

Weird Tales

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WEIRD STORY REPRINT

The Dragon Fang

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

CHAPTER 1

THE MIRACULOUS DRAGON FANG

“**C**OME, men and women, and little people of Tching-tou, come and listen. The small and ignoble person who annoys you by his presence is the miserable conjurer known as Piou-lu. Everything that can possibly be desired he can give you;—charms to heal dissensions in your noble and illustrious families;—spells by which beautiful little people without style may become learned Bachelors, and reign high in the palaces of literary composition;—supernatural red pills, with which you can cure your elegant and renowned diseases;—wonderful incantations, by which the assassins of any member of your shining and virtuous

families can be discovered and made to yield compensation, or be brought under the just eye of the Brother of the Sun. What is it that you want? This mean little conjurer, who now addresses you, can supply all your charming and refreshing desires; for he is known everywhere as Piou-lu, the possessor of the ever-renowned and miraculous Dragon Fang!”

There was a little, dry laugh, and a murmur among the crowd of idlers that surrounded the stage erected by Piou-lu in front of the Hotel of the Thirty-two Virtues. Fifth-class mandarins looked at fourth-class mandarins and smiled, as much as to say, “We who are educated men know what to think of this fellow.” But the fourth-class mandarins looked haughtily at the fifth-class, as if they had no business to smile at their

superiors. The crowd, however, composed as it was principally of small traders, barbers, porcelain-tinkers, and country people, gazed with open mouths upon the conjurer, who, clad in a radiant garment of many colors, strutted proudly up and down upon his temporary stage.

"What is a Dragon Fang, ingenious and well-educated conjurer?" at last inquired Wei-chang-tze, a solemn-looking mandarin of the third class, who was adorned with a sapphire button and a one-eyed peacock's feather. "What is a Dragon Fang?"

"Is it possible," asked Piou-lu, "that the wise and illustrious son of virtue, the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, does not know what a Dragon Fang is?" and the conjurer pricked up his ears at the mandarin, as a hare at a barking dog.

"Of course, of course," said the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, looking rather ashamed of his having betrayed such ignorance, "one does not pass his examinations for nothing. I merely wished that you should explain to those ignorant people here what a Dragon Fang is; that was why I asked."

"I thought that the Soul of Wisdom must have known," said Piou-lu, triumphantly, looking as if he believed firmly in the knowledge of Wei-chang-tze. "The noble commands of Wei-chang-tze shall be obeyed. You all know," said he, looking round upon the people, "that there are three great and powerful Dragons inhabiting the universe. Lung, or the Dragon of the Sky; Li, or the Dragon of the Sea; and Kiau, or the Dragon of the Marshes. All these Dragons are wise, strong and terrible. They are wondrously formed, and can take any shape that pleases them. Well, good people, a great many moons ago, in the season of spiked grain, I was following the profession of a barber in the mean

and unmentionable town of Siho, when one morning, as I was sitting in my shop waiting for customers, I heard a great noise of tam-tams, and a princely palanquin stopped before my door. I hastened, of course, to observe the honorable rites toward this newcomer, but before I could reach the street a mandarin, splendidly attired, descended from the palanquin. The ball on his cap was of a stone and color that I had never seen before, and three feathers of some unknown bird hung down behind his headdress. He held his hand to his jaw, and walked into my house with a lordly step. I was greatly confused, for I knew not what rank he was of, and felt puzzled how to address him. He put an end to my embarrassment.

"I am in the house of Piou-lu, the barber," he said, in a haughty voice that sounded like the roll of a copper drum amidst the hills.

"That disgraceful and ill-conditioned person stands before you," I replied, bowing as low as I could.

"It is well," said he, seating himself in my operating-chair, while two of his attendants fanned him. "Piou-lu, I have the toothache!"

"Does your lordship," said I, "wish that I should remove your noble and illustrious pain?"

"You must draw my tooth," said he. "Wo to you if you draw the wrong one!"

"It is too much honor," I replied; "but I will make my abominable and ill-conducted instruments entice your lordship's beautiful tooth out of your high-born jaw with much rapidity."

"So I got my big pincers, and my opium-bottle, and opened the strange mandarin's mouth. Ah! it was then that my low-born and despicable heart descended into my bowels. I should have dropped my pincers from sheer fright if they had not caught by their hooked ends in my wide sleeve. The mandarin's mouth

was all on fire inside. As he breathed, the flames rolled up and down his throat, like the flames that gather on the Yellow Grass Plains in the season of Much Heat. His palate glowed like red-hot copper, and his tongue was like a brass stewpan that had been on the salt-fire for thirty days. But it was his teeth that affrighted me most. They were a serpent's teeth. They were long, and curved inward, and seemed to be made of transparent crystal, in the center of which small tongues of orange-colored fire leaped up and down out of some cavity in the gums.

"'Well, dilatory barber,' said the mandarin, in a horrible tone, while I stood pale and trembling before him, 'why don't you draw my tooth? Hasten, or I will have you sliced lengthwise and fried in the sun.'

"'O, my lord!' said I, terrified at this threat, 'I fear that my vicious and unendurable pincers are not sufficiently strong.'

"'Slave!' answered he in a voice of thunder, 'if you do not fulfil my desires, you will not see another moon rise.'

"I saw that I should be killed anyway, so I might as well make the attempt. I made a dart with my pincers at the first tooth that came, closed them firmly on the crystal fang, and began to pull with all my strength. The mandarin bellowed like an ox of Tibet. The flames rolled from his throat in such volume that I thought they would singe my eyebrows. His two attendants and his four palanquin-bearers put their arms round my waist to help me to pull, and there we tugged for three or four minutes, until at last I heard a report as loud as nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine firecrackers. The attendants, the palanquin-bearers, and myself all fell flat on the floor, and the crystal fang glittered between the jaws of the pincers.

"The mandarin was smiling pleasantly as I got up from the floor. 'Piou-lu,' said he, 'you had a narrow escape. You have removed my toothache, but had you failed, you would have perished miserably; for I am the Dragon Lung, who rules the sky and the heavenly bodies, and I am as powerful as I am wise. Take as a reward the Dragon Fang which you drew from my jaw. You will find it a magical charm with which you can work miracles. Honor your parents, observe the rites, and live in peace.'

"So saying, he breathed a whole cloud of fire and smoke from his throat, that filled my poor and despicable mansion. The light dazzled and the smoke suffocated me, and when I recovered my sight and breath the Dragon Lung, the attendants, the palanquin, and the four bearers had all departed, how and whither I knew not. Thus was it, elegant and refined people of Tching-tou, that this small and evil-minded person who stands before you became possessed of the wonderful Dragon Fang, with which he can work miracles."

THIS story, delivered as it was with much graceful and dramatic gesticulation, and a volubility that seemed almost supernatural, had its effect upon the crowd, and a poor little tailor, named Hang-pou, who was known to be always in debt, was heard to say that he wished he had the Dragon Fang, wherewith to work miracles with his creditors. But the mandarins, blue, crystal, and gilt, smiled contemptuously, and said to themselves, "We who are learned men know how to esteem these things."

The Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, however, seemed to be of an inquiring disposition, and evinced a desire to continue his investigations.

"Supremely visited conjurer," said he to Piou-lu, "your story is indeed wonderful. To have been visited

by the Dragon Lung must have been truly refreshing and enchanting. Though not in the least doubting your marvelous relation, I am sure this virtuous assemblage would like to see some proof of the miraculous power of your Dragon Fang."

The crowd gave an immediate assent to his sentiment by pressing closer to the platform on which Piou-lu strutted, and exclaiming with one voice, "The lofty mandarin says wisely. We would like to behold."

Piou-lu did not seem in the slightest degree disconcerted. His narrow black eyes glistened like the dark edges of the seeds of the water-melon, and he looked haughtily around him.

"Is there any one of you who would like to have a miracle performed, and of what nature?" he asked, with a triumphant wave of his arms.

"I would like to see my debts paid," murmured the little tailor, Hang-pou.

"O Hang-pou," replied the conjurer, "this unworthy personage is not going to pay your debts. Go home and sit in your shop, and drink no more rice-wine, and your debts will be paid; for labor is the Dragon Fang that works miracles for idle tailors!"

There was a laugh through the crowd at this sally, because Hang-pou was well known to be fond of intoxicating drinks, and spent more of his time in the street than on his shop-board.

"Would either of you like to be changed into a camel?" continued Piou-lu. "Say the word, and there shall not be a finer beast in all Tibet!"

No one, however, seemed to be particularly anxious to experience this transformation. Perhaps it was because it was warm weather, and camels bear heavy burdens.

"I will change the whole honorable assemblage into turkey-buzzards,

if it only agrees," continued the conjurer; "or I will make the Lake Tung come up into the town in the shape of a water-melon, and then burst and overflow everything."

"But we should all be drowned!" exclaimed Hang-pou, who was cowardly as well as intemperate.

"That's true," said Piou-lu, "but then you need not fear your creditors,"—and he gave such a dart of his long arm at the poor little tailor, that the wretched man thought he was going to claw him up and change him into some frightful animal.

"Well, since this illustrious assembly will not have turkey-buzzards or camels, this weak-minded, ill-shapen personage must work a miracle on himself," said Piou-lu, descending from his platform into the street, and bringing with him a little three-legged stool made of bamboo rods.

The crowd retreated as he approached, and even the solemn Weichang-tze seemed rather afraid of this miraculous conjurer. Piou-lu placed the bamboo stool firmly on the ground, and then mounted upon it.

"Elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool," he said, lifting his arms, and exhibiting something in his hand that seemed like a piece of polished jade-stone,—“elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool, the justly despised conjurer, named Piou-lu, entreats that you will immediately grow tall, in the name of the Dragon Lung!"

Truly the stool began to grow, in the presence of the astonished crowd. The three legs of bamboo lengthened and lengthened with great rapidity, bearing Piou-lu high up into the air. As he ascended he bowed gracefully to the open-mouthed assembly.

"It is delightful!" he cried; "the air up here is so fresh! I smell the tea winds from Fuh-kien. I can see the spot where the heavens and the earth cease to run parallel. I hear the gongs of Peking, and listen to the

lowing of the herds of Tibet. Who would not have an elegant bamboo stool that knew how to grow?"

By this time Piou-lu had risen to an enormous height. The legs of the slender tripod on which he was mounted seemed like silkworms' threads, so thin were they compared with their length. The crowd began to tremble for Piou-lu.

"Will he never stop?" said a mandarin with a gilt ball, named Lin.

"O, yes!" shouted Piou-lu from the dizzy height of his bamboo stool. "O, yes! this ugly little person will immediately stop. Elegant stool, the poor conjurer entreats you to stop growing; but he also begs that you will afford some satisfaction to this beautifying assemblage down below, who have honored you with their inspection."

The bamboo stool, with the utmost complaisance, ceased to lengthen out its attenuated limbs, but on the moment experienced another change as terrifying to the crowd. The three legs began to approach each other rapidly, and before the eye could very well follow their motions had blended mysteriously and inexplicably into one, the stool still retaining a miraculous equilibrium. Immediately this single stem began to thicken most marvelously, and instead of the dark shining skin of a bamboo stick, it seemed gradually to be incased in overlapping rings of a rough bark. Meanwhile a faint rustling noise continued overhead, and when the crowd, attracted by the sound, looked up, instead of the flat disk of canework on which Piou-lu had so wondrously ascended, they beheld a cabbage-shaped mass of green, which shot forth every moment long pointed satiny leaves of the tenderest green, and the most graceful shape imaginable. But where was Piou-lu? Some fancied that in the yellow crown that topped the cabbage-shaped bud of this strange tree they

could see the tip of his cap, and distinguish his black, roguish eyes, but that may have been all fancy; and they were quickly diverted from their search for the conjurer by a shower of red, pulpy fruits, that began to fall with great rapidity from the miraculous tree. Of course there was a scramble, in which the mandarins themselves did not disdain to join; and the crimson fruits—the like of which no one in Tching-tou had ever seen before—proved delightfully sweet and palatable to the taste.

"That's right! that's right! perfectly bred and very polite people," cried a shrill voice while they were all scrambling for the crimson fruits; "pick fruit while it is fresh, and tea while it is tender. For the sun wilts, and the chills toughen, and the bluest plum blooms only for a day."

Everybody looked up, and lo! there was Piou-lu, as large as life, strutting upon the stage, waving a large green fan in his hand. While the crowd was yet considering this wonderful reappearance of the conjurer, there was heard a very great outcry at the end of the street, and a tall thin man in a coarse blue gown came running up at full speed.

"Where are my plums, sons of thieves?" he cried, almost breathless with haste. "Alas! alas! I am completely ruined. My wife will perish miserably for want of food, and my sons will inherit nothing but empty baskets at my death! Where are my plums?"

"Who is it that dares to address the virtuous and well-disposed people of Tching-tou after this fashion?" demanded the Mandarin Lin, in a haughty voice, as he confronted the newcomer.

The poor man, seeing the gilt ball, became immediately very humble, and bowed several times to the mandarin.

"O, my lord!" said he; "I am an incapable and undeserving plum-

seller, named Liho. I was just now sitting at my stall in a neighboring street selling five cash worth of plums to a customer, when suddenly all the plums rose out of my baskets as if they had the wings of hawks, and flew through the air over the tops of the houses in this direction. Thinking myself the sport of demons, I ran after them, hoping to catch them, and— Ah! there are my plums," he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and making a dart at some of the crimson fruits that the tailor Hang held in his hand, intending to carry them home to his wife.

"These your plums!" screamed Hang, defending his treasure vigorously. "Mole that you are, did you ever see scarlet plums?"

"This man is stricken by heaven," said Piou-lu, gravely. "He is a fool who hides his plums and then thinks that they fly away. Let someone shake his gown."

A porcelain-cobbler who stood near the fruiterer immediately seized the long blue robe and gave it a lusty pull, when, to the wonder of everybody, thousands of the most beautiful plums fell out, as from a tree shaken by the winds of autumn. At this moment a great gust of wind arose in the street, and a pillar of dust mounted up to the very top of the strange tree, that still stood waving its long satiny leaves languidly above the house-tops. For an instant everyone was blinded, and when the dust had subsided so as to permit the people to use their eyes again the wonderful tree had completely vanished, and all that could be seen was a little bamboo stool flying along the road, where it was blown by the storm. The poor fruiterer, Liho, stood aghast, looking at the plums, in which he stood knee-deep.

The mandarin, addressing him, said sternly, "Let us hear no more such folly from Liho, otherwise he will get twenty strokes of the stick."

"Gather your plums, Liho," said Piou-lu kindly, "and think this one of your fortunate days; for he who runs after his losses with open mouth does not always overtake them."

And as the conjurer descended from his platform it did not escape the sharp eyes of the little tailor Hang that Piou-lu exchanged a mysterious signal with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze.

CHAPTER 2

THE SHADOW OF THE DUCK

IT WAS close on nightfall Piou-lu stopped before Wei-chang-tze's house. The lanterns were already lit, and the porter dozed in a bamboo chair so soundly that Piou-lu entered the porch and passed the screen without awaking him. The inner room was dimly lighted by some horn lanterns elegantly painted with hunting scenes; but despite the obscurity the conjurer could discover Wei-chang-tze seated at the farther end of the apartment on an inclined couch covered with blue and yellow satin. Along the corridor that led to the women's apartments the shadows lay thick; but Piou-lu fancied he could hear the pattering of little feet upon the matted floor, and see the twinkle of curious eyes illuminating the solemn darkness. Yet, after all, he may have been mistaken, for the corridor opened on a garden wealthy in the rarest flowers, and he may have conceived the silver dripping of the fountain to be pattering of dainty feet, and have mistaken the moonlight shining on the moist leaves of the lotus for the sparkle of women's eyes.

"Has Piou-lu arrived in my dwelling?" asked Wei-chang-tze from the dim corner in which he lay.

"That ignoble and wrath-deserving personage bows his head before you," answered Piou-lu, advancing and sa-

luting the mandarin in accordance with the laws of the Book of Rites.

"I hope that you performed your journey hither in great safety and peace of mind," said Wei-chang-tze, gracefully motioning to the conjurer to seat himself on a small blue sofa that stood at a little distance.

"When so mean an individual as Piou-lu is honored by the request of the noble Wei-chang-tze, good fortune must attend him. How could it be otherwise?" replied Piou-lu, seating himself not on the small blue sofa, but on the satin one which was partly occupied by the mandarin himself.

"Piou-lu did not send in his name, as the rites direct," said Wei-chang-tze, looking rather disgusted by this impertinent freedom on the part of the conjurer.

"The elegant porter that adorns the noble porch of Wei-chang-tze was fast asleep," answered Piou-lu, "and Piou-lu knew that the great mandarin expected him with impatience."

"Yes," said Wei-chang-tze; "I am oppressed by a thousand demons; devils sleep in my hair, and my ears are overflowing with evil spirits; I can not rest at night, and feel no pleasure in the day. Therefore was it that I wished to see you, in hopes that you would, by amusing the demon that inhabits my stomach, induce him to depart."

"I will endeavor to delight the respectable demon who lodges in your stomach with my unworthy conjurations," replied Piou-lu. "But first I must go into the garden to gather flowers."

"Go," said Wei-chang-tze. "The moon shines, and you will see there very many rare and beautiful plants that are beloved by my daughter Wu."

"The moonlight itself can not shine brighter on the lilies than the glances of your lordship's daugh-

ter," said the conjurer, bowing and proceeding to the garden.

Ah! what a garden it was that Piou-lu now entered! The walls that surrounded it were lofty, and built of a rosy stone brought from the mountains of Manchuria. This wall, on whose inner face flowery designs and triumphal processions were sculptured at regular intervals, sustained the long and richly laden shoots of the white magnolia, which spread its large snowy chalices in myriads over the surface. Tamarisks and palms sprang up in various parts of the grounds, like dark columns supporting the silvery sky; while the tender and mournful willow drooped its delicate limbs over numberless fish-ponds, whose waters seemed to repose peacefully in the bosom of the emerald turf. The air was distracted with innumerable perfumes, each more fragrant than the other. The blue convolvulus, the crimson ipomea, the prodigal azaleas, the spotted tiger-lilies, the timid and half-hidden jasmine, all poured forth, during the day and night, streams of perfume from the inexhaustible fountains of their chalices. The heavy odors of the tube-rose floated languidly through the leaves, as a richly plumaged bird would float through summer air, borne down by his own splendor. The blue lotus slept on the smooth waves of the fish-ponds in sublime repose. There seemed an odor of enchantment over the entire place. The flowers whispered their secrets in the perfumed silence; the inmost heart of every blossom was unclosed at that mystic hour; all the magic and mystery of plants floated abroad, and the garden seemed filled with the breath of a thousand spells. But amidst the lilies and lotuses, amidst the scented roses and the drooping convolvuli, there moved a flower fairer than all.

"I am here," whispered a low voice, and a dusky figure came glid-

ing toward Piou-lu, as he stood by the fountain.

"Ah!" said the conjurer, in a tender tone, far different from the shrill one in which he addressed the crowd opposite the Hotel of the Thirty-two Virtues. "The garden is now complete. Wu, the Rose of Completed Beauty, has blossomed on the night."

"Let Piou-lu shelter her under his mantle from the cold winds of evening, and bear her company for a little while, for she has grown up under a lonely wall," said Wu, laying her little hand gently on the conjurer's arm, and nestling up to his side as a bird nestles into the fallen leaves warmed by the sun.

"She can lie there but a little while," answered Piou-lu, folding the mandarin's daughter in a passionate embrace, "for Wei-chang-tze awaits the coming of Piou-lu impatiently, in order to have a conjuration with a devil that inhabits his stomach."

"Alas!" said Wu, sadly; "why do you not seek some other and more distinguished employment than that of a conjurer? Why do you not seek distinction in the Palace of Literary Composition, and obtain a style? Then we need not meet in secret, and you might without fear demand my hand from my father."

Piou-lu smiled, almost scornfully. He seemed to gain an inch in stature, and looked around him with an air of command.

"The marble from which the statue is to be carved must lie in the quarry until the workman finds it," he answered, "and the hour of my destiny has not yet arrived."

"Well, we must wait, I suppose," said Wu, with a sigh. "Meantime, Piou-lu, I love you."

"The hour will come sooner than you think," said Piou-lu, returning her caress; "and now go, for the mandarin waits."

WU GLIDED away through the gloom to her own apartment, while the conjurer passed rapidly through the garden and gathered the blossoms of certain flowers as he went. He seemed to linger with a strange delight over the buds bathed in the moonlight and the dew; their perfume ascended into his nostrils like incense, and he breathed it with a voluptuous pleasure.

"Now let the demon tremble in the noble stomach of Wei-chang-tze," said Piou-lu, as he re-entered the hall of reception laden with flowers. "This ill-favored personage will make such conjurations as shall delight the soul of the elegant and well-born mandarin, and cause his illustrious persecutor to fly terrified."

Piou-lu then stripped off the petals from many of the flowers, and gathered them in a heap on the floor. The mass of leaves were indeed variegated. The red of the quamoelit, the blue of the convolvulus, the tender pink of the camellia, the waxen white of the magnolia, were all mingled together like the thousand hues in the Scarfs of Felicity. Having built this confused mass of petals in the shape of a pyramid, Piou-lu unwound a scarf from his waist and flung it over the heap. He then drew the piece of jade-stone from his pocket, and said,—

"This personage of outrageous presence desires that what will be may be shown to the lofty mandarin, Wei-chang-tze."

As he pronounced these words, he twitched the scarf away with a rapid jerk, and lo! the flower-leaves were gone, and in their place stood a beautiful mandarin duck, in whose gorgeous plumage one might trace the brilliant hues of the flowers. Piou-lu now approached the duck, caught it up with one hand, while with the other he drew a sharp knife from his girdle and severed the bird's head from its body at a single stroke. To

the great astonishment of Wei-chang-tze, the body and dismembered head of the bird vanished the moment the knife had passed through the neck; but at the same instant a duck, resembling it in every respect, escaped from the conjurer's hands and flew across the room. When I say that this duck resembled the other in every respect, I mean only in shape, size and colors. For the rest, it was no bodily duck. It was impalpable and transparent, and even when it flew it made no noise with its wings.

"This is indeed wonderful!" said Wei-chang-tze. "Let the marvelous conjurer explain."

"The duck formed out of flowers was a duck pure in body and in spirit, most lofty mandarin," said Piou-lu, "and when it died under the knife, I ordered its soul to pass into its shadow, which can never be killed. Hence the shadow of the duck has all the colors as well as the intelligence of the real duck that gave it birth."

"And to what end has the very wise Piou-lu created this beautiful duck-shadow?" asked the mandarin.

"The cultivated Wei-chang-tze shall immediately behold," answered the conjurer, drawing from his wide sleeve a piece of rock-salt and flinging it to the farther end of the room. He had hardly done this when a terrific sound, between a bark and a howl, issued from the dim corner into which he had cast the rock-salt, and immediately a large gray wolf issued wonderfully from out of the twilight, and rushed with savage fangs upon the shadow of the beautiful duck.

"Why, it is a wolf from the forest of Manchuria!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze, rather alarmed at this frightful apparition. "This is no shadow, but a living and bloodthirsty beast."

"Let my lord observe and have no fear," said Piou-lu, tranquilly.

The wolf seemed rather confounded

when, on making a snap at the beautiful duck, his sharp fangs met no resistance, while the bird flew with wonderful venom straight at his fiery eyes. He growled, and snapped, and tore with his claws at the agile shadow that fluttered around and over him, but all to no purpose. As well might the hound leap at the reflection of the deer in the pool where he drinks. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed all the while to possess some strange, deadly influence over the savage wolf. His growls grew fainter and fainter, and his red and flaming eyes seemed to drop blood. His limbs quivered all over, and the rough hairs of his coat stood on end with terror and pain—the shadow of the beautiful duck never ceasing all the time to fly straight at his eyes.

"The wolf is dying!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze.

"He will die,—die like a dog," said Piou-lu, in a tone of savage triumph.

And presently, as he predicted, the wolf gave two or three faint howls, turned himself round in a circle as if making a bed to sleep on, and then lay down and died. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed now to be radiant with glory. It shook its bright wings, that were lovely and transparent as a rainbow, and, mounting on the dead body of the wolf, sat in majesty upon his grim and shaggy throne.

"And what means this strange exhibition, learned and wise conjurer?" asked Wei-chang-tze, with a sorely troubled air.

"I will tell you," said Piou-lu, suddenly dropping his respectful and ceremonious language, and lifting his hand with an air of supreme power. "The mandarin duck, elegant, faithful, and courageous, is an emblem of the dynasty of Ming, the true Chinese race that ruled so splendidly in this land before the invaders usurped the throne. The cowardly and savage

wolf is a symbol of the Manchu Tartar robbers who slew our liberties, shaved our heads, and enchained our people. The time has now arrived when the duck has recovered its splendor and its courage, and is going to kill the wolf; for the wolf can not bite it, as it works like a shadow in the twilight and mystery of secret association. This you know, Wei-chang-tze, as well as I."

"I have indeed heard of a rebel Chinese named Tién-té who has raised a flame in our peaceful land, and who, proclaiming himself a lineal descendant of the dynasty of Ming, seeks to dethrone our wise and heavenly sovereign, Hién-foung."

"Lie not to me, Wei-chang-tze, for I know your inmost thoughts. Chinese as you are, I know that you hate the Tartar in your heart, but you are afraid to say so for fear of losing your head."

The mandarin was so stupefied at this audacious address that he could not reply, while the conjurer continued: "I come to make you an offer. Join the forces of the heaven-descended Emperor Tién-té. Join with him in expelling this tyrannical Tartar race from the Central Kingdom, and driving them back again to their cold hills and barren deserts. Fly with me to the Imperial camp, and bring with you your daughter Wu, the Golden Heart of the Lily, and I promise you the command of one third of the Imperial forces, and the Presidency of the College of Ceremonies."

"And who are you, who dare to ask of Wei-chang-tze to bestow on you his nobly-born daughter?" said Wei-chang-tze, starting in a rage from his couch.

"I!" replied Piou-lu, shaking his conjurer's gown from his shoulders and displaying a splendid garment of yellow satin, on the breast of which was emblazoned the Imperial Dragon,—"I am your Emperor, Tién-té!"

"Ha!" screamed a shrill voice behind him at this moment, "here he is. The elegant and noble rebel for whose head our worthy Emperor has offered a reward of ten thousand silver taels. Here he is. Catch! beautiful and noble mandarins, catch him! and I will pay my creditors with the head money."

Piou-lu turned, and beheld the little tailor Hang-pou, at whose back were a whole file of soldiers and a number of mandarins. Wei-chang-tze shuddered, for in this compromise of his character he knew that his death was written if he fell into the Imperial hands.

CHAPTER 3

"ALL IS OVER"

"**S**TATELY and temperate tailor," said Piou-lu, calmly, "why do you wish to arrest me?"

"Ho! because I will get a reward, and I want to pay my debts," said Hang-pou, grinning spitefully.

"A reward for me, the miserable and marrowless conjurer Piou-lu! O, elegant cutter of summer gowns, your well-educated brains are not at home!"

"O, we know you well enough, mighty conjurer. You are none other than the contumacious rebel, Tién-té, who dares to claim the throne held by the wise and merciful Hién-foung; and we will bear you to the court of Pekin in chains, so that you may wither in the light of his terrible eyes."

"You think you will get a reward of ten thousand silver taels for my head?" said Piou-lu.

"Certainly," replied the little tailor, rubbing his hands with glee,— "certainly. His Unmatched and Isolated Majesty has promised it, and the Brother of the Sun never lies."

"Listen, inventive closer of symmetrical seams! Listen, and I will tell you what will become of your ten

thousand silver taels. There is a long avenue leading to the imperial treasury, and at every second step is an open hand. When the ten thousand taels are poured out, the first hand grasps a half, the second hand an eighth of the remaining half, the third hand grasps a fourth of the rest, and when the money-bags get down a little lower, all the hands grasp together; so that when the bags reach the little tailor Hang-pou, who stands stamping his feet very far down indeed, they are entirely empty; for Tartar robbers surround the throne, and a Tartar usurper sits upon it, and the great Chinese nation toils in its rice-fields to gild their palaces, and fill their seraglios, and for all they give get neither justice nor mercy. But I, Tién-té, the Heavenly Emperor of this Central Land, will ordain it otherwise, and hurl the false Dragon from his throne; for it is written in the Book of Prognostics, a copy of which was brought to me on the wings of a yellow serpent, that the dynasty of Han shall rule once more, and the Tartar wolves perish miserably out of the Land of Flowers."

"This is treason against the Light of the Universe, our most gracious Emperor," said the Mandarin Lin. "You shall have seventy times seven pounds of cold iron put upon your neck for these blasphemies, and I will promise you that many bamboo splinters shall be driven up under your rebellious nails."

"Let our ears be no longer filled with these atrocious utterances!" cried Hang-pou. "O brave and splendid mandarins, order your terrifying tigers to arrest this depraved rebel, in order that we may hasten with him to Peking."

"Before you throw the chains of sorrow around my neck, O tailor of celestial inspirations," said Piou-lu, with calm mockery,—“before the terrible weight of your just hand falls

upon me, I pray you, if you would oblige me, to look at that duck." So saying, Piou-lu pointed to where the shadow of the duck was sitting on the body of the wolf.

"Oh, what a beautiful duck!" cried Hang-pou, with glistening eyes, and clapping his hands. "Let us try and catch him!"

"It is indeed a majestic duck," said Mandarin Lin, gravely stroking his mustache. "I am favorable to his capture."

"You will wait until we catch the duck, illustrious rebel!" said Hang-pou to Piou-lu, very innocently, never turning his eyes from the duck, to which they seemed to be glued by some singular spell of attraction.

"I will talk with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze while you put your noble maneuvers into motion," answered Piou-lu.

"Now, let us steal upon the duck," said Hang-pou. "O handsomely-formed duck, we entreat of you to remain as quiet as possible, in order that we may grasp you in our hands."

Then, as if actuated by a single impulse, the entire crowd, with the exception of Wei-chang-tze and Piou-lu, moved toward the duck. The mandarins stepped on tiptoe, with bent bodies, and little black eyes glistening with eagerness; Hang-pou crawled on his belly like a serpent; and the soldiers, casting aside their bows and shields, crept, with their hands upon their sides, toward the beautiful bird. The duck remained perfectly quiet, its variegated wings shining like painted talc, and its neck lustrous as the court robe of a first-class mandarin. The crowd scarcely breathed, so intense was their eagerness to capture the duck; and they moved slowly forward, gradually surrounding it.

Hang-pou was the first to make a clutch at the bird, but he was very much astonished to find his hand

closing on empty air, while the duck remained seated on the wolf, as still as a picture.

"Miserable tailor!" cried Mandarin Lin; "your hand is a sieve, with meshes wide enough to strain elephants. How can you catch the beautiful duck? Behold me!" and Mandarin Lin made a rapid and well-calculated dive at the duck. To the wonderment of everyone except Piou-lu and Wei-chang-tze, the duck seemed to ooze through his fingers, and, escaping, flew away to the other end of the room.

"If my hand is a sieve," said Hang-pou, "it is evident that the noble mandarin's hand is not a wall of beaten copper, for it lets ducks fly through with wonderful ease."

"It is a depraved and abominable duck, of criminal parentage," said Mandarin Lin, in a terrible rage; "and I vow, by the whiskers of the Dragon, that I will catch it and burn it on a spit."

"O, yes!" cried the entire crowd, —mandarins, soldiers, and the little tailor,—all now attracted to the chase of the duck by a power that they could no longer resist. "O, yes! we will most assuredly capture this little duck, and, depriving him of his feathers, punish him on a spit that is exceedingly hot."

So the chase commenced. Here and there, from one corner to the other, up the walls, on the altar of the household gods,—in short, in every portion of the large room, did the mandarins, the little tailor, and the soldiers pursue the shadow of the beautiful duck. Never was seen such a duck. It seemed to be in twenty places at a time. One moment Mandarin Lin would throw himself bodily on the bird, in hopes of crushing it, and would call out triumphantly that now indeed he had the duck; but the words would be hardly out of his mouth when a loud shout from the rest of the party would disabuse his

mind, and, turning, he would behold the duck marching proudly down the center of the floor. Another time a soldier would declare that he had the duck in his breeches pocket; but while his neighbors were carefully probing that recess the duck would be seen calmly emerging from his right-hand sleeve. One time Hang-pou sat down suddenly on the mouth of a large china jar, and resolutely refused to stir, declaring that he had seen the duck enter the jar, and that he was determined to sit upon the mouth until the demon of a duck was starved to death. But even while uttering his heroic determination, his mouth was seen to open very wide, and, to the astonishment of all, the duck flew out. In an instant the whole crowd was after him again; Mandarin Hy-le tumbled over Mandarin Ching-tze, and Mandarin Lin nearly drove his head through Hang-pou's stomach.

THE unhappy wretches began now to perspire and grow faint with fatigue, but the longer the chase went on the hotter it grew. There was no rest for any of them. From corner to corner, from side to side,—now in one direction, now in another,—no matter whither the duck flew, they were compelled to follow. Their faces streamed, and their legs seemed ready to sink upon them. Their eyeballs were ready to start out of their heads, and they had the air of government couriers who had traveled five hundred *li* in eleven days. They were nearly dead.

"Those men will surely perish, illustrious claimant of the throne," said Wei-chang-tze, gazing with astonishment at this mad chase.

"Let them perish!" said the conjurer; "so will perish all the enemies of the Celestial sovereign, Tién-té. Wei-chang-tze, once more, do you accept my offer? If you remain here,

you will be sent to Peking in chains; if you come with me, I will gird your waist with the scarf of Perpetual Delight. We want wise men like you to guide our armies, and——”

“And the illustrious Tién-té loves the mandarin’s daughter,” said Wei-chang-tze, roguishly finishing the sentence. “Light of the Universe and Son of Heaven, Wei-chang-tze is your slave!”

Piou-lu—for I still call him by his conjurer’s name—gave a low whistle, and, obedient to the summons, Wu’s delicate shape came gliding from the corridor toward her lover, with the dainty step of a young fawn going to the fountain.

“Wu,” said Piou-lu, “the marble is carved, and the hour is come.”

“My father, then, has consented?” said Wu, looking timidly at her father.

“When the Emperor of the Central Land condescends to woo, what father dare refuse?” said Wei-chang-tze.

“Emperor!” said Wu, opening her black eyes with wonder. “My Piou-lu an Emperor!”

“I am indeed the son of the Dragon,” said Piou-lu, folding her to his breast, “and you shall sit upon a throne of ivory and gold.”

“And I thought you were only a conjurer!” murmured Wu, hiding her head in his yellow gown.

“But how are we to leave this place?” asked Wei-chang-tze, looking alarmed. “The guard will seize us if they get knowledge of your presence.”

“We shall be at my castle in the

mountains of Tse-Hing, near the Kouéi-Lin, in less than a minute,” answered Piou-lu; “for to the possessor of the Dragon Fang all things are possible.”

Even as he spoke the ground began to slide from under their feet with wonderful rapidity, leaving them motionless and upright. Houses, walls, gardens, fields, all passed by them with the swiftness of a dream until, in a few seconds, they found themselves in the mountain castle of Tién-té, where they were welcomed with a splendid hospitality. Wu became the favorite wife of the adventurous Emperor, and Wei-chang-tze one of his most famous generals.

The day after these events some Tartar soldiers entered Wei-chang-tze’s house to search for the mandarin, when, in the reception-hall, they were confounded at finding a number of men lying dead upon the floor, while in the midst sat a beautiful duck, that immediately on their entrance flew out through a window, and was seen no more. The dead men were soon recognized, and it was the opinion of the people of Tching-tou that Wei-chang-tze had poisoned all the soldiers and mandarins, and then fled. The tailor, Hang-pou, being among the corpses, was found to have given his creditors the slip forever.

Victory still sits on the banner of Tién-té, and he will, without doubt, by the time that the tea is again fit to gather, sit upon the ancient throne of his ancestors.

Everything is now gracefully concluded.

