

The Scio Press

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He turned to the captain. "Why do you not summon your men to defend the ship," he began, but broke off in disgust for the man whom he addressed stood wringing his hands in abject terror, and muttering words which were half prayers, half curses.

"All is in vain," he said; "they are all dead with fear. Ah! Sho Mai, I could die a thousand times and feel no pang like this, that I am powerless to protect you; but alone, without a single man to stand by my side and strike one blow." He ground his teeth with rage.

"Towards!" he shrieked, shaking his clenched hand at the struggling crowd of sailors, "you deserve the death that awaits you!"

His voice was lost in the tumult. "We must join in their flight since no one will make a stand," said Sho Mai, who she led the way to one of the boats.

He was about to follow her when those who had the oars pushed off, and in a moment an expanse of water separated the lovers. In despair he flung himself from the ship's side, and swam after the boat which bore Sho Mai, but he could not overtake it.

"Only one moment," and Li Khl looked her hand; "this place which first brought in face to face has at length, in the mystery of fate, brought us heart to heart. Is it not so?"

"Ah! keep that secret, too," murmured Sho Mai, through her tears. "Put my hand on a sign that has been revealed to you must be hidden for a time."

But when, an hour afterward, they came upon Hi Yuen Wy in his garden the old philosopher, with all his wisdom, could not perceive the new light in the sky, though it was like the smile of heaven.

Presently the pirate vessel came off her fastenings and was seen to drift gradually away from the prize. The wedge-shaped sails, which had been lowered but a few minutes before, went up with a rattling sound which could be heard a long distance across the water, and the prow was turned in pursuit of the fugitives.

"The gods defend us," said the captain, turning pale. "It is!"

The name of Kwan Dah is like the menace of a drawn sword. Hundreds of miles from the sea which he has so often reddened with innocent blood, the murderous ferocity of this inhuman fiend is as well known as in the forests of ships where sailors who fear no other terror of the ocean speak of Kwan Dah's deeds with trembling voices.

Even Sho Mai needed no word except his name to tell her for what fate she

Up to the presence of the most noble First Chief of Kwan Dah, and pay your homage, dogs!" said the sailor, as he roughly helped the trembling captives to assist the ladder.

"Do you believe in the God of Ocean?" asked the chief. "Yes," faltered the trembling wretch. "Then go to him, and may you prosper!"

At this, one of the executioners with a swinging stroke cut the captain's head from his body. Then both threw him over the rail into the sea. Another victim was called, and in a moment, his lifeless body fell into the ocean.

When the end of the path was reached the Chief halted, and taking a long strip of silk wound it round and round the eyes of Sho Mai till not a ray of light could reach his. Then one of the

... was awful questioning began again, and in almost every instance a wave of the sword was the end. A few were spared, but as they seemed to be the largest and most powerful of the captives, Sho Mai had little hope with which to meet the summons, which came at last.

"Boy, who are you?" asked the Chief. It seemed to Sho Mai that her voice came from a distance, and yet it did not tremble as she replied: "I am now but one of many captives of Kwan Dah. I expect to be but one of many victims of his sword."

"You speak boldly." "Because there is but one death. I am on the threshold." There was a pause, and her eyes met those of the Chief. No effort of her life was comparable to that by which she now steadied her gaze. A minute that was like a year crept by with its burden of terror, and then the Chief waved his hand, and Sho Mai was led back to the little band of those whom the sword had passed by.

"Let them be taken below," ordered the Chief, and in a moment they were in the rayless gloom of a little cabin behind a bolted door. But Sho Mai had cast one hasty glance at the sun which now touched the horizon, and she carried the remembrance of the gathering darkness with her as a consolation. The night might come in time to cast its yail between Li Khl and his pursuers.

The sword which had flashed so close to her own throat had withdrawn into its scabbard. Youth hopes easily, and Sho Mai filled the darkness of her prison with bright pictures.

With the cargo of the captured merchantman and the captives whose lives had been spared the pirates set sail for the home of the pirate king, Kwan Dah. It was a large sail, but the winds were favorable, and before many days had passed the peaks of the famous island, Shi Yan San, which, interpreted, is the Ten Island mountains, rose out of the sea.

The Shi Yan San is one of the most densely wooded islands in the Yellow Sea, near the peninsula of Corea. It is known as the Mysterious Kingdom of the Sea, because no vessel, excepting the pirates' junks, had ever been able to make a landing. The shore is of a high, precipitous formation. Jagged rocks rise precipitously and in such fantastic shapes that they seem every minute about to fall into the ocean which forever beats at their feet. Gales are of frequent occurrence and of long duration.

Inland the Kingdom of the Sea is exceedingly fertile, and its fields are tilled by the slaves of the pirates, who for many generations have made this spot their home. Of the chiefs who had held sway over this infamous colony none had ever made his name so terrible on the surrounding seas as Kwan Dah. At the time of this story he had ruled for thirty years, though the Emperor

had offered a reward of ten million taels and an hereditary dukedom to him who should capture the pirate chief, dead or alive.

In order to procure wives for his seven thousand subjects Kwan Dah was in the habit of raiding the towns on the coast of China and Corea and stealing all the young women that could be captured. Half a hundred of these unfortunate creatures were prisoners in Kwan Dah's harem, whence there was no escape except to the grave.

Sho Mai learned these agreeable details of her future home during her voyage in the pirate junk. The second day after her capture she was subjected to some on deck, and was not allowed to any restraint, though those who had been captured with her were still kept closely imprisoned. She struck up a sort of comradeship with one of the sailors, who told her such facts about the island as have already been given. Sho Mai questioned him eagerly about Li Khl, but he could remember no such person, and the girl began to feel sure that her lover had escaped.

"Why was my life spared?" she asked the sailor. "The others who were selected were strong men."

"The others were picked out for their strength," replied the sailor. "They will be made slaves. You will be taken into the presence of Kwan Dah, and if he sees fit you will become a member of the colony. It is the custom to recruit our forces from such youths among our captives as give promise of exemplary courage. But do not congratulate yourself yet. If Kwan Dah is not pleased with you, why, and the sailor made an expressive and horrible gesture as of one who waves a sword in the air.

Near the evening of the following day the junk anchored in the lee of some great rocks near the mysterious island. When the sail had been furled Sho Mai was summoned to the presence of the Chief. He spoke not a word, but pointed over the side of the vessel to where a small boat lay riding on the swell. Four sailors with oars poised in air were waiting to row the boat to the island. The girl climbed down the ladder, stepped into the boat and took a seat in the stern. She was followed an instant later by the Chief, who sat beside her.

"To the shore," he said, briefly, and, dipping their oars, the men gave way with a will. A landing was made in a strangely ill-lit place which looked as if it had been cut by the labor of men in the solid rock. The Chief, Sho Mai and two sailors followed a narrow trail until they came to a little clearing in the forest. Here were a number of small rude huts of skins, and so closely painted that they were hardly distinguishable from the foliage in the background. At the door of each but stood a sentinel armed with the same kind of curved sword as had been used by the executioners on board the junk. A smoothly beated path divided the village of tents, and along this the little party passed. At every tent the Chief halted long enough to whisper a talismanic word to the silent sentinel, and to make a peculiar sign.

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