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THE sun had just sunk below the horizon and a gentle breeze caressed one's face. The muddy water of Soochow Creek, transformed to a golden green, flowed quietly westward. The evening tide from the Whangpoo had turned imperceptibly, and now the assortment of boats along both sides of the creek were riding high, their decks some six inches above the landing-stages. Faint strains of music were borne on the wind from the park across the river, punctuated by the sharp, cheerful patter of kettle-drums. Under a sunset-mottled sky, the towering framework of Garden Bridge was mantled in a gathering mist. Whenever a tram passed over the bridge, the overhead cable suspended below the top of the steel frame threw off bright, greenish sparks. Looking east, one could see the warehouses on the waterfront of Pootung like huge monsters crouching in the gloom, their lights twinkling like countless tiny eyes. To the west, one saw with a shock of wonder on the roof of a building a gigantic neon sign in flaming red and phosphorescent green: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER.

It was a perfect May evening. Three 1930-model Citroens flashed over the bridge, turned westward, and headed straight along the North Soochow Road. Passing a block west of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce Building on the corner of North Honan Road, where the creek below was usually thronged with steam-launches plying upriver, the three cars slowed down. The driver of the first car said in a low voice to the hulking fellow sitting beside him in black silk:

"The Tai Sheng Chang Company, isn't it, Kuan?"

"Of course it is," replied his companion, also in a low voice. "Surely you haven't forgotten already? That bitch must be making you soft in the head."

As the bodyguard, for such he was, spoke, he showed large, strong teeth. The car jarred to a stop and Kuan quickly scrambled out, placing his hand on the Browning at his side as he did so and glancing all round. Then he went round and opened the other door and stood holding it, looking stern and forbidding. A head stuck out cautiously—a square, pimply, purplish face with thick eyebrows and round eyes. Spotting the signboard over the gate with the name “The Tai Sheng Chang Shipping Company,” the man emerged completely and quickly made for the building with his bodyguard close behind him.

“Is the *Flying Cloud* arriving soon?” the purplish-faced man asked in a loud and arrogant voice. About forty, powerfully built and imposing, he struck you at once as a solid and prosperous businessman, accustomed to giving orders. Before the words were out of his mouth, the clerks sitting there in the office jumped up as one man, and a tall, thin young man, smiling broadly, stepped forward.

“Yes, Mr. Wu, very soon,” he answered respectfully. “Please take a seat.” He turned to a boy: “Go and get some tea.”

While he was speaking he drew up a chair and placed it behind the visitor, whose fleshy face twitched in what could have been a smile as he glanced at the young man, and then looked out towards the street. By now the visitor’s car had moved on to make room for the second, out of which a man and a woman appeared and came into the hall. The man was short and stoutish with a bland and pallid face, while the woman was much taller, and bore a certain resemblance to the other man with her square face, although her skin was smooth and fair. Both she and her husband were in their forties, but in her fashionable dress she did not look more than thirty. The husband greeted the first arrival:

“Why, hello, Sun-fu! Are we all waiting here?”

Before the purplish-faced man could answer, the spindly youth quickly chimed in with a broad smile:

“Yes, here, Mr. Tu. I’ve just heard her hooter and sent someone to keep a look-out at the landing-stage. He’ll run back as soon as the boat arrives. I don’t think we’ll have to wait more than five minutes. Only five more minutes.”