

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CAGE

HOW long are you going to keep me here?" Yung-fu turned at the sound of the familiar voice to see Li Cho-pen looking at him through the heavy wire netting of his detention pen. It was a great cage with wire above, as well as on the sides. At the back of the inclosure, which might have been fifteen feet square and eight feet high, was a hut made of corrugated iron. Within, one could see a pile of straw with an old blanket spread on it.

"Now you've got me here, how long are you going to keep me?" The question was repeated with a sneer. The man had his arm in a sling, and fresh bandages showed recent attention. They were the only clean thing about him. His face was covered with dust. The eyes gleamed bloodshot from the dirty sockets. Bits of straw clung to his clothing and to his hair, which was unkempt.

"I had nothing to do with putting you here, and I am not responsible for the length of time you remain," replied Yung-fu, with a slight pang of compassion for his old schoolmate.

"No, I suppose being so near the captain, you didn't have any hand in getting me shoved up here into solitary."

"I didn't, but I will say that it is not so much as you really deserve. If I had my way, I would send all you fellows who are disgracing the name of China back where you belong."

"Nothing would suit me better. I'll go to-morrow if you will arrange it," airily answered the masher.

"Yes, you would go back and carry a ruined name with you."

"Name? What's the good of a name? You can't eat it."

"But you can eat bitterness for the lack of it. I have looked up your record and find you have been up on the average of six times a year for breaking rules. You're a fine credit to our native land, aren't you?"

"Oh, stop preaching. You talk like a Y. M. C. A. secretary. I haven't done anything these swaggering Englishmen and Frenchmen don't do. Of course it is all right for them to gamble and get drunk and run around with singsong girls; but when one of us Chinese does anything of the kind we are sinners and get jailed for it. They are the worst hypocrites I ever saw. I used to think they were all saints before I came to France."

"Well, if they don't know better, you do. The foreigners are just like the rest of us, good and bad alike. They never told us that they were all sages. That is just an inference we drew from seeing only their propagators of religion at home; and if we believed it, it only shows how childish we were. But because we have found some of them rascals is no reason why we should imitate the worst. There are the Y men you seem to despise so. At any rate, you must say that they are virtuous. If you would associate with such people more, you would be a great deal better off. You don't have to go bad."

"Oh, that caterwauling at their meetings makes me sick."

"Perhaps it's because you have no music in your heart."

"If that is music, I haven't, nor do I want any."

"Why don't you go to the French classes and learn to speak the language of the land?" suggested Yung-fu.

"I know enough of their cursed patois to buy what

I want. You don't suppose I want to discuss philosophy with these frog eaters, do you?" He spoke with the utmost scorn and with his free hand shook the wire netting.

"There are writing materials furnished at the hut. Have you written to your mother recently?" It would have gratified Yung-fu to be able to break through that steely barrier which surrounded the personality of this fellow countryman of his, as it would have pleased Li Cho-pen to be able to break through the steel strands which shut his body from the world. The intimacy of the question was detected and resented by the prisoner. Was Yung-fu trying to play on his tenderer side? He would allow no one to get beneath that hard surface. What right had he to ask such a question who had been instrumental in putting him like a fox into this cage?

"What business is that of yours?" he flung back. "Of course I am spending all my spare time just now writing letters," he continued ironically. "Do you wish me to tell my dear sister that the French ladies are taking good care of you?"

Galahad flushed. "You may tell your sister anything you please, but I would omit writing with what disastrous results *you* tried to take care of one French lady."

The barb was pointed, and it hurt. There was something bitterer, however, than the memory of his defeat at the hands of Yung-fu. It was his sense of general failure. They had been pupils of the same master, and here Yung-fu was occupying a remunerative position of influence while he was only a coolie. What had Yung-fu done to win this smile of fortune? What trick had he turned which he himself had failed to try? There must be a gambler's luck about such success. Whether he really believed it or not, he attributed it to playing the foreigner for a good thing. Perhaps he had

been stupid to be so indifferent to the good will of the officers; perhaps he ought to have been more discreet if not more viruous.

"You've gotten in with these foreign devils by toadying to them and doing their dirty work." He was trying to anger Yung-fu, knowing his cage was also his castle.

"I don't know that the work I am doing is any dirtier than the work you are in here for," retorted the interpreter, dryly.

"Well, at least I am not one of their hound dogs."

"No, you are just a common rabbit which we have run to hole." The insult was studied, and the answer was just as scathing. They were both using terms which were among the most extreme in the language, and which would not have been possible, at least for Yung-fu, had the affair not reached the breaking point of all courtesy.

"You said 'we,' and you spoke the truth there," quickly rejoined Li. "You think that you are playing the true Chinese, quite the princely man; but you have sold yourself to these Westerners, and us your own blood brothers as well."

"You my blood brother!" exclaimed Yung-fu, with feelings of deep disgust. "I repudiate the relationship."

"Well, shall I call you my 'in-law'?" taunted the brother of the girl his family wanted him to marry.

"No, the name is more insulting than to call me the dog which you did a few moments ago." Galahad was thoroughly angry by this time.

"Well, you are very particular. You don't like 'dog,' and you object to 'blood brother,' and now even 'in-law' irritates you. How shall I address you—as 'Your Excellency' or 'Your Highness,' now you have become an official?"

This last had been spoken with an assumed whine; but now he smote upon his thigh and spoke out in a strong voice, which for a moment seemed to ring with

sincerity. "Oh, how I hate them and all their superiority. The only thing in which these foreign devils are really better is war; but we'll learn their little game and then let them look out, and their hired helpers also."

Yung-fu smiled. "Yes, I see you putting yourself at the head of China's armies and saving the country—by attacking the foreign women first."

Li winced. They were facing each other, separated only by the wire netting. Deliberately the man spit full in Yung-fu's face. The latter removed the saliva from his cheek with his index finger and wiped it on the edge of the sole of his shoe. "You have not forgotten your schoolboy tricks, Li Cho-pen," he said.

"No, nor will I forget this dirty trick you are playing me." He turned on his heel and entered the hut, where he threw himself down upon the pile of straw with his back to Yung-fu.

