our young friend is ambitious," he said.

Forge laughed gently. "You can hardly blame him. He wants to marry Miss Rayner and save his ancestral home, so I am quite sure he will search for the fan."

"He won't find it then," said the Major petulantly.

"Won't he?" questioned Forge sweetly, "well, perhaps not. By the way you want to see me Major. Mrs. Bressy tells me you called at least twice yesterday."

"Yes. She didn't know when you would be back."

"I never tell her. I like to take the old lady unawares. She is a Dickens' character, with a fondness for drink, and for taking things which don't belong to her. I always go away and come back unexpectedly. Yesterday I was in Paris. Now I am at Marport. Well?"

The Major had contained himself with difficulty all this time, and had grown very red in the face. The colour changed to a lively purple, as he burst out. "See here Forge what's the use of talking to me in this way. You have that fan."

"Have I," said Forge smiling gently.

"Yes. You know well enough that the very fan—the jade fan with the five beads, was the cause of my getting into trouble in Canton. You got me out of the trouble and you asked me to give you the fan, when I thanked you."

"And you refused," said Forge still smiling.

"Well I did at first," said Tidman sulkily. "I risked my life over the beastly thing, and—"

Forge raised a thin hand. "Spare yourself the recital. I know."

"Well then," went on Tidman excitedly. "You asked again for it when you came home, and I gave it to you. Ainsleigh is quite right. He *did* see the fan. I showed it to him one day before you arrived. I see he has forgotten, but any stray thought may revive his memory. I don't want him to have the fan."

"Why not?" asked Forge shutting his knife with a click.

"Because I want the five thousand pounds for myself. I'm not so well off as people think, and I want—"

"You forget," said Forge gently, "you gave me the fan."

"And have you got it?"

"I have," he nodded towards a cabinet of Chinese work adorned with quaint figures, "it's in there."

"Give it to me back."

"No. I think I'll keep it."

"What do you want to do with it?" asked Tidman angrily.

Forge rose and looked stern, "I want to keep it from Lo-Keong," he said savagely, "there's some secret connected with that fan. I can't understand what the secret is or what the fan has to do with it: but it means life and death to this Mandarin. He'd give ten thousand—twenty thousand to get that fan back. But he shan't."

"Oh," groaned the Major, "why did I give it to you. To think that such a lot of money should go begging. If I had only known what the fan was worth."

"You knew nothing about it save as a curiosity."

"How do you know," demanded the Major.

Forge who had turned towards the cabinet wheeled round and looked more like a hawk than ever as he pounced on the stout man. "What do *you* know?" and he clawed Tidman's plump shoulders.

"Let me go confound you," blustered the Major, "what do you mean by assaulting a gentleman—"

"A gentleman." Forge suddenly released the Major and laughed softly, "does Benjamin Tidman, old Farmer Tidman's son call himself so. Why I remember you—"

"Yes I know you do, and so does that infernal Pewsey cat."

Forge suddenly became attentive. "Miss Pewsey if you please. She is my friend. I may—" Forge halted and swallowed something. "I may even marry her some day."

"What," shouted Tidman backing to the wall, "that old—old—"

"Gently my good Benjamin, gently."

"But—but you're not a marrying man."

"We never know what we are till we die," said Forge turning again towards the black cabinet, "but you needn't mention what I have said. If you do," Forge snarled like an angry cat and shot one glance from his gray eyes that made Tidman shiver: then he resumed his gentle tone. "About this fan. I'll make a bargain with you."

"What's that?" asked the Major avariciously.

"I'll show you the fan, and if you can guess it's secret, I'll let you give it to this Tung-yu or Hwei or Kan-su or whatever he

likes to call himself."

"But you don't want Lo-Keong to have the fan," said the Major doubtfully.

Forge opened the cabinet slowly. "So long as I learn the secret he can have the fan. I want to ruin him. He's a devil and—ah—" he started back. "The fan—the fan—"

"What is it?" asked Tidman, craning over Forge's shoulder at an empty drawer, "where is the fan?"

"Lost," cried Forge furiously, and looked like a dangerous grey rat.

"Five thousand pounds gone," moaned the Major.

"My life you fool—my life," cried the doctor, "it is at stake."

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## CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

### Miss Wharf at Home

The best houses in Marport were situated on the Cliffs. They stood a considerable way back and had small plots of ground before them cultivated or not, according to the taste of those who owned them. Some of these gardens were brilliant with flowers, others had nothing but shrubs in them, presenting rather a sombre appearance, and a few were bare sun-burnt grass plots, with no adornment whatsoever. A broad road divided the gardens from the grassy undulations of the cliffs, and along this thoroughfare, rolled

carriages, bicycles, and motor-cars all day during the season. Then came the grass on the cliff-tops which stretched for a long distance, and which was dotted with shelters for nervous invalids. At one end there was a round bandstand where red-coated musicians played lively airs from the latest musical comedy. Round the stand were rows of chairs hired out at twopence an afternoon, and indeed, all over the lawns, seats of various kinds were scattered. At the end of the grass, the cliffs sloped gradually and were intersected with winding paths, which led downward to the asphalt Esplanade which ran along the water's edge, when the tide was high, and beside evil-smelling mud when the tide was out. And on what was known as the beach—a somewhat gritty strand—were many bathing machines. Such was the general appearance of Marport which the Essex people looked on as a kind of Brighton, only much better.

Miss Sophia Wharf owned a cosy little house at the far end of the cliffs, and just at the point where Marport begins to melt into the country. It was a modern house comfortably furnished and brilliant with electric lights. The garden in front of it was well taken care of, there were scarlet and white shades to the windows and flower boxes filled with blossoms on the sills. Everyone who passed remarked on the beauty of the house, and Miss Wharf was always pleased when she heard them envy her possessions. She liked to possess a Naboth's Vineyard of her own, and appreciated it the more, when others would have liked to take it. She had an income of one thousand a year and therefore could live very comfortably. The house (Ivy Lodge was it's highly original name) was her own, bought in the days when Marport was nothing but a fishing village. She knew everyone in the neighbourhood, was a staunch friend to the vicar who was high church and quite after her own heart in the use of banners, incense, candles and side-