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WINDOWS of DESTINY

by
JAMES B. M. CLARK JR.



"Slowly the head came back to the left, until the eyes were fixed upon the ghastly countenance of Kupfer."

THE spectacles lay on the table between the two men, and for a time neither spoke. Each was busy with his thoughts. Winthrop, the younger, gazed at the glasses with eager curiosity not un-mixed with awe, for Dr. Ransome had just been telling him strange things about them and his journalistic instinct was fired. Here was a "story" with a vengeance. . . . Magic glasses!

The spectacles were certainly uncommon. The frame, of solid gold, was of unusual design, heavy and strong, the metal encircling the lenses after the old style. The bars that clasped the sides of the wearer's head were bowed slightly to give a spring effect, and after a still older fashion were hinged in the middle so that they could be folded up very compactly. Beyond being rather dark in tint there did not seem to be anything to distinguish the lenses from ordinary "smoked" glasses — excepting

perhaps their thickness. They were very heavy.

The case lay near Dr. Ransome's elbow. It also was of antique design and was quite a work of art. It was of light strong wood covered with red morocco leather and was in two pieces, the main body and a sliding end, which was removed completely when one inserted or withdrew the manner of the old-fashioned razor cases. Extending for about two-thirds of the length of the case proper there was clamped to one of its sides a kind of ivory tablet secured in place by little gold rivets. This tablet was inlaid with representations of fruits and flowers of remarkable perfection in form, coloring and artistic arrangement, betraying at once its Oriental origin.

"As I was explaining," said Dr. Ransome, "the mandarin brought the rock crystals over personally from Canton to Jena in Germany, having

heard of the fame of the optical workers there. I think I am right in saying that the crystals were spherical and had been used for crystal-gazing. Where they were actually mined I never heard. The mandarin, although a high and important dignitary in his own country, traveled to Europe without ostentation (for it was ordained that it should be done so) and proceeded to Jena, where he behaved rather singularly. Instead of going to the optical companies he went among the workers themselves, and by dint of persuasion and bribes ascertained that one Carl Werther, an elderly Swiss and a single man, was the cleverest and most accurate grinder in the district. Then he sought out Werther's employers and for a handsome payment obtained their permission to let him have the services of the Swiss on this particular job until it was finished. He would have taken Werther back with him to do the work in China, but it had been prophesied that it would be done in the west, and no true Chinaman would dream of disputing anything so sacred. However, he stipulated that he personally must be present during all the operations, that the unfinished work should be given to his care each night, that all particles of the ground crystals be gathered up and restored to him, and that no one should look through the finished glasses. In short he made himself a horrible nuisance to the optical people, but as he was willing to pay any price, they humored him and so he had his way."

"Didn't want anyone to see through the glasses, eh?" asked Winthrop with interest.

"No," said Ransome. "He was insistent on that point. But in that connection it is rather curious to note that the Swiss, Werther, developed some lung trouble not long after the mandarin had gone back east, and this soon carried him off. On his

death bed he confessed to the parish priest that he had disobeyed the mandarin's injunctions and had contrived to pilfer a piece of the precious crystal out of which he had fashioned for himself a monocle. The deed seemed to have troubled his conscience—in fact it was stated he had been a changed man since working on that particular job. At his own request the monocle was buried with him."

Winthrop picked the spectacles up and unfolded them.

"May I?" he asked, with an enquiring look at Dr. Ransome.

"Certainly," said the doctor heartily. "I brought them out for that purpose."

Winthrop adjusted the heavy frame to his face with difficulty and blinked around the room.

"I don't see anything special," he said in disappointed tones. "Everything is darker than usual—that's all."

He took the glasses off and looked at the doctor half-reproachfully. "And yet you say some people can see wonderful things through them?"

Dr. Ransome nodded.

"Try again," he said.

The young reporter again fixed the glasses in position and looked around. He stared out of the window for a few seconds and then, on turning his head sharply toward where Dr. Ransome was seated, he gave a start and an exclamation.

"Gee!" he said. "That was curious."

He remained staring.

"What was it?" asked Dr. Ransome, smiling slightly.

"As I turned round toward you there," said Winthrop, "instead of yourself sitting in the chair in everyday American clothes there was seated a Chinese gentleman in yellow robes ornamented with black dragons—I saw the dragons distinctly—and with some kind of a hat or skull-cap

on his head. The face and figure were yours—beard and all—but you had become a Chinaman. Then in a flash you were yourself again.”

He took the glasses off once more and examined them intently.

“I am glad you saw something after all,” said Dr. Ransome, his plump cheerful face wearing an air of relief. “It is a good sign. And what you saw was not so very ridiculous as might be supposed. For there is a certain amount of Chinese blood in my veins, as your father may have told you. My maternal grandmother was a full-blooded Chinese lady. When I was working on the staff of the *New Asia* in Hong-kong, by virtue of my Chinese ancestor I was admitted to membership in a powerful Chinese society, and on state occasions we wore such robes as you have described. All this, however, is between ourselves. . . .”

His keen blue eyes held those of his companion for a moment.

“Certainly,” replied Winthrop. “But you are not going to do me out of my story, I hope?”

“There will be no story out of these glasses, if you please,” said Dr. Ransome firmly and impressively. And then seeing the disappointment on Winthrop’s features he added kindly: “But I will give you plenty of other stories, Harry, never fear.”

The young man thanked him gratefully. To have been sent for by the most noted traveler and correspondent of his day and not get anything out of him would, he felt, have been nothing short of a calamity.

“THE glasses are famous throughout the East, where they are known as the ‘windows of destiny,’” continued Dr. Ransome. “Worn by an honest and earnest student and one who loves his fellows they will reveal the true nature of those on whom he turns his gaze. To those whose

hearts are evil other sights may be revealed. But the flippant, the sacrilegious and the unbelieving can accomplish nothing at all with them. The glasses were stolen from a temple in Peking during the Boxer rebellion (I was there at the time) and were found by a servant of mine on the body of a dead bandit. He brought them to me. I turned them over to the society of which I spoke, which numbers the best and most influential men in China among its members; and they commissioned me to perform a certain service with them in this country. But the glasses will ultimately go back to China, no matter whether I take them there or not. If they are in existence at all they will be recovered and taken there.”

“They are liable to be stolen, of course,” said Winthrop, keenly interested.

“They are,” said Dr. Ransome, “although not altogether on account of their intrinsic value. There are many sects and secret societies in China that would give anything to have them—plotters and malevolent persons. Several lives have been lost over them already, and there is even danger in having them about one—although not so much in this country.”

“How curious and interesting!” said Winthrop, drinking in every word.

“Rather,” said Dr. Ransome soberly. “And serious at the same time. For this is their theory of the purpose of the glasses: the ‘windows of destiny’ are to reveal to a great leader the manner in which to overcome the evils of mankind, and he is to open the eyes of the world to the true way out of the slough of hatred and enmity into which the peoples of the earth have fallen. Their faith in this is sublime, and their dream is that one of their race is to be the one chosen for the work.”

"Yes?" said Winthrop tensely.

"It is easy to speak of these things in a matter-of-fact way and to summarize them," said Dr. Ransome gravely. "But no words of mine could convey the faintest notion of the patient labor and care and love and devotion through long periods of time that finally resulted in the formulating of these theories—a formulation that might make many of our scientists blush. But it has finally been worked out to this. These people believe that somewhere in the world today there is what they call an 'imp of discord'—one man in particular who is making it his business to create strife and discord. Now I presume you know your history well enough to be aware of the mischief that one man or a few men can work—the case of Cæsar is a good enough illustration. You know how he repeatedly pardoned the handful of enemies who spent their lives balking him and who finally brought about his death and the disruption of the empire. Very well. There are in the world today a certain number of men whose business it is to create strife for their own personal ends. The Chinese believe that there is a kind of arch-chief who consciously or unconsciously affects the others—a kind of ringleader as it were. According to their calculations he is to be found in this country, and I have been commissioned to find him."

"And can I be of assistance to you?" asked Winthrop, his countenance betraying eagerness.

"You can," said Dr. Ransome decisively. "I have chosen you for the work. To get the best results from the glasses it is essential to have good and true eyesight. Now I am afflicted with a certain type of myopia which virtually prevents my using them at all. But you have good eyesight, and that is the first consideration. Secondly, your father was one

of my dearest friends. And, last but not least, I have made enquiries about you and find you to be possessed of considerable discretion."

Winthrop blushed as he bowed his thanks. This was indeed praise from a high quarter.

"I have consequently arranged with your employers," continued Dr. Ransome, "that for the next month you will be at my disposal. With your newspaper affiliations, and letters I shall give you, you will be able to get access to certain public men with whose names I shall furnish you. Some are financiers, some senators, some judges, some manufacturers. All you will be called on to do will be to get an interview with each of these men and survey them one and all through the glasses. You will report your findings to me here a month hence. You can get in touch with me in the interval if need be at the Press Club in New York. This is Thursday. You may reckon your month as commencing on next Monday, the thirteenth. If you will call here on Saturday forenoon at 11 o'clock I will give you all the papers you need and also the glasses, which meantime I am going to have taken from this old-fashioned frame and fitted into a more modern one—I think a horn frame will be the most suitable."

Dr. Ransome smiled and waved his hand, signifying that the interview was at an end, and Winthrop took his departure.

SO GREAT was the young reporter's excitement that he could scarcely sleep that night, and he counted the hours as they passed. To think that he should be selected for such a task—a task the like of which had never been heard of and which might involve all sorts of extraordinary adventures! He was in a fever of anticipation till the fateful Saturday forenoon wore slowly round, and

punctually at 11 o'clock he was at Dr. Ransome's room in the hotel. True to his promise the doctor had had the dark lenses taken from the heavy gold mounting, and they were now framed in common bone. The magnificent case, too, had disappeared and the spectacles were enclosed in one of polished aluminum. This the doctor handed to Winthrop shortly after his entrance, together with papers and letters of introduction.

"Take the names in the order in which you find them in the list," he said. "It is true this involves going back and forth from one town to another, but never mind. There is a reason for that particular order. And first of all you had better wear the glasses for a day or two (at intervals, that is, and not all the time) and get accustomed to their peculiarities. They take a little understanding. Be here a month from Monday with your report. Should anything very startling happen before then you can communicate with me as directed."

He shook hands with the young man and turned to his correspondence.

Winthrop's experiences before interviewing the first of his men may perhaps be best described by quoting from the report which he ultimately made to Dr. Ransome.

"I found at first that the glasses tended to give me a headache and even to cause a certain amount of dizziness. I could not wear them for more than about fifteen minutes at one time during the first day, but was able to increase this with each succeeding day until finally I could wear them as long as two hours at a stretch. My experiences on the first day (Saturday the eleventh) were so extraordinary that I was rendered rather nervous and excited, and went slightly easier on the next day. By the third day the 'breaking in' was complete.

"I began by viewing people on the public thoroughfares and in the street cars and subways. Many of these appeared ridiculously small, as if viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. These I assumed to be small people—unimportant, humbugs. Their number was distressingly and depressingly large. As sure as I turned the glasses on some well-dressed, impressive, prosperous-looking person whom one would have supposed to be of some importance, just so surely would he dwindle away. It would have been laughable had it not been rather sad on account of its commonness. Goodness seemed almost invariably to be found in inverse ratio to worldly circumstances—you got better results among the poor people.

"Ordinary everyday workpeople showed up well, that is to say they appeared very largely to be their normal selves, which I took to be a healthy sign. Some of them assumed quite a beatific appearance, and every now and again one would be discovered with a perfect aura or halo surrounding him or her. Almost invariably these were either artizans or simple office workers.

"One case in particular that quite stunned me was that of old Joe Leslie, who runs the little candy store near the university. There was such a light shining around this old man's head that one could hardly look at him. And yet when the glasses were removed it was just old Joe smiling at you. I felt inclined to go down on my knees. I have known for a long time that Joe was a good old scout, and I received kindnesses at his hands myself when at college. But now I think he must be a positive angel. I felt impelled to speak to him of those old days and to thank him again, but he could not remember having done anything in particular, he said. When I insisted he laughed and told me to forget it.

“Then I had an idea and told him to try on the glasses. He did so, and exclaimed almost at once on how bright everything and everybody looked. He went to the shop door and looked down the street, and he kept remarking all the time on the brightness and how beautiful everybody looked. He wanted to know where he could buy such glasses. I felt slightly ashamed to think that I should have seen most folks look the other way—that is at their worst.

“Wicked people, of whom there seem to be a great many, presented all sorts of appearances—mean, furtive, hypocritical, ferocious, and a few awful beyond description. These were chiefly in high places, and it used to scare me sometimes to see what power they had. Many of them seemed to move through a range of emotions according as their moods varied, from merely unpleasant to actually dreadful, just as the good varied from mildly good to beautiful. Even the small sometimes tended to grow larger. But the bad were always bad and the good never so.

“I was greatly interested in what I saw in the churches, which proved the most fascinating study. The ministers measured up poorly, most of them being small. An extra good type was found in a small denominational chapel down in the east end, the pastor of which, an old man, was said to be ‘emptying his church.’ It was admitted, however, that he did good work among the poor. It may perhaps have been significant here that the radiance which emanated from the person of this fine-looking old gentleman seemed to find a reflection in the countenances of nearly all of the limited number of worshipers who attended on the morning of my visit, and who seemed to be largely old women. The whole interior of the building was resplendent, and the worshipers seemed to laugh at one another with their eyes in a way that

was very beautiful and made one feel happy. I felt refreshed after attending this service.

“The average congregation seemed to contain an unpleasantly large number of the crafty and cunning and even of the cruel. The types could all be easily distinguished. The pastor of one fashionable church presented a truly demoniacal appearance and positively filled me with terror. Yet his sermon was clever and created much merriment and even applause. But just as in the old man’s church the radiance spread, so here did the evil—or rather this man had gathered evil ones about him. Here and there could be seen the white radiance shining (generally around some old head), but the general aspect of this church was dark and terrifying. A look of malevolent understanding seemed to sweep like wind on a field of corn across the upturned countenances as some clever point was made. Yet it was a wealthy and ‘upper class’ congregation.

“The business section showed up very badly—worst of all, with the possible exception of the town corporation. Heads of businesses, managers, partners, directors and officials of big companies were generally of the cunning and unscrupulous type, although here and there there were curious streaks of decency (very often among the younger men), and every now and again some splendid specimen. It is interesting to note that most of the men in this field who showed up well had good solid reputations. I did not find a single case of a fine man who was not known to be fine. A curious thing was that some of the very biggest magnates appeared quite small, while their lieutenants and right-hand men would be shockingly bad—indicating, I take it, that the great man was simply rather a harmless person who was being worked upon by scoun-

drels. Bankers as a class showed up well; lawyers the reverse.

"The city council, as a body, made the poorest showing, with deceit and dishonesty the order of the day, plus a certain amount of desperate villainy. But we have a good mayor. It was worth something to see him sitting there illuminating the whole chamber with his fine, honest, benevolent countenance. As I sat at the reporters' table a prominent member of the council came behind the mayor's chair (he was supposed to be one of the mayor's strongest supporters) and bending over whispered in his ear. For sheer malignity I never saw anything approaching this man's face as viewed through the glasses. The mayor frowned and dissented, and the look on the councilor's face became so diabolical that I took off the glasses in alarm, expecting to see him seize the mayor by the throat. But he was just standing there smiling—only it was a smile that I now understand thoroughly."

ABOUT the middle of the first week of the term of inquiry Winthrop interviewed the first of the men on his list, which contained in all twelve names that were household words all over the country. Left to himself Winthrop could scarcely have hoped to gain admittance to all of them, but Dr. Ransome was also working in his behalf and barriers were broken down in a way that Winthrop did not always understand. Sometimes there were delays and postponements, and of course time was lost by the order of the names on the list, which necessitated starting out at Washington, then journeying to New York, then back again to Washington, then to Chicago, then to New York again. But he kept steadily at the task, although so far the results were disappointing. Nothing very unusual developed until he tackled his ninth man, a world-renowned financier, at

the beginning of the last week of the search. Immediately after seeing this man he wired to Dr. Ransome to meet him at once, and next day they were together.

Winthrop was pale and excited, and his eyes shone strangely. The work, while not exactly difficult, had been arduous and nerve-trying and had called for much discretion and patience. But this was not what worried him; it was what he had on his mind.

"I think we have got our man, Doctor," he exclaimed dramatically, after shaking hands. "At least if it is a man at all."

He commenced to stride nervously up and down the room.

Dr. Ransome, although calm and unperturbed, nevertheless manifested real interest.

"Better sit down, Harry," he said, drawing out a chair and leading the excited young reporter to it. "We must keep cool, for we may have serious work to do. Tell me exactly what you saw."

Winthrop sat down and passed his hand with a quick movement across his forehead.

"I can hardly believe it is true," he said. "It is like some horrible nightmare. I almost wish I hadn't seen the sight."

"Yes?" said Dr. Ransome quietly, taking a pencil and a pad of paper from his pocket.

"I was rather relieved, if the truth must be told," began Winthrop, "that my men were showing up so well. They were mostly cunning and tricky. One or two, of course, were really villainous, but not more so than other men in lower walks of life. I felt pretty secure about this financier, he was so well known and so famous. I was sure he would figure well. I called as per appointment, and had a little chat with him before I put the glasses on while I explained to him about that Asiatic Develop-

ment Company and gave him the prospectus and your letter. While he was busy with these I donned the spectacles and turned my gaze on him. One look was enough. I nearly fell off my chair. You will understand the horror I felt and still feel when I tell you that what I saw sitting before me in that office chair was a thing like a monstrous rat!"

"Ah!" said Dr. Ransome significantly. "A rat."

He made one deep and curious character in the notebook with his pencil and then shut the book and put it back in his pocket.

"You possibly know what the man is like," continued Winthrop, shuddering slightly. "A little thin man with a narrow head and rather a high, bald forehead—everything about him small, small hands, small frame—and wears rather tight-fitting clothes. He changed right before my eyes, and there was a kind of great rat decked out in clothes and sitting at a desk reading a paper. I tell you the very hands became paws—I sat spellbound watching them slowly change. His voice is a high-pitched squeaking voice at the best of times, and when he raised his head and squeaked at me my blood simply ran cold. I could only mumble something incoherent in reply, so great was my confusion, tearing off the glasses as I did so. And there was his normal self staring at me in astonishment and doubtless thinking I had taken a fit or something. I made excuses. . . . Blamed it on the heat. But I got away as quickly as possible. I was afraid. When he shook hands with me at parting I nearly yelled, thinking I felt the touch of a paw."

Winthrop hid his face for a moment, quite overcome. Dr. Ransome, now pale and troubled, came round and patted him on the shoulder.

"I know all I need to know now," he said gently. "You have done well

and will be well rewarded. Don't speak of it any more."

"Yes, yes," said Winthrop with nervous eagerness. "Let me tell everything. It gives me relief. It is having the knowledge bottled up within me that is harmful."

Dr. Ransome resumed his seat.

"I once went into a show in my home town of Portland, Maine, when I was a boy," Winthrop said after a short silence, "to see something that had been caught on a ship in the harbor and was being exhibited as a curiosity. A nickel was charged for admission. It was a great monstrous rat of some kind—I forget exactly what they called it. But I wished afterward I had not looked at it at all—it haunted me for days. Its head and front paws were small—not so very much bigger than those of an ordinary rat, but it increased alarmingly toward the rear and had an enormous pair of haunches. The brute weighed, I think, about forty pounds. As you entered the tent in which its cage was housed you got a hind view of the thing, and it somehow made me think of the shoulders of a human being. I remember it gave me a kind of nausea at the time. Well, I experienced exactly the same sensation when I got my first glimpse of Kupfer through the glasses. He was sitting side on to me, and somehow it was his shoulders that first assumed the aspect of the hind quarters of the brute."

"It must have been dreadful," said Dr. Ransome sympathetically. "But I must see it too—if I can. It is part of my duty."

"The little paws handling the papers," said Winthrop, shuddering again. "The head with the snout in the air. . . ."

He stopped, unable to continue. For some moments he struggled with his emotions and then burst out: "Good God, sir! This is too horrible! What on earth does it mean?"

"Something like this, as near as I can figure," said Dr. Ransome sadly. "The thing began with this man's grandfather, who made the family fortune. We will suppose him to have been an ordinary type of man—perhaps slightly more avaricious than usual. His son, who succeeds him, extends and enlarges the business (as we know he did) and makes it a world-wide organization. He possibly is abnormally avaricious, as we have reason to believe he was. Now in the process of two such lives, unless great care is exercised (which it rarely is) the human element in the make-up of the individual is apt to become flattened out. There are few who can successfully carry the load of such greatness or handle wisely and justly the prodigious power entailed by the possession of such fortunes. For aught I know, the grandfather of this man may have been abnormal to begin with. The father was sometimes called 'money-mad.' The son is apparently a person whose soul is almost completely atrophied. That I take to be the meaning of the picture revealed. Cunning reigns supreme. Its symbol is the rat."

"Do you mean that the man has really lost his soul?" asked the horror-stricken reporter.

"Something like that," said Dr. Ransome, "although it is a little difficult to express by the use of a word like 'soul.' If you knew a little more about the religions of the East you would grasp the significance more clearly. The Buddhists, for example, do not believe in a 'soul' as we understand the term. They believe in a kind of collective something passing down from one life to another, the collective good or collective evil of the father coming down to the son as it were—in other words the starting of one life from the point of development at which the last one left off."

"I think I understand—slightly at any rate," said Winthrop.

"Now," continued Dr. Ransome, "if you keep going backward from what we might call the 'goodness' point you will come presently to what may be termed the 'zero line.' By that I mean the character line, to be on the right side of which is still to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, though the predominating tendency may be to do evil. But when you go below zero the distinction between good and evil is lost—the person is no longer able to discriminate between them."

"Really incapable of discriminating?" asked Winthrop in horrified fascination.

"Really incapable," said Dr. Ransome, "or in acute danger of becoming so unless he can be resuscitated by a tremendous mental shock of some kind. This man, as you know, is a public character. Hardly a day passes without his appearing somewhere or other and making a speech. You must have seen many of these speeches and know how they are always bristling with expressions of good will toward mankind in general and the poor and needy in particular. The man has been trained that way. He knows how to play up to the crowd. You will find him giving large sums to charities—his name is on every list of any importance. He supports at least one church almost entirely by himself. And yet if you could just read his inmost heart—hear him confess what he actually thought—well, you would then understand why he is symbolized by the rat."

Winthrop nodded.

"I understand," he said.

"There were five 'evil things' that had to be located," Dr. Ransome went on. "These were: the Rat, symbolical of malevolent cunning, the most feared and hated of all; the Ass, representing stupidity; the Gorilla,

typifying ferocity and hatred; the Sheep, indicating fear; and the Snake, symbolical of mischief. One of these, the Snake, is in the East; two, the Ass and the Gorilla, are in Europe (I had a hand in discovering them); while this continent can claim two, the Sheep (whom I unearthed very quickly), and the **Rat**, whom you have just discovered. All are great and powerful men, wherein lies the danger to mankind. A secret bond unites all of them in a way they themselves do not dream of. It would be rather dreadful for the world if they did. It is to preclude such dire possibility that we are working."

"How extraordinary!" said Winthrop, sitting so still that he scarcely seemed to breathe. "One can hardly credit such things. Are there any good ones equally powerful?"

"Yes," said Dr. Ransome. "But they must stay concealed from the evil ones for a time. 'Great Ones' they call them in the East—and they are all located there, it is somewhat disappointing to confess. But you can imagine with what joy these devoted Orientals set out on making such discoveries—or rather you can not imagine it. For these people are devoted beyond all our knowledge. But you may ponder, my boy, those lines of Shakespeare's: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Nothing more truly significant was ever pronounced by a European. Just think of the men who are working in the East there, trying to save humanity from itself. Some of them are monks walled up in huts in Tibet from which they never emerge, but working—working. . . ."

"And we always think of these people as barbarians," said Winthrop with a rueful smile, "and think we have a monopoly of workers in human welfare."

"Just as they think of us as bar-

barians," said the doctor briskly. "Except that they are willing to admit our gain in things material—of which of course they take little stock."

"What is the next move in this wonderful business?" asked Winthrop curiously.

"We will go and see our man tomorrow together," said Dr. Ransome, pulling the telephone book toward him and starting to turn over the leaves. "I will call him up now and make an appointment. After that I will send a cable to Canton."

In a few seconds he had the number and the appointment was made.

"Ten-thirty tomorrow, Harry," he said. "Come around here at 10 o'clock. I must view him through the glasses. He is interested in that commercial scheme. I knew he would be. . . ."

NEXT morning Dr. Ransome and his young co-worker set out on foot for the offices of the magnate. The day was warm and glorious, the sun shone brilliantly, and little old New York looked its best. The sparrows twittered and fussed, and the throngs rushed about their business—keen, eager, hurrying. Winthrop and Dr. Ransome seemed the only ones in sight whose conduct was leisurely. Yet Winthrop was looking about him with new eyes and a different vision. To his fancy it seemed that he was helping in the shaping of destiny—that he had been called to a great task. It struck him as rather strange, and indeed wounded his vanity somewhat, to think that all this change in his outlook could be brought about by simply looking through a particular pair of spectacles. Of course there was Dr. Ransome. He glanced at the sedate little figure by his side, calm and unruffled. How had he reached such a pinnacle of greatness? And yet it

was not necessary to ask. If you knew the man you knew the answer.

Dr. Ransome's card was enough to give them a preference among the throng that waited in the great man's anteroom, and they were ushered into his presence almost directly. He was, as Winthrop had described, a little, thin, wizened man with a high, dome-like forehead and a pair of ferretlike pale blue eyes. The room was plainly and simply furnished with good fumed-oak material, and a rich green carpet covered the floor. It was a typical office of its kind—the working-place of a modern commercial man of action. Here was no litter of papers and books or of baskets. A large, square, flat-topped desk stood over near the window. Kupfer was seated at one side. Before him was a blotting pad and perhaps half a dozen open letters. There were also two ink bottles, black and red, a small rack of pens and pencils, and a bottle of mucilage. That was all.

“Welcome to our city, Ransome,” said Kupfer in his piping voice, rising and shaking hands with the doctor. “It's years since I have seen you. Been prowling around in the interval, I suppose, keeping your finger on the pulse of world affairs, eh?”

He laughed at his own facetiousness, at the same time motioning his visitors to chairs.

“Yes,” said Dr. Ransome rather quietly, seating himself. “I have been doing a little of that, amongst other things.”

He took the spectacle case from his pocket and proceeded to don the glasses.

“You wear those dark glasses, too,” said Kupfer, who missed nothing. “It seems to me I noticed your young friend wore a pair yesterday. We all come to them sooner or later. I'm one of the lucky ones—I've escaped so far. ‘Don't do any reading or writing yourself if you can

help it,’ a famous eye specialist advised me years ago. ‘Make the other fellow do it for you.’ Ha, ha! The advice was sound; I took it.”

Dr. Ransome smiled in reply, at the same time surveying the financier steadily through the glasses. Winthrop watched him breathlessly. Although he did not change countenance or betray concern in any marked fashion, anyone who knew the veteran journalist well could have told that he was troubled, chiefly by the loss of his habitual quietude and poise. He made little restless movements that were unusual to him, and looked away from Kupfer from time to time. Presently he took the glasses off and replaced them in their case.

“You have looked over the proposition?” he said.

“Yes,” said Kupfer, opening one of the drawers of his desk and taking out the papers which Winthrop had left. “I am interested, of course. The potentialities are tremendous. I am inclined to put in a couple of millions myself—that is, to raise it in my own circle. The granary idea is very sound in view of the food conditions over there. ‘The key of the supply chest is the key of the house’ is one of my maxims. I have never known it to fail.”

In spite of himself Winthrop could scarcely repress a shudder.

“Can this state governor be trusted?” asked Kupfer, after further examination of the papers.

“Absolutely,” said Dr. Ransome curtly. “Any of the Chinese whose names are mentioned can. However, things are developing rather quickly over there, and even since I left there have been changes. My latest advice, by cable this morning, is that two of their men are on their way over here with further particulars. You will see them when they come, I suppose? They will be here in about three weeks, but I can advise you definitely later and make an appointment.”

"Certainly," said the financier. "I'll be interested to hear the latest news."

He fixed his eyes on the doctor. "You seem to have a way with those fellows, Ransome," he said, half enviously. "I remember how they stuck by you in that Southern China proposition. You didn't know I was the power behind the Whaley interests, eh? But I was watching you all the time. And they certainly stayed with you."

There was some further talk of a business nature, and the visitors rose.

"Breaking the youngster in, are you?" asked Kupfer, his little eyes darting from one countenance to another in a way that made Winthrop wonder uneasily if he could read their thoughts. "Can't begin too young. I was seven when I first lent a fellow a dime and got back two of his Saturday nickels and a chunk of candy. Ha, ha! You can't begin too young. I'll wait your further word, Doctor. Glad to have seen you."

In a few moments they were in the street again.

"Let's go and have some refreshment, Harry," said Dr. Ransome. "I feel slightly unwell after that experience. I can well understand your being upset. He is our man, sure enough."

THEY adjourned to a café near by and ordered drinks, while Dr. Ransome pulled out his cigar case and they both proceeded to light up.

"Are these men actually on the way from China?" asked Winthrop.

"I sent off a cable yesterday after you left me," said Dr. Ransome, "and just got word before we set out this morning that they had been able to get passage at the last minute on a C. P. R. steamer for Vancouver. I knew they wouldn't lose much time. Until they arrive, however, we can

do nothing but wait. You can go back to your reporting meantime, Harry, and I will send for you again when the time is ripe. I will possibly need you at hand. What action the Chinese will take I do not yet know, but I will see what they propose when I have had a talk with them."

"How does Kupfer use his power for evil, may I ask?" said Winthrop, for whom the subject had a fascination. "Does he create wars?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Ransome. "That would be too crude and too dangerous. But the same result can be achieved by simply creating or maintaining discord. When you have seen as much of the world as I have, Harry, you will understand why Carlyle marveled that people of good will (and the great mass of the people of all countries have good will), who have never even seen one another, should yet be found confronting each other with weapons of destruction and killing each other off. You may remember he asks 'Why?' and then says: 'Have they any quarrel? None in the world. Indeed in an indirect way they are useful to one another. Ah! But their masters told them to do it!' That is the secret, and it is as true today as then. You don't know the power that this man, for instance, wields in the newspaper world—few do. But I know it. He can inflame a whole nation with ease on any given issue."

"But why should he?" persisted the younger man.

"If you were to suggest to him that he was deliberately doing such a thing he would possibly be highly indignant and even genuinely astonished," said Dr. Ransome. "That is what I meant by going below zero spiritually. In a sense the man is perhaps not morally responsible. The real evil lies in the concentration of power in the hands of people who haven't the least idea how to employ

it properly. That is one thing these Orientals can not understand—how with all our fine talk about freedom and liberty (and goodness knows there is enough of that, both spoken and written) we should still put power into the hands of irresponsible private persons—power that might make an Alexander or a Napoleon green with envy. They can not understand it in the East. And although they are all the time looking to us for guidance and counsel, we never attempt to explain it—we only make excuses.”

“But in what way does discord serve Kupfer’s purpose?” asked Winthrop.

“It begins chiefly in trade rivalries,” said Dr. Ransome, “and trade rivalries are really the cause of most international troubles. Then trade rivalry is followed by outside monopoly and control—a thing an Oriental loathes and abominates above everything. They know the meaning of Kupfer’s ‘key of the supply chest’ well enough. Just think what a foreign financier with unlimited means can do. He can make his tools and his minions capture and corner anything, and he can not be stopped so long as the prime mover or guiding spirit is beyond your control. And in the East they are satisfied that the master minds who are keeping the nations of the world from amity and brotherliness are really very few—perhaps not more than the five I spoke of. For, as I have said, they work together and are interlocked. Possibly the man we have just seen is the biggest force for disruption in the whole round world today.”

“Is he in so many things as all that?” asked Winthrop, half convinced.

“In virtually everything that it is possible to be in,” said Dr. Ransome. “And in all of them simply and solely for what is to be made.

Do you think a world can be run on such lines—that you can shape the destinies of mankind by the tricks of the moneylender?”

“But getting a monopoly even of vital things,” said Winthrop, to whom much of the doctor’s talk was anathema, “why need that have an injurious effect?”

Dr. Ransome smiled.

“You are young, Harry,” he said, “and you live in a highly organized country. Have you ever seen a small trader crushed out—even here? Have you tried to gage the feelings engendered? Do you know the meaning of the term ‘harvest of hatred?’ Is the knocking of a man’s feet from under him—destroying his livelihood—a thing to be done lightly? And if it is bad here (and it is bad enough) what do you suppose it is like in the East, where the same business has been in the same family for generations, where things are still more or less chaotic, and where famine stalks periodically? I can not begin to tell you of the mischief wrought. No; while these ‘imps of discord’ have a free hand there is no hope for humanity. That is the plain English of the business.”

“But what will these men who are coming over do?” asked Winthrop with a faint sense of uneasiness.

“I don’t know,” said Dr. Ransome gravely. “But you may rest assured you will not be an ‘accessory after the fact’ to any violence or wrong-doing. These people do not believe in bloodshed. They say, and they say rightly, that just and upright men need never fear. There is nothing can hurt them. But the guilty man fears his guilt.”

“But if this man does not know—is not responsible?” asked Winthrop.

“Let us await developments,” said the doctor. “He is perhaps not so far gone as we suppose.”

IN THE intervening weeks Winthrop went about his reporting duties without much energy. His mind was entirely taken up with the problem of the financier. What was to happen now? It could hardly fail to be sensational, he felt. His impatience increased with the passing of the days, and it was with relief that when a call came for him on the telephone one evening about a month after his visit to Kupfer with Dr. Ransome, he heard the doctor's quiet voice asking him to call at the hotel next day.

"Our friends are here, Harry," he said in matter-of-fact tones. But he might have spoken in more sounding phrases for an hour without conveying so much as he did by this simple sentence.

Next day found Winthrop in Dr. Ransome's room, being introduced to two grave, elderly Oriental gentlemen—gentlemen in the finest sense of the term, gentle, amiable, courteous. Both were in conventional American clothes, and were, to Winthrop's eyes, very similar in appearance excepting that one was taller than the other. Their quiet air and kindly faces rather relieved the excitable young reporter, who had made up his mind for something rather formidable. In addition to resembling one another, it seemed to Winthrop that the two men also bore a striking resemblance to Dr. Ransome. They might, he thought, have been three brothers. Dr. Ransome introduced them jocularly as "Ho" and "Hi," "for," he said, "their real names would be too hard on your jaws. So the tall gentlemen will be Mr. Hi, since he is the higher of the two, and the other will be Mr. Ho."

The Chinese smiled their amusement at the doctor's fun.

"Mr. Kupfer is to meet us here at 3:30 this afternoon, Harry," said Dr. Ransome. "I will want you to

take some notes—to act as our amanuensis. You will please attend. It is my desire and that of my friends here."

Winthrop bowed and murmured his thanks and gratification. The simplicity and yet the seriousness of the whole proceedings were having an effect upon his character, he felt. He had become more thoughtful, and in the interval had taken to studying sociological problems, at which he had always laughed in the past. It was being borne in upon him that there was work to be done and only too few to do it. He felt that he had a place in the scheme of things. Previously he had been a unit; now he was a man.

Promptly at 3:30 the financier drove up in his car. He was accompanied by his secretary, a tall, pale, repressed-looking man, who entered with him. On finding, however, that Winthrop was to be present to take notes, of which he would have a copy, Kupfer sent his secretary back to the office, and the five men proceeded to a small parlor attached to the suite of rooms occupied by the Chinese. It was a homely little room with mahogany furniture and red hangings. No more prosaic place could have been imagined for so momentous a gathering.

Although Winthrop had seen the veteran journalist on several occasions since their last long talk, no mention had been made of the spectacles, and beyond knowing that the doctor had had them restored to their gold frame, Winthrop had not asked any questions about them. He somehow felt that they had served their purpose, and indeed, he was not curious to look through them any more. This state of mind sometimes puzzled him slightly. He now observed, however, that the glasses were being worn by Hi, the taller of the two Chinese.

Introductions were quickly made, and all sat down together at the lit-

tle square table in the center of the room, Kupfer at one end with Hi opposite, while Ho was on his left, and Dr. Ransome, with Winthrop by his side, on the right. Kupfer had a portfolio of papers, as had also the Chinese gentlemen, from which various documents were produced and passed around. No time was lost, and the business part of the transaction was soon completed. The Chinese talked very little, Dr. Ransome acting as their spokesman. But Winthrop observed in the intervals of his note-taking that Hi rarely took his eyes from the face of the financier opposite. It gave him a slight thrill, which he did not like to class as fear.

A TENTATIVE form of agreement was quickly drawn up, which Kupfer offered to take to his office for final drafting prior to the affixing of signatures. Dr. Ransome produced a box of cigars from somewhere and passed them around. Everything seemed to be going along in a natural and normal manner, and Harry Winthrop began to be conscious of a sense of disappointment. Hi had taken the spectacles off, and they lay on the table at his elbow. A ray of sunlight coming through a corner of the window fell squarely upon them and brought dazzling reflections from the gold framework. The keen eyes of Kupfer were attracted immediately.

"A curious pair of spectacles," he said. "May I look at them?"

They were passed across and he examined them with interest.

"Try them on," Dr. Ransome suggested casually.

Kupfer did so and looked around the assembly with a faint smile of amusement until his eyes rested upon the countenance of Hi, sitting opposite, when he appeared to become suddenly transfixed. His face went ashy pale and his mouth fell open slightly.

"My God!" he said in a voice shrill with terror. "Who's that sitting there? Who—who are you all? What are you?"

His glance was darting from one to another now, and he half rose from his chair.

"What's the matter, Kupfer?" asked Dr. Ransome.

The financier tore the glasses from his face and threw them violently upon the table.

"Take these damn things away," he said roughly. "They make me see things." Then, quickly recovering, he added hastily: "Excuse me, gentlemen. I haven't been too well lately—been working too hard, I guess."

He seized a cigar and busied himself with lighting it. Winthrop deemed, however, that he turned his chair slightly so as to avoid looking in the direction of the calm and stately figure sitting opposite.

For a few moments no one spoke, and then Hi leaned forward slightly across the table, and addressing himself to Kupfer said clearly and distinctly: "There shall be two men at work in the field; one shall be taken and the other left."

Kupfer went paler than ever and said sharply: "What's that?"

"A scriptural quotation," said Dr. Ransome equably.

"But what on earth is its application here and now?" asked Kupfer, his eyes darting round the assembly once more.

"It is written in your Book that it shall come to pass," said Hi in his level unemotional tones. "Perhaps the time of trial is at hand. Another of your prophets has said:

"For East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.
Till two strong men stand presently
At God's' great judgment seat.

And I am ready."

In spite of the calmness with which this was said, there was such a tre-

mendous atmosphere of concentration about the man as he sat there that Winthrop's hand trembled as he wrote. His flesh crept, and he was conscious that the hair on his head bristled. He felt as if he was in the midst of mighty forces that tossed him hither and thither.

"What the devil's all this rot, Ransome?" asked Kupfer angrily. "What's the man quoting that stuff to me for? Doesn't he know it refers to fighters?"

"Who said it referred to fighters?" said Dr. Ransome sternly. "Why should it refer to fighters? The world's affairs are not settled by fighters, as you know well enough. The master minds do not fight. They make others fight for them just as they make others read and write for them."

"I am not here to discuss such things," said Kupfer furiously. "Come—our business is finished. . . ."

He rose from his chair.

"Sit down," said Dr. Ransome authoritatively.

Winthrop gasped. This was a new Dr. Ransome that he did not know.

"What's this?" said Kupfer with an uneasy laugh, but sitting down nevertheless. "A holdup or a kidnapping game or something?" His eyes were roving around the room after the manner of a hunted animal's. "Have you gone mad, Ransome?"

"You will sit down there, sir, and listen to what I have to say to you," said Dr. Ransome in a tone that stirred Winthrop's blood by its passionate feeling. "You boasted not long ago that you watched me. Very good. I have been watching you, too. I know you. I have seen your handiwork in every corner of the civilized globe, and nowhere has it been good. You are one of the cords that is strangling the soul of my country. I know you. You thought the trial between East and West was to be

one of fighters, did you? You hoped so, no doubt. Poor fool! Do you think the masses can be forever set on to slaughter one another—that there is no destiny working slowly and certainly to raise poor deluded humanity from such a slough?"

In his righteous indignation and blazing anger Ransome was magnificent. Winthrop felt half afraid of him.

"I am ready," said Hi once more.

The dreadful calmness of his tone after the fiery eloquence of Dr. Ransome produced on Kupfer an effect that was nothing short of terrifying. He cowered in his seat.

"Observe the man before you," continued Dr. Ransome, speaking more gently, and indicating Hi by a nod of his head. "He is one of the greatest men the world has ever known. If you but knew, man, the extent to which you are honored that the trial should be between you two—that you may be the very man of destiny if you will but play a proper part! Come, Kupfer; do your duty. Do you think for a moment that I, your fellow countryman, would stoop to such a thing as the foul play I can see your mind suspects? Try to compose yourself. How gladly would I play the part for you could it but be done! Why, there may await you a glory that might make even your ambitious soul rejoice! What is it that you fear?"

"Death," said Hi, suddenly.

It was the first time he had spoken, and the effect of his voice was startling.

"Death?" said Dr. Ransome contemptuously. "Don't tell me, Kupfer, that you fear death! I couldn't believe it of you—you who have gambled with life and death on a colossal scale, have 'held the keys of supply chests'—have juggled with men like pawns and puppets, making here and breaking there as suited the

purpose. *You fear death! Don't tell me!*"

Kupfer sat silent, but his ashen face told the tale only too well. Yet he still strove to bluster.

"This is all damned nonsense," he said in the tone that he usually employed to strike terror—and which generally did. "It is madness. You will be sorry for your little joke, Ransome, for I can break you easily enough."

"You certainly can," said Dr. Ransome, smiling compassionately. "Poor fellow! You certainly can."

THE Chinese meantime had been acting. From somewhere about his person Hi produced an object wrapped in yellow silk. He proceeded to unwind it, and presently he laid upon the table a quaint and beautiful little chalice in the form of a golden dragon, the four legs of which constituted the stand or support, while the arched back bore the little golden bowl itself, the capacity of which appeared as if it might be about an ordinary mouthful. The dragon's body was beautifully carved and inlaid. The head, facing forward and tilted upward at a slight angle, was embellished with two small but brilliant green zircons which took the place of the eyes. The brightness of these stones, combined with the open jaws and protruding forked tongue of the image, produced an effect at once ferocious and sinister, which truly bespoke Oriental workmanship and design. The whole thing did not stand more than six inches high nor weigh in excess of twelve or fourteen ounces, although so exquisite was the workmanship that a suggestion of heaviness and solidity was conveyed. Ho had in the meantime taken from one of his pockets a tiny gold phial, the top of which he unscrewed, and rising from his seat he poured the contents, a dull red liquid, into the little bowl. Then,

placing the dragon in the center of the table facing across to where Dr. Ransome was sitting, he resumed his seat. Kupfer's eyes were riveted in fascinated horror to the thing on the table. Dr. Ransome continued to speak.

"There is the draft that may mean either paradise or perdition," he said solemnly. "One of you must drink. We await but the sign."

He made a peculiar sweep with his right arm and said something in a strange tongue. Then he folded his arms and stood silent.

All eyes were fixed upon the dragon. For a few moments there was tense silence, and then a cry broke from Kupfer, accompanied by an exclamation from the young reporter. For the head of the image was moving, moving slowly and tremblingly, as if the brute was shaking itself from some kind of lethargy. The tongue was withdrawn, the mouth closed, and the green eyes flashed balefully as the head turned slowly, first to the left slightly, and then round to the right, as if surveying the countenances of all present. Little streams of green light like the widening rays of small searchlights seemed to issue forth from the brilliant eyes, as they were fastened in turn upon the orbs of each person. As Winthrop met the flash he felt his hair bristle again on his head, and after the eyes had passed him he had a sense of being left in the darkness.

Round went the head, round and still farther round to the right, until the creature appeared to be looking right over his shoulder in the direction of Ho, who was seated behind. Then slowly the head came back again to the left, round, round, until the eyes were fixed upon the ghastly countenance of Kupfer. There they remained fixed while the mouth opened once more and the tongue shot forth in the direction of the financier. For about fifteen sec-

onds this attitude was maintained, and then the head slowly resumed its normal forward position.

"You are the man, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome quietly. "Drink!"

The financier was by this time in a pitiable condition, but he still strove desperately to master himself. From time to time he licked his lips, and his eyes darted frequently in the direction of the door—a fact that did not escape the observation of Dr. Ransome.

"There is the key of the door, Kupfer," he said, taking it from his pocket and laying it on the table. "You are free to go whenever you choose and to take what proceedings you may see fit. What you are expected to do here you must do of your own volition. But you will have to face this test some day, somewhere. You can not escape it." He said this in a tone of solemn conviction that was impressive in the extreme.

"If I fail there shall come another," said Hi in his passionless voice. "And after him another—and then another. They will be more numerous than the grains of sand in the desert. And ever they will present you with the cup."

"Bluff and intimidation!" snarled Kupfer, clutching the door-key but yet remaining with his eyes fixed upon the golden dragon. "Trickery and nonsense! You shall all answer for it—every one of you. . . ." He writhed in his seat, yet seemed incapable of rising from it.

"Come, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome again after an interval of silence, during which Winthrop was sure that the beating of his heart must have been audible to all present. "Take the draft. As I said before, I would take it for you if I could—for the credit of the West. But I can not. You have seized the power and not I."

"The power!" said Kupfer, almost with a shriek, and commencing to twist his hands one about the other. "Leave me the power! Take the wealth if you want it. . . . But I must have the power!"

His hands were extended before him now, stretching in the direction of the dragon, his eyes still glued upon it. His attitude was almost one of supplication, Winthrop thought with a shudder of terror and wrath.

"I must have the strings in my own hands—the wires. . . ." the squeaking voice continued. "Must feel them slacken and taut in my grasp. . . . with a movement pull down or stiffen up some figure across continents—oceans . . . make them dance! Ha, ha!"

The tension went from his rigid figure and his arms and head collapsed weakly on the table. Winthrop laid down his pencil; the sight sickened him and he could write no more.

"But it's all damned nonsense, I tell you!" said Kupfer, recovering himself once more and starting to his feet. "I'll teach you all! Somebody will pay for this. . . ."

He seized the key, and rushing to the door began to fight frantically with the lock, his panic returning as he found the key refusing to work. Curses and imprecations broke from him.

"The door isn't locked, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome quietly. "Go right out."

In his frenzy, Kupfer did not hear, or could not comprehend. Still the rattling and scrambling continued and still he cursed and tugged, until presently he actually locked the door. Then in a trice he unlocked it again and was gone.

SILENCE reigned for some time after the financier's sensational departure, and then Dr. Ransome said

rather sadly: "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

No one made any reply, but both Chinese smiled a trifle grimly. Obeying a sudden impulse the doctor drew the golden dragon toward him, and placing it before the startled young reporter said authoritatively: "Drink it, Harry!"

The young man took the little image in his hand, and for a moment hesitated. To his excited and overwrought fancy it seemed as if the very claws of the brute were winding around his fingers, while the little green eyes sparkled with added fire. Then putting the bowl to his lips he drank off the contents with a mighty gulp. The liquid seemed to course like fire through his veins—then he glowed all over.

"Never tasted better port wine in your life, did you, Harry?" said Dr. Ransome, laughing, while broad smiles illuminated the faces of the Chinese.

"No, sir," replied Winthrop in rather a shamefaced tone as he thought of his momentary funk. "I certainly never did."

The nervous reaction brought upon him by the sudden change from horror to bathos actually caused him to tremble in spite of himself. He laid the dragon upon the table and surveyed it solemnly.

"But I am ready to swear, Dr. Ransome," he said, "that I saw this creature turn its head and look around at all of us."

"If you had had a camera, Harry, and had taken a snap, you would

have found something different," said the doctor, laughing again. "The trick is an old one in the East. The little fellow's head, as you can see, is quite rigid."

"And all the marvelous things I saw through the glasses," said Winthrop incredulously and in some disappointment. "Were they all the result of hypnotism too?"

"To a certain extent," said Dr. Ransome. "If you surround the commonest kind of an object with sufficient mystery, wonderful results can be achieved. The subject himself, in his interest and excitement, supplies most of the energy, while another mind guides."

"And what do you suppose will happen now, if I may ask?" said Harry, thinking again of Kupfer.

"It is a little difficult to tell," replied Dr. Ransome. "Kupfer may retire from business shortly on the score of ill health; or he may continue his activities on a less aggressive scale; or he may carry right along on his present lines, and I may have a new and ferocious enemy. Either of the first two courses seems the most probable, but in the event of the third some further action may be necessary."

Again he spoke in the strange tongue and both Chinese bowed their heads in acquiescence.

"And in that case there may be something further for me to do?" enquired the young man eagerly.

"Perhaps," said Dr. Ransome smiling. "One never knows."

