

# AN EXCHANGE OF TWO FLOWERS

by Sarah Zettel



## CHAPTER THREE

### A Conversation Between Old Friends

#### I.

*March 11, 1839*

*The City of Canton, Guangdong Province*

*China*

“Lin Zexu! Welcome to this house!”

Pao Jian was settled in the courtyard beneath the plum tree. Everything had been done to make the scene a casual one. There was even a *weiqi* game board, with a pattern of black and white stones set on its grid, making a problem for contemplation. Overhead, the tree’s black and crooked branches looked like slashes of ink against the blue sky, but the swelling buds could be discerned beneath the bark.

High Commissioner Lin had known and corresponded with Pao Jian for years. When he received his post to Canton, he’d immediately written to let Pao know he would soon arrive to take up the duty, and the difficulty, of ending the trade in foreign opium in Canton. Pao was an old man, and Lin knew his health to be failing, but even so Lin had difficulty concealing his shock as he moved forward to greet his friend.

Pao Jian had withered. His skin was seamed and sallow. His white hair and beard were uncombed and wispy. Despite the warmth of the day, he had been wrapped in quilted silks.

“Sit, honored sir, sit.” Pao Jian gestured Lin toward the stool that had been positioned beside his sofa. His voice was as light and frail as his body. His hand shook as he extended it, and Lin dropped his gaze so that he would not see the sheen of sweat on his friend’s brow. Only Pao’s lively eyes held something of his former

strength. "Have you eaten? There is wine warming. My son and his wife will bring it to us shortly."

"Thank you, sir."

They sat in the shade and chatted about their families and their sons, as well as the potential of the students in the civil service exams that Lin would be overseeing as part of his duties in Canton. Pao's son, Pao Tengzhou, and his wife came into the courtyard with the servants to bring the table, tea, and the jar of warmed wine, cups and dishes of snacks. They both bowed respectfully. Lin spoke to Pao Tengzhou of his own sons, and to his wife, Chen Saizen, of her poetry.

Many men had compiled arguments about the propriety of women writing poetry, or writing at all. But Chen Saizen's efforts were balanced in theme and classical in form. Lin found himself of the mind that the fact that some women produced bad or silly poetry was no reason to condemn it all. Men had, after all, produced bad poetry for centuries. From what he read, and what he saw now in her comportment and her reasoned and respectful answers, Pao Tengzhou's wife was not at all silly.

Indeed, Chen Saizen, was taking careful note of all she saw. Something worried her. In fact, it angered her.

*What is it?*

It could well be the same thing that concerned her husband. Although Pao Tengzhou tried to conceal the fact, his attention kept straying to his father.

Pao Jian noticed this as well, and he smiled.

"Now then, now then. You have both seen me. I am not going to depart this earth in the next hour. Go see to your own business, and let an old man talk with his friend."

Breeze blew, filling the air with a thick, sweet, and painfully familiar scent. Lin's unease increased. He should not have come. He should have pursued his worries and his task, without attempting to involve his old friend.

But except for Pao Jian, Lin was alone in this province. He had no family here, and very few friends. He did not know who he could trust, or how far. He needed his friend.

Lin said nothing and was sure his face betrayed nothing, but Pao Jian still smiled at him with something of the same indulgence he had just shown his son and daughter-in-law.

"Well, now, my friend Lin. You have been set a difficult problem. What will

you do?"

Instead of answering, Lin studied the *weiqi* board. *Weiqi* was a game played by laying stones on a grid. On the surface, it was very simple. Even children played. The object was to surround the stones of the opponent while claiming the largest portion of the board for oneself. Each stone was worth the same as any other, but once placed, no stone could be moved, unless it was captured. Therefore, it was not the initial placement of the stone that determined whether a player won or lost the game. It was whether one had the patience to look ahead and understand exactly what that placement meant.

Games between masters could stretch on for days.

"I will do as I have been instructed," said Lin finally. "The Emperor was very clear. I am to go, examine and act in regard to the opium trade."

"Well, you have gone and are here. What will you examine first?"

Lin plucked a black *weiqi* stone out of the dish and turned it over slowly in his fingers. "I think I must begin with the *English*."

"Ah, the famous *English*!" Pao sighed. "There are those who say they are an enigma, and must remain so. After all, what is there to be known about men from a country so many thousands of *li* away who let themselves be ruled by a young girl?"

"But their country is not thousands of *li* away." Lin returned the black stone to its dish and picked up a white one instead. "It is directly to the south of us, in Hindustan and Calcutta."

"You call Calcutta their country?"

"I do not have to. They call it that. As do the men who live there."

"And what do you say to those who suggest that how they deal with the men of Hindustan must necessarily be different than how they deal with the Celestial Kingdom? Like all barbarians the English are naturally drawn toward the Celestial Kingdom, this being the center of Heaven and Earth and the source of all good things."

"But do the barbarians know that, I wonder? They seem to see it only as the source of all tea." He laid the stone back down in the dish, not ready to disturb the pattern on the board. "And we have failed to lead them toward correct behavior, which is supposed to be the duty of men of superior vision, understanding and education."

Pao cocked his head. "Have you read the essays written by the Autumnal Literature Society?"

“The ones that say the exploits of the foreigners called *Pelig* in Tibet and Nepal twenty years ago were only a foretaste of the actions of the foreigners called the *Yinquil* in Calcutta?”

“And illustrating that the *Pelig* and the *Yinquil* are not separate tribes, as had been thought. They are all *English*,” Pao went on. “All from one place, and all gathered under one ruler.”

*They are here, there and everywhere.* Deng’s words echoed through his thoughts. *There is the company, the army, the king, the governors, all tangled together. Then come these ships that seem to have no master whatsoever but wander the world at will.*

“Those essays have been very much on my mind. They also suggest that the English, in all their many varieties and regions, have no intention of ever fully and correctly participating in the tributary system that was created for those with lands directly bordering the Celestial Kingdom. Their ships, it is suggested, seek more than trade.”

*Ask the men of Calcutta.*

“Has the Emperor read these writings?” asked Pao quietly.

“He did not say so to me. And none of the secretaries or council members mentioned them.” This did not surprise Lin. The Autumnal Literature Society had the taint of the radical about it. Members of the Grand Council would only approach its ideas with extreme caution.

Pao Jian seemed to understand this. “Well, now that you are a little further from the capitol, you might wish to read over some of those writings again, especially where the history and nature of the *English* expansion out of Calcutta is considered. They have some...illuminating suggestions for how the English might be brought to better understanding. You may also wish to consider the writings of Yao Ying. The booksellers will have copies.”

Lin smiled ruefully. “The piles of paper in my new office are already knee high.”

“And they will get higher. You have come to the attention of important men, Lin Zexu. Papers will shower on your head like autumn leaves.”

Lin picked a white stone up in his fingertips. This time, he placed it on the board beside a pair of black stones, capping their short line.

“Perhaps the *English*, can be considered in the light of a student new to learning,” Lin said. “The student cannot grasp forty thousand characters, or even

forty, on the first day. Is this his fault? No. It is the responsibility of the teacher to first examine the student, and understand the limits of *his* understanding."

Pao looked at the board, and the new arrangement. He took a black stone from the dish, and with a shaking hand, set it down, changing the problem, the game, and the vision of the future that troubled Lin's mind.

"Neither is it the student's fault if he has had ignorant teachers," said Pao. "But if the student is stubborn and resists the exhortations of that teacher? That is his fault."

"But what if the teacher is greedy? What if the teacher is a fool?"

"Then that teacher must be dismissed, and other teachers found."

Lin made himself turn away from the board. The allure of the game was strong. He wanted to sit here with his friend, drinking wine and speaking in allegories, as if the problems of opium and foreigners were thousands of years and thousands of *li* away. But Lin had already stayed too long. Pao Jian struggled to hold his head up and he was dragging his quilts more tightly around his thin frame to conceal his tremors. The thick, sweet fragrance hung in the air around them, inviting sleep, and tears together.

"I have some letters to leave with you," said Lin. "There are men I wish to contact about my mandate, both formally and informally."

"I am glad to help however I can."

"My plan is to enlist this province's scholars and land owners to my cause. I want them persuaded that stopping the opium trade is to their long-term benefit, and not only because they will be viewed most favorably when they come forward to expose who buys and sells the poison. But I want your opinion of these men before I approach them."

"A good opening. Will you make similar appeals to the Governor and Governor-General?"

"I have already held my first conversation with Governor-General Deng Tingzhen. I had hoped that he would be the first to hear my plans, but..." Lin shrugged. "It has become clear that another route must be taken."

"I believe that you are correct, and I am sorry for it. What of the Cohong merchants?"

"I don't know. Yet. I must speak with Howqua and Mowqua next."

"Then I will keep you here no longer." Lin did not wish to see the relief in his friend's expression. "I will look over these letters and send my son with my opinions."

He is a sound young man and you may trust him. You will let me know at once if there is any other thing this house can do to assist you?"

"I will."

Lin stood, and they spoke their thanks and all the other courtesies. Lin left that sweet scented courtyard much depressed in his mind. His earlier nap had eased his exhaustion, but now it had returned, and doubled.

He also found he was not at all surprised to see Pao's daughter-in-law, Chen Saizen, waiting for him beside the outer courtyard gate.

"Sir."

Lin acknowledged Chen Saizen's bow. "I thank you for your hospitality today. Your home is a calm and restorative place."

"Thank you, Sir. May I speak with you?"

"Certainly."

She lifted her gaze, briefly, and Lin was stunned by the depths of the bitterness that darkened her eyes. Despite that, her voice remained calm and her tone humble.

"My father-in-law is very ill. My husband wishes to stay home and look after him during this time. But my father-in-law wishes his son to work with you, for the good of his family and his grandsons. This has placed my husband in a hard position."

So much waited behind those sharp eyes — an infinity of worry honed into anger by the unforgiving filial duty of silence. But this was honest feeling. Lin understood it. Indeed, Lin felt certain he understood this woman very well.

"There will be many documents that must be examined in the coming days," he said, striving to match her resolute calm. "Their information must be compiled, copied and distributed. Some of that work can be done here. I know that Pao Jian's son has passed his examinations and writes with an excellent hand. The senior clerks will contact him."

"Thank you, Sir." Chen Saizen bowed with studied correctness, and Lin left her there. But the burn of her silent, honest anger remained with him for a long time.

## II.

*March 12, 1839*

*Aboard the Golden Peony, on the Pearl River*

*Guangdong Province*

*China*

“Well now, Howqua,” Lancelot Dent paced the lacquered and gilded ship’s cabin. Sunlight and river breezes streamed through the carved screens. “I take it you’ve had a chance to meet this legendary High Commissioner Lin. What do you think of him?”

“I have not yet met him myself,” Howqua replied coolly. “But I have spoken with friends who have. It is with deep regret I must tell you he lives up to his reputation.”

Howqua was the current head of Canton’s Cohong merchants — the cadre of trading families exclusively licensed by the Emperor of China to do business with foreigners. Since Lancelot Dent represented one of the largest British trading houses, the two men met frequently. A magnificent “flower boat” was hardly their usual venue to do business, however. These luxurious vessels were hired by wealthy men to cruise the river and entertain their friends, usually with a good old-fashioned debauch involving wine, women, and song.

And opium, of course. Some of which might even have come in on Dent’s ships. In fact, considering the amount of opium Whiteman, Dent & Brightman brought in each season, odds were it had.

Dent paused beside the cabin screen, to stare across the muddy river. It was a good day to be out on the water. The river was smooth, the oarsmen steady. Like the rest of the boat’s crew, their job was to create a maximum amount of comfort for the men who’d hired it for the day. The screens allowed for a dramatic view of the passing banks. They also let in the men’s raucous laughter, and the answering lilt of women’s voices. Sometimes a group would break into song, or suggest new riddles and puns built around the guests’ names and presumed attributes.

Dent would have liked to be allowed to enjoy himself. His time in the China trade had given him a taste for their sophisticated women, and the ones aboard the boat were really quite pretty. But the fact of the matter was, Dent should not be here. He was *fan qui* — foreign. That meant these boats were off-limits, like the rest

of Canton. Dent was supposed to remain meekly confined in the factory compound, venturing out only as far as the Consou House.

But the crowded factories were a bad place for private conversation, and anyway, merchant or no, as a man of rank, Howqua wasn't supposed to condescend to enter the foreigner's territory except in cases of extreme emergency.

*Like impending death, or riot.*

However, the factories were actually fairly easy to escape. They might be walled off from the city, but they sat right on the banks of the Pearl River. A small fee paid to a cooperative sampan owner got Dent out onto the water to meet this particular boat. And he had no worries about the passengers gossiping to their highly placed friends. Once the men settled in for their smoke, no one would remember that a foreigner had ever come aboard.

"The good news is that High Commissioner Lin's time here is short," Howqua was seated on a padded divan. Teakwood racks held jars of wine and porcelain cups within reach. Neither of them had yet moved to drink. The servant had been sent away, so they could speak freely in their usual mix of the Cantonese dialect and English. They both knew more of each other's language than the Emperor's edicts allowed, so neither descended into the pidgin used for common trade.

"Lin Zexu has been promised a further posting as a Governor-General once he is finished with us here," Howqua went on. "That, however is also the bad news."

"Why?" asked Dent impatiently. Dent had come here expecting a report on how much the bribes were going to run. Normally, that was Howqua's own business, but rumors about Lin were starting to unnerve some of the other men on the Canton Board of Trade, and Dent wanted to be able to spoon them some reassurance. "If Lin's just passing through, we can wait him out like we've done all the others."

The Emperor declared his intention to eradicate the opium trade at fairly regular intervals. He'd send a new official with a new title into Canton. Howqua would meet with the fellow over cups of tea. A price and some token enforcement measures would be agreed to. They'd all go along until the official got caught, and then everything would return to normal.

"If Lin has only a short time to complete his mission, he will implement stern measures," said Howqua. "Rumors are already flying. Men who were once eager to take their deliveries are instead piling up pipes and bowls to hand over to the police when they come calling. Some even express relief that the trade is ending."

"A few nervous little shopkeepers."



Everybody was overreacting to the presence of this one man. Dent wandered across to the rack of cups. That was no good. The merchants knew the ways of Peking's officials as well as the Cohong did. One fresh arrival shouldn't make any of them so much as blink.

He picked up the wine jar and turned it around in his hands, admiring its pure white sides and sapphire blue mandala. *Lovely thing. Take some doing to get it home in one piece...*

A spasm of annoyance spread across Howqua's face. "While I waste my time here trying to convince you that our trade is in danger, Commissioner Lin is meeting with Guang Xie, our Commandant of Police. He is also gathering together the first among our landowners. I am to make my appearance before him shortly, *and*, I am told by men I trust that he has also summoned Mowqua."

"That just tells us Lin's information's out of date. Mowqua's retired." Mowqua — Lu Guangheng — was one of the highest men among the Cohong merchants. At least, he had been until a few years ago. In fact, Lu Guangheng had held Howqua's office.

"Retired, yes, but he remains senior to me and immensely respected," Howqua reminded Dent curtly. "And he is the head of his family. That family is large and old, with ties in Canton and throughout the province. *Dian Di* —" Howqua used the Chinese formulation of Dent's name. "— Unblock your ears. Hear what is being said. Lin's orders are written in the Emperor's own hand. His freedom is complete. His power regarding the opium trade is absolute. The calls for legalization are all finished. The Emperor does not want the trade slowed. He does not want it taxed. He wants it *stopped*."

*Good God, the man's turning yellow.* Dent covered his mouth to hide his snicker. This wasn't funny. There was far too much money at stake.

"You saw for yourself how Governor-General Deng was driven to kill a man in front of the factories before Lin even arrived," Howqua went on. "Now Lin is here. He met with Deng in the first hour of his entering Canton, and Deng all but crawled to me on his knees in fear."

"Wait, Howqua. This — Lin can't possibly touch the Governor-General?"

Lin was a jumped-up little inspector, just like all the others. They came in with bluster and moralizing. They'd make a few arrests — a few slow shopkeepers, a pirate or two if they were lucky. Once in a while, they'd toss in the owner of a "fast crab" boat of the kind that took the opium from the sailing vessels to the shore.

But that was it. The price of the bribes could get steep, but not one of the inspectors or commissioners, or whatnot, lasted longer than a few months. And not one of them had required they make any real change in the flow of goods.

“Lin has already begun to roam the streets in plain clothes, counting the opium houses,” said Howqua. “He has hand selected men to go to the ports at night and watch who comes and goes. *Everyone* who comes and goes.”

The skin on Dent’s neck crawled. For one of the very few times in his life, he had the urge to retreat behind the factory wall. Bolt himself in his room. Not that it would do any good. If the city’s troops mustered against them, nothing would do any good.

*Heavens help us.* The legend of Commissioner Lin was starting to get to *him*. He set the graceful jar back into its place on the rack.

“But still, if he’s on his way to a Governor-General’s palace, we’ll be all right. All we have to do is keep our heads and...”

“That may prove difficult,” said Howqua drily. “Many sharp axes can fall in a short time. How many of my sons should I get ready to lose do you think?”

“You don’t think he’d arrest any of your people?” No one ever went near the Cohong trading families. Ever. They were too good at what they did. That included determining the weakness, or the asking price, of the men they dealt with.

“I do think it,” Howqua snapped. “And I am not the only one. What do you think the execution in front of your people was about? Governor-General Deng is not a timid man, but he has become anxious to prove his diligence, in the hope that Commissioner Lin will not decide to arrest *him*.”

*Good God.*

This was a genuine problem. As long as opium remained technically illegal, the smooth flow of their goods required a sound network of understanding and cooperation. Among his other duties, Governor Deng oversaw Canton’s water forces. That meant Deng was the one who kept the patrol boats off their backs.

If Deng got scared enough to actually start enforcing the law...

“All right. All right. But what do you want me to do about it? Everything outside the factory walls is your business.” Dent wished he hadn’t said that. Sounded too much like whining.

*Not in front of the little fellow,* murmured his brother Tom from the back of his mind.

Tom had founded their company and brought Lance in. There wasn’t

anything Tom didn't know about trade, and about foreigners, whatever their shade or business. Lancelot would have loved to have his brother's steady advice right about now. But Tom was half a world away, and it was Lancelot who was here, with this little fellow.

No disrespect of course. Howqua was a good man, after his kind, and he understood what he was about. But Howqua remained a Chinaman, which meant you could only trust him when you could see both hands.

Just now Howqua had his hands folded inside his sleeves.

"What do I want you to do?" Howqua deliberately mimicked Dent's flat, rigid inflections, and Dent felt the blood rush to his cheeks. "I need to know what your head man, Yi Lu — *Captain Elliot* —" Howqua pronounced the name and title carefully. "— will do if Commissioner Lin directly orders the foreigners to stop bringing us opium?"

Dent wanted to laugh, but he couldn't. Not quite. Captain Charles Elliot, the current superintendent of trade in Canton, was a little man in every sense of the word. That made him easy to ridicule. After all, superintendents changed places almost as fast as Imperial Commissioners. The last fellow, Robinson, had lasted exactly a year, and the fellow before him, Lord Napier had both burned and fizzled in spectacular fashion after two.

But Elliot was different. He toed the line, not just with the English traders but with the Chinese. Unlike Lord Napier with his bluster, or Robinson with his blinkered laziness, Elliot tried to work according to the Chinese system. He obeyed Imperial protocol as much as he could. He got his translators — and every expert he could find — to brief him on custom and procedure, and he actually followed what they told him.

Which got him laughed at, and berated by his superiors in every dispatch. The British did not *kowtow* to anyone. The British did not pay attention to the odd ways of foreigners. The British came, they set up a system to get what they wanted, and the natives were taught to follow it, kindly if possible, harshly if necessary.

That was the way it worked in India. That was the way they were determined to make it work in China.

And yet, it was Elliot who managed to get official permission to take up station in Canton itself when the others who held his post couldn't get any further up river than Macao. Not only that, but during Elliot's tenure, trade had not only flowed smoothly, it had increased.

Because despite argument, and ridicule, and all British precedent, the fussy bureaucrat with his short fuse had consistently tried to play China's game according to China's rules.

If Commissioner Lin started quoting those rules...if he started making demands about British property, or — no, unthinkable, not possible — British lives, what would Elliot do?

Dent found he had no idea.

"The trading companies won't put up with any interference with the opium business," Dent said out loud. *That, at least, I'm sure of.* "They'll raise a ruckus. Agitate to get Elliot removed."

"And how long would it take such a petition to get to Elliot's superiors?"

A year. And another to get it back. Elliot could do an untold amount of damage in two years.

Probably best not to stoke that particular fear just now.

*Don't lie,* murmured Tom from memory. *Always comes back to bite you. Just give 'em the best version of the truth you can.*

What was the best version of the truth about Charles Elliot?

"I don't think we need to worry about the superintendent. He just wants to make his pile and get out."

"Even though he brings his wife and children with him to live in Macao? That is not the action of a man planning to *get out.*"

Every now and then, the extent of Howqua's information network could still surprise Dent. "Well, a bit like your Mr. Lin, Elliot's strictly passing through. Once he's cleared his debt and got his stake, he's moving on. Tasmania, I think. Easier to do if the family's already here with you." Dent picked up the wine jar again, and this time he poured out two cups. "So, you see? No matter which way you look at it, this is strictly a temporary problem. We are patient men, Howqua. We can out wait kings and emperors, never mind, commissioners and captains." He smiled at his own neat turn of phrase and held out one of the wine cups.

Howqua did not smile, or take the cup. Dent set it back in the rack. Above them, a woman laughed and clapped. A man began to sing, loudly. Dent's Chinese was good enough to know the subject matter was nothing the man would repeat in front of his mother.

"Yi Lu — *Captain Elliot* — does not approve of the trade in opium," said Howqua. "You have told me this yourself. He may make common cause with

Commissioner Lin.”

*And he’s made things work by playing the game according to the Chinese rules...*

No.

Elliot would not even consider putting British property at risk, never mind British citizens. The man was a lot of things, but he was a loyal naval officer. Elliot would never turn traitor. Dent knew that for sure.

*It’s not about what you know Lance, old boy, Tom’s memory reminded him. It’s about who you know, and who knows you. Most of all, it’s about who likes you.*

Elliot did not like him. *Now that could become a problem.* Dent gulped his wine.

“Dian Di, you say Yi Lu has debt. He needs money. Can he be bribed?” asked Howqua.

“I wish he could,” said Dent. “I’ve made...a few overtures. Got nowhere, I’m afraid.” The truth was, Elliot had almost taken a swing at him. Come to think of it, that was where things had begun to go wrong between him and the little captain.

“Can he be persuaded to go away until we understand what demands Commissioner Lin will make of the foreigners? If communication can be delayed, or letters misplaced or destroyed, the confusion will help us and frustrate them both.”

Above decks, things had quieted down. Probably everyone was settling into their smoke. Dent sauntered back over to the carved screen and looked out for a long moment. The river was never empty, not during daylight. Trading ships with their huge white sails loomed over the sampans. Long oar boats — some of them surely “fast crabs” — shot between the bulkier vessels. The junks and houseboats with their round cabins and long tillers bobbed along, placidly minding their own business.

It was a whole world in motion, as busy and varied as any city street. It fascinated him and always had. Maybe because he’d seen it before, on the Thames, and in the port of Calcutta.

*It’s the same the whole world over...* the line from the music hall song flitted through his mind.

*It’s also a bad time to turn philosopher Lance, old boy. You’ve got a problem. Howqua’s angry, and he’s scared. He wants Elliot out of the way for a bit. Might help, might not. But if you can work it, though, that will reassure him that you’re still on his side.*

In his mind’s eye, Tom nodded his approval.

“At bottom, Elliot’s a straightforward man,” Dent mused. “Got all the British virtues and a good dose of ambition to go with them. So, our best shot is to appeal to his sense of duty.”

“His duty will be to stop the opium.”

“That’s *Lin’s* duty. *Elliot’s* duty is to protect British life and property.” Dent stopped. He had it. “It’s also to establish a direct line of communication between our government and yours.”

“You English keep saying such things. It is incomprehensible. The means of communication exists. It is clearly drawn and perfectly understood. A petition is written in the proper form and submitted...”

Dent cut him off. “I’m not going to argue protocol with you now. Just try to understand that the way you do things is not the way we *want* to do things. We want to meet face-to-face with men who have the power to make things happen. Elliot wants to actually meet Commissioner Lin personally. Stand in front of him. In the same room,” he added, because of the confusion on Howqua’s face.

“Lin would never do such a thing.”

“I know that. But if we could make Elliot think there was just a chance — any chance at all — he could get into a room with Lin, he’d go haring off to the ends of the earth.”

“*Why?*”

“Because Lin is carrying the Emperor’s writing and meets with the Emperor face-to-face. If Elliot meets Lin, that means he’s gotten closer to the Emperor than any Englishman, ever.”

But how to convince Elliot that chance was real? Any ruse would have to hinge on something a Chinaman of Lin’s rank would actually *do*. Elliot, damn him, had made a study of their protocols.

“You say there are rumors that Lin’s prowling the streets, right? Well, he has to have heard there’s drop off points all up and down the coast where fast crab boats meet the land smugglers to unload the opium. Suppose we tell Elliot that Lin wants to make some kind of tour of inspection? Your fellows do that, don’t they? I might be able to make Elliot think they could bump into each other while Lin’s traveling up the coast...”

Howqua’s eyes sparked, and Dent saw he grasped the idea. “What if we could say Commissioner Lin means to go to Macao and Yi Lu might be able to find him there? I have a copy of a letter from a friend of the commissioner’s.” There was that

network again. "It speaks of the possibility that Lin will only stop temporarily in Canton and will move onto Macao for the duration of his business in the province."

"Yes. That will do nicely. Can you get me that copy?"

"I will send it by my oldest son,"

"Excellent. Leave the rest in my hands. I'll have word for you by tomorrow night."

Howqua nodded, and looked through the screen, judging the river bank and the angle of the sunlight. "You should go now. I will have a servant rouse your boatman."

Unfortunately, the boatman had been enjoying a little of what was on offer to the paying customers. At least it was the wine and not the opium. So, instead of leaving Dent stranded while he slept it off, the ragged man just insisted on singing the same obscene song Dent had heard earlier. Apparently, he thought it was the height of wit, because he kept stopping between couplets for a long, wheezing laugh.

No matter. They'd get where they were going soon enough. In fact, by the end of the first hour, Dent had thrown back his head and begun to sing along. The pair of them had a jolly time of it, braying like idiots and laughing at themselves as they bobbed and weaved back up the Pearl River in the sunset.

That was the difference between him and Elliot, Dent mused. Elliot resented things. Always raging against what couldn't be helped. Where did that kind of thing lead a man? To apoplexy and an early grave. Too bad he couldn't learn to take things as he found them. Made things so much easier. As it was, Elliot was as bad as that holier-than-thou American Puritan, Mr. Charles King.

*Well, no not quite that bad.* Elliot at least had some care for his own family and his own future. And, if push came to shove, he could be counted to act for them.

Dent chuckled. *Have to take my own advice. Take Elliot as I find him.*

*Take him, and leave him,* suggested his memory of Tom. *High and dry.*



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