

The Wallet of Kai Lung

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The Transmutation Of Ling

I: INTRODUCTION

The sun had dipped behind the western mountains before Kai Lung, with twenty li or more still between him and the city of Knei Yang, entered the camphor-laurel forest which stretched almost to his destination. No person of consequence ever made the journey unattended; but Kai Lung professed to have no fear, remarking with extempore wisdom, when warned at the previous village, that a worthless garment covered one with better protection than that afforded by an army of bowmen. Nevertheless, when within the gloomy aisles, Kai Lung more than once wished himself back at the village, or safely behind the mud walls of Knei Yang; and, making many vows concerning the amount of prayer-paper which he would assuredly burn when he was actually through the gates, he stepped out more quickly, until suddenly, at a turn in the glade, he stopped altogether, while the watchful expression into which he had unguardedly dropped at once changed into a mask of impassiveness and extreme unconcern. From behind the next tree projected a long straight rod, not unlike a slender bamboo at a distance, but, to Kai Lung's all-seeing eye, in reality the barrel of a matchlock, which would come into line with his breast if he took another step. Being a prudent man, more accustomed to guile and subservience to destiny than to force, he therefore waited, spreading out his hands in proof of his peaceful acquiescence, and smiling cheerfully until it should please the owner of the weapon to step forth. This the unseen did a moment later, still keeping his gun in an easy and convenient attitude, revealing a stout body and a scarred face, which in conjunction made it plain to Kai Lung that he was in the power of Lin Yi, a noted brigand of whom he had heard much in the villages.

"O illustrious person," said Kai Lung very earnestly, "this is evidently an unfortunate mistake. Doubtless you were expecting some exalted Mandarin to come and render you homage, and were preparing to overwhelm him with gratified confusion by escorting him yourself to your well-appointed abode. Indeed, I passed such a one on the road, very richly apparelled, who inquired of me the way to the mansion of the dignified and upright Lin Yi. By this time he is perhaps two or three li towards the east."

"However distinguished a Mandarin may be, it is fitting that I should first attend to one whose manners and accomplishments betray him to be of the Royal House," replied Lin Yi, with extreme affability. "Precede me, therefore, to my mean and uninviting hovel, while I gain more honour than I can reasonably bear by following closely in your elegant footsteps, and guarding your Imperial person with this inadequate but heavily-loaded weapon."

Seeing no chance of immediate escape, Kai Lung led the way, instructed by the brigand, along a very difficult and bewildering path, until they reached a cave hidden among the crags. Here Lin Yi called out some words in the Miaotze tongue, whereupon a follower appeared, and opened a gate in the stockade of prickly mimosa which guarded the mouth of the den. Within the enclosure a fire burned, and food was being prepared. At a word from the chief, the unfortunate Kai Lung found his hands seized and tied behind his back,

while a second later a rough hemp rope was fixed round his neck, and the other end tied to an overhanging tree.

Lin Yi smiled pleasantly and critically upon these preparations, and when they were complete dismissed his follower.

"Now we can converse at our ease and without restraint," he remarked to Kai Lung. "It will be a distinguished privilege for a person occupying the important public position which you undoubtedly do; for myself, my instincts are so degraded and low-minded that nothing gives me more gratification than to dispense with ceremony."

To this Kai Lung made no reply, chiefly because at that moment the wind swayed the tree, and compelled him to stand on his toes in order to escape suffocation.

"It would be useless to try to conceal from a person of your inspired intelligence that I am indeed Lin Yi," continued the robber. "It is a dignified position to occupy, and one for which I am quite incompetent. In the sixth month of the third year ago, it chanced that this unworthy person, at that time engaged in commercial affairs at Knei Yang, became inextricably immersed in the insidious delights of quail-fighting. Having been entrusted with a large number of taels with which to purchase elephants' teeth, it suddenly occurred to him that if he doubled the number of taels by staking them upon an exceedingly powerful and agile quail, he would be able to purchase twice the number of teeth, and so benefit his patron to a large extent. This matter was clearly forced upon his notice by a dream, in which he perceived one whom he then understood to be the benevolent spirit of an ancestor in the act of stroking a particular quail, upon whose chances he accordingly placed all he possessed. Doubtless evil spirits had been employed in the matter; for, to this person's great astonishment, the quail in question failed in a very discreditable manner at the encounter. Unfortunately, this person had risked not only the money which had been entrusted to him, but all that he had himself become possessed of by some years of honourable toil and assiduous courtesy as a professional witness in law cases. Not doubting that his patron would see that he was himself greatly to blame in confiding so large a sum of money to a comparatively young man of whom he knew little, this person placed the matter before him, at the same time showing him that he would suffer in the eyes of the virtuous if he did not restore this person's savings, which but for the presence of the larger sum, and a generous desire to benefit his patron, he would never have risked in so uncertain a venture as that of quail-fighting. Although the facts were laid in the form of a dignified request instead of a demand by legal means, and the reasoning carefully drawn up in columns of fine parchment by a very illustrious writer, the reply which this person received showed him plainly that a wrong view had been taken of the matter, and that the time had arrived when it became necessary for him to make a suitable rejoinder by leaving the city without delay."

"It was a high-minded and disinterested course to take," said Kai Lung with great conviction, as Lin Yi paused. "Without doubt evil will shortly overtake the avaricious-souled person at Knei Yang."

"It has already done so," replied Lin Yi. "While passing through this forest in the season of Many White Vapours, the spirits of his bad deeds appeared to him in misleading and symmetrical shapes, and drew him out of the path and away from his bowmen. After suffering many torments, he found his way here, where, in spite of our continual care, he perished miserably and in great bodily pain. . . . But I cannot conceal from myself, in spite of your distinguished politeness, that I am becoming intolerably tiresome with my commonplace talk."

"On the contrary," replied Kai Lung, "while listening to your voice I seemed to hear the beating of many gongs of the finest and most polished brass. I floated in the Middle Air, and for the time I even became unconscious of the fact that this honourable appendage, though fashioned, as I perceive, out of the most delicate silk, makes it exceedingly difficult for me to breathe."

"Such a thing cannot be permitted," exclaimed Lin Yi, with some indignation, as with his own hands he slackened the rope and, taking it from Kai Lung's neck, fastened it around his ankle. "Now, in return for my uninviting confidences, shall not my senses be gladdened by a recital of the titles and honours borne by your distinguished family? Doubtless, at this moment many Mandarins of the highest degree are anxiously awaiting your arrival at Knei Yang, perhaps passing the time by outdoing one another in protesting the number of taels each would give rather than permit you to be tormented by fire-brands, or even to lose a single ear."

"Alas!" replied Kai Lung, "never was there a truer proverb than that which says, 'It is a mark of insincerity of purpose to spend one's time in looking for the sacred Emperor in the low-class tea-shops.' Do Mandarins or the friends of Mandarins travel in mean garments and unattended? Indeed, the person who is now before you is none other than the outcast Kai Lung, the story-teller, one of degraded habits and no very distinguished or reputable ancestors. His friends are few, and mostly of the criminal class; his wealth is nor more than some six or eight cash, concealed in his left sandal; and his entire stock-in-trade consists of a few unendurable and badly told stories, to which, however, it is his presumptuous intention shortly to add a dignified narrative of the high-born Lin Yi, setting out his domestic virtues and the honour which he has reflected upon his house, his valour in war, the destruction of his enemies, and, above all, his great benevolence and the protection which he extends to the poor and those engaged in the distinguished arts."

"The absence of friends is unfortunate," said Lin Yi thoughtfully, after he had possessed himself of the coins indicated by Kai Lung, and also of a much larger amount concealed elsewhere among the story-teller's clothing. "My followers are mostly outlawed Miaotze, who have been driven from their own tribes in Yun Nan for man-eating and disregarding the sacred laws of hospitality. They are somewhat rapacious, and in this way it has become a custom that they should have as their own, for the purpose of exchanging for money, persons such as yourself, whose insatiable curiosity has led them to this place."

"The wise and all-knowing Emperor Fohy instituted three degrees of attainment: Being poor, to obtain justice; being rich, to escape flattery; and being human, to avoid the

passions," replied Kai Lung. "To these the practical and enlightened Kang added yet another, the greatest: Being lean, to yield fatness."

"In such cases," observed the brigand, "the Miaotze keep an honoured and very venerable rite, which chiefly consists in suspending the offender by a pigtail from a low tree, and placing burning twigs of hemp-palm between his toes. To this person it seems a foolish and meaningless habit; but it would not be well to interfere with their religious observances, however trivial they may appear."

"Such a course must inevitably end in great loss," suggested Kai Lung; "for undoubtedly there are many poor yet honourable persons who would leave with them a bond for a large number of taels and save the money with which to redeem it, rather than take part in a ceremony which is not according to one's own Book of Rites."

"They have already suffered in that way on one or two occasions," replied Lin Yi; "so that such a proposal, no matter how nobly intended, would not gladden their faces. Yet they are simple and docile persons, and would, without doubt, be moved to any feeling you should desire by the recital of one of your illustrious stories."

"An intelligent and discriminating assemblage is more to a story-teller than much reward of cash from hands that conceal open mouths," replied Kai Lung with great feeling. "Nothing would confer more pleasurable agitation upon this unworthy person than an opportunity of narrating his entire stock to them. If also the accomplished Lin Yi would bestow renown upon the occasion by his presence, no omen of good would be wanting."

"The pleasures of the city lie far behind me," said Lin Yi, after some thought, "and I would cheerfully submit myself to an intellectual accomplishment such as you are undoubtedly capable of. But as we have necessity to leave this spot before the hour when the oak-leaves change into night-moths, one of your amiable stories will be the utmost we can strengthen our intellects with. Select which you will. In the meantime, food will be brought to refresh you after your benevolent exertions in conversing with a person of my vapid understanding. When you have partaken, or thrown it away as utterly unendurable, the time will have arrived, and this person, together with all his accomplices, will put themselves in a position to be subjected to all the most dignified emotions."

II

"THE story which I have selected for this gratifying occasion," said Kai Lung, when, an hour or so later, still pinioned, but released from the halter, he sat surrounded by the brigands, "is entitled 'Good and Evil', and it is concerned with the adventures of one Ling, who bore the honourable name of Ho. The first, and indeed the greater, part of the narrative, as related by the venerable and accomplished writer of history Chow-Tan, is taken up by showing how Ling was assuredly descended from an enlightened Emperor of the race of Tsin; but as the no less omniscient Ta-lin-hi proves beyond doubt that the person in question was in no way connected with any but a line of hereditary ape-worshippers, who entered China from an unknown country many centuries ago, it would

ill become this illiterate person to express an opinion on either side, and he will in consequence omit the first seventeen books of the story, and only deal with the three which refer to the illustrious Ling himself."

THE STORY OF LING

Narrated by Kai Lung when a prisoner in the camp of Lin Yi.

Ling was the youngest of three sons, and from his youth upwards proved to be of a mild and studious disposition. Most of his time was spent in reading the sacred books, and at an early age he found the worship of apes to be repulsive to his gentle nature, and resolved to break through the venerable traditions of his family by devoting his time to literary pursuits, and presenting himself for the public examinations at Canton. In this his resolution was strengthened by a rumour that an army of bowmen was shortly to be raised from the Province in which he lived, so that if he remained he would inevitably be forced into an occupation which was even more distasteful to him than the one he was leaving.

Having arrived at Canton, Ling's first care was to obtain particulars of the examinations, which he clearly perceived, from the unusual activity displayed on all sides, to be near at hand. On inquiring from passers-by, he received very conflicting information; for the persons to whom he spoke were themselves entered for the competition, and therefore naturally misled him in order to increase their own chances of success. Perceiving this, Ling determined to apply at once, although the light was past, to a Mandarin who was concerned in the examinations, lest by delay he should lose his chance for the year.

"It is an unfortunate event that so distinguished a person should have selected this day and hour on which to overwhelm us with his affable politeness!" exclaimed the porter at the gate of the Yamen, when Ling had explained his reason for going. "On such a day, in the reign of the virtuous Emperor Hoo Chow, a very benevolent and unassuming ancestor of my good lord the Mandarin was destroyed by treachery, and ever since his family has observed the occasion by fasting and no music. This person would certainly be punished with death if he entered the inner room from any cause."

At these words, Ling, who had been simply brought up, and chiefly in the society of apes, was going away with many expressions of self-reproach at selecting such a time, when the gate-keeper called him back.

"I am overwhelmed with confusion at the position in which I find myself," he remarked, after he had examined his mind for a short time. "I may meet with an ungraceful and objectionable death if I carry out your estimable instructions, but I shall certainly merit and receive a similar fate if I permit so renowned and versatile a person to leave without a fitting reception. In such matters a person can only trust to the intervention of good spirits; if, therefore, you will permit this unworthy individual to wear, while making the venture, the ring which he perceives upon your finger, and which he recognizes as a very powerful charm against evil, misunderstandings, and extortion, he will go without fear."

Overjoyed at the amiable porter's efforts on his behalf, Ling did as he was desired, and the other retired. Presently the door of the Yamen was opened by an attendant of the house, and Ling bidden to enter. He was covered with astonishment to find that this person was entirely unacquainted with his name or purpose.

"Alas!" said the attendant, when Ling had explained his object, "well said the renowned and inspired Ting Fo, 'When struck by a thunderbolt it is unnecessary to consult the Book of Dates as to the precise meaning of the omen.' At this moment my noble-minded master is engaged in conversation with all the most honourable and refined persons in Canton, while singers and dancers of a very expert and nimble order have been sent for. The entertainment will undoubtedly last far into the night, and to present myself even with the excuse of your graceful and delicate inquiry would certainly result in very objectionable consequences to this person."

"It is indeed a day of unprepossessing circumstances," replied Ling, and after many honourable remarks concerning his own intellect and appearance, and those of the person to whom he was speaking, he had turned to leave when the other continued:

"Ever since your dignified presence illumined this very ordinary chamber, this person has been endeavouring to bring to his mind an incident which occurred to him last night while he slept. Now it has come back to him with a diamond clearness, and he is satisfied that it was as follows: While he floated in the Middle Air a benevolent spirit in the form of an elderly and toothless vampire appeared, leading by the hand a young man, of elegant personality. Smiling encouragingly upon this person, the spirit said, 'O Fou, recipient of many favours from Mandarins and of innumerable taels from gratified persons whom you have obliged, I am, even at this moment, guiding this exceptional young man towards your presence; when he arrives do not hesitate, but do as he desires, no matter how great the danger seems or how inadequately you may appear to be rewarded on earth.' The vision then melted, but I now clearly perceive that with the exception of the embroidered cloak which you wear, you are the person thus indicated to me. Remove your cloak, therefore, in order to give the amiable spirit no opportunity of denying the fact, and I will advance your wishes; for, as the Book of Verses indicates, 'The person who patiently awaits a sign from the clouds for many years, and yet fails to notice the earthquake at his feet, is devoid of intellect.'"

Convinced that he was assuredly under the especial protection of the Deities, and that the end of his search was in view, Ling gave his rich cloak to the attendant, and was immediately shown into another room, where he was left alone.

After a considerable space of time the door opened and there entered a person whom Ling at first supposed to be the Mandarin. Indeed, he was addressing him by his titles when the other interrupted him. "Do not distress your incomparable mind by searching for honourable names to apply to so inferior a person as myself," he said agreeably. "The mistake is, nevertheless, very natural; for, however miraculous it may appear, this unseemly individual, who is in reality merely a writer of spoken words, is admitted to be exceedingly like the dignified Mandarin himself, though somewhat stouter, clad in better

garments, and, it is said, less obtuse of intellect. This last matter he very much doubts, for he now finds himself unable to recognize by name one who is undoubtedly entitled to wear the Royal Yellow."

With this encouragement Ling once more explained his position, narrating the events which had enabled him to reach the second chamber of the Yamen. When he had finished the secretary was overpowered with a high-minded indignation.

"Assuredly those depraved and rapacious persons who have both misled and robbed you shall suffer bow-stringing when the whole matter is brought to light," he exclaimed. "The noble Mandarin neither fasts nor receives guests, for, indeed, he has slept since the sun went down. This person would unhesitatingly break his slumber for so commendable a purpose were it not for a circumstance of intolerable unavoidableness. It must not even be told in a low breath beyond the walls of the Yamen, but my benevolent and high-born lord is in reality a person of very miserly instinct, and nothing will call him from his natural sleep but the sound of taels shaken beside his bed. In an unexpected manner it comes about that this person is quite unsupplied with anything but thin printed papers of a thousand taels each, and these are quite useless for the purpose."

"It is unendurable that so obliging a person should be put to such inconvenience on behalf of one who will certainly become a public laughing-stock at the examinations," said Ling, with deep feeling; and taking from a concealed spot in his garments a few taels, he placed them before the secretary for the use he had indicated.

Ling was again left alone for upwards of two strokes of the gong, and was on the point of sleep when the secretary returned with an expression of dignified satisfaction upon his countenance. Concluding that he had been successful in the manner of awakening the Mandarin, Ling was opening his mouth for a polite speech, which should contain a delicate allusion to the taels, when the secretary warned him, by affecting a sudden look of terror, that silence was exceedingly desirable, and at the same time opened another door and indicated to Ling that he should pass through.

In the next room Ling was overjoyed to find himself in the presence of the Mandarin, who received him graciously, and paid many estimable compliments to the name he bore and the country from which he came. When at length Ling tore himself from this enchanting conversation, and explained the reason of his presence, the Mandarin at once became a prey to the whitest and most melancholy emotions, even plucking two hairs from his pigtail to prove the extent and conscientiousness of his grief.

"Behold," he cried at length, "I am resolved that the extortionate and many-handed persons at Peking who have control of the examination rites and customs shall no longer grow round-bodied without remark. This person will unhesitatingly proclaim the true facts of the case without regarding the danger that the versatile Chancellor or even the sublime Emperor himself may, while he speaks, be concealed in some part of this unassuming room to hear his words; for, as it is wisely said, 'When marked out by

destiny, a person will assuredly be drowned, even though he passes the whole of his existence among the highest branches of a date tree."

"I am overwhelmed that I should be the cause of such an engaging display of polished agitation," said Ling, as the Mandarin paused. "If it would make your own stomach less heavy, this person will willingly follow your estimable example, either with or without knowing the reason."

"The matter is altogether on your account, O most unobtrusive young man," replied the Mandarin, when a voice without passion was restored to him. "It tears me internally with hooks to reflect that you, whose refined ancestors I might reasonably have known had I passed my youth in another Province, should be victim to the cupidity of the ones in authority at Peking. A very short time before you arrived there came a messenger in haste from those persons, clearly indicating that a legal toll of sixteen taels was to be made on each printed paper setting forth the time and manner of the examinations, although, as you may see, the paper is undoubtedly marked, 'Persons are given notice that they are defrauded of any sum which they may be induced to exchange for this matter.' Furthermore, there is a legal toll of nine taels on all persons who have previously been examined--"

"I am happily escaped from that," exclaimed Ling with some satisfaction as the Mandarin paused.

"--and twelve taels on all who present themselves for the first time. This is to be delivered over when the paper is purchased, so that you, by reason of this unworthy proceeding at Peking, are required to forward to that place, through this person, no less than thirty-two taels."

"It is a circumstance of considerable regret," replied Ling; "for had I only reached Canton a day earlier, I should, it appears, have avoided this evil."

"Undoubtedly it would have been so," replied the Mandarin, who had become engrossed in exalted meditation. "However," he continued a moment later, as he bowed to Ling with an accomplished smile, "it would certainly be a more pleasant thought for a person of your refined intelligence that had you delayed until to-morrow the insatiable persons at Peking might be demanding twice the amount."

Pondering the deep wisdom of this remark, Ling took his departure; but in spite of the most assiduous watchfulness he was unable to discern any of the three obliging persons to whose efforts his success had been due.

III

IT was very late when Ling again reached the small room which he had selected as soon as he reached Canton, but without waiting for food or sleep he made himself fully acquainted with the times of the forthcoming examinations and the details of he

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