

The Free Press' Short Story

THE YELLOW MASK

MAY EMERY HALL

HE last of Doctor Forrest's morning patients was just leaving his office in the missionary compound as the doctor's son, Ronald, accompanied by Sidney Borden, turned in at the gate. Sidney was Ronald's friend, on a week's visit from Shanghai. Both young men spoke the native dialect with ease, having lived long enough in that section of China to have mastered it.

It was, therefore, in Sun Ming's own tongue that Ronald called out to him. "Well, how is the interloper getting along, Sun Ming? Is my father still helping you?" The keen, intelligent face of Sun Ming lighted up with gratitude. "Oh, much, very much," was his enthusiastic response. Turning to Sidney, "I am pleased to meet Mr. Ronald Forrest's honorable friend again," he added with formal politeness.

Sidney acknowledged the deep bow of the young Chinese with a stiff nod. Not a word accompanied it, to Ronald's embarrassment and disappointment. He tried to make up for his friend's inconsiderate coldness by throwing more cordially than usual into his good-by. "You'll be around in the morning as usual, I suppose, Sun Ming? You're not dismissed yet, are you?" "It is yet one week," explained Sun Ming, "that your honorable father desires that I come to him."

"Well, so long, Sun Ming," Ronald had amused himself by teaching his Chinese friend a few Americanisms. "Song long, Mr. Ronald Forrest," returned Sun Ming with unfeigned gravity. The compound gate closed on the yellow-robed figure. Immediately Ronald turned on Sidney, a flush of annoyance on his face. "Why couldn't you have been decent to him, Sid? He inquired, 'Sun Ming is a good sort. Since he has been coming to father for treatment, he has become greatly interested in the mission.'"

"You think he has," came the cool comment from his friend. "I know it!" asserted Ronald hotly. "Why, he would do anything!" "To further his own interests," added Sidney quickly. "Like all the yellow natives hereabouts. Don't let them take you in, Ron. What do you know about this Sun Ming, anyway?" "Oh, a lot!" "Yes, but just what?" pursued Sidney. "How did he get that wound of his, for instance?" "He didn't say," replied Ronald somewhat moodily.

"Where does he live?" came Sidney's next question. "Across the river, temporarily, with a friend, so as to be near the clinic," "where's his real home?" went on Sidney. "Up the river." "That's definite!" came the sarcastic rejoinder. "Is he poor, well-to-do, or what?" "They say that Sun Ming is really possessed of considerable wealth," proudly declared Ronald. "Well, that part of the story I can well believe," hinted his friend. "See here, Sid," suddenly fared up Ronald. "What's at the back of all that? If you excuse my saying so, I'm dead sick of your questionaire."

later. Had his mother lived, Ronald felt sure she would have desired no better future for her son. He, therefore, left the conversation hastily to the others at table, who were, besides Doctor Forrest, Merle Carroll, Mrs. Carroll, and Guy Oliver, a young Princeton graduate. This was Guy's first missionary post and he brought to it all the fresh enthusiasm and idealism of youth pledged to service. "Why you are not planning to be one of us," the addressed Sidney.

"Ronald listened, tense. "Why?" repeated Sidney. Ronald could see that he was a trifle nettled. "Well, really, I don't consider myself an object of pity." "Oh, I don't mean that, exactly," Guy hastened to reply. "But the Orient, China, especially, offers such wonderful possibilities." "That's what Dad thinks," came the rejoinder. "He's never been sorry for a minute that the old people transferred him from the New York office."

"I wasn't speaking of business opportunities," went on the young missionary, "but of—"

"The only thing that counts with you, of course," supplemented Sidney. "But if you'll excuse my saying so, I think all this missionary effort is—"

He had no chance to finish his sentence and Ronald was not sorry. At that moment Doctor Forrest's servant approached the table. Chong Feng was the doctor's right-hand man, valet, laboratory assistant, cook, and boatman. Whenever professional calls necessitated travel by water, it was Chong Feng who did the rowing. It looked now as though such a trip were in prospect.

"Boy here," announced Chong Feng with terse directness, speaking in the limited English of which he was very proud. "Much sick father, Doctor up river. Right away."

"I mentioned a village about five miles distant. The doctor rose with alacrity. "But, Dad," objected Ronald, "you're not through lunch!" "I know, Son," returned his father. "This is a hurry call, and a few minutes' delay might make considerable difference."

Just then Ronald glanced at Sidney. He was sure that his friend's lips formed a word suspiciously like "Bank!" Following lunch, Ronald and Sidney carefully avoided all mention of the disputed subject of missions. They took a long walk out in the country, and, upon returning to the compound around four o'clock, Ronald suggested a bite to allay their keen appetites until dinner. The two boys stretched themselves out comfortably in bamboo chairs on the side porch after Ronald had given instructions to Wah Yee to serve them there. A bountiful tray was soon forthcoming. "Oh, Wah Yee," called Ronald as the kitchen boy was about to withdraw, "ask Dad if he can take the time to join us."

"Doctor Forrest is not back yet," explained Wah Yee in his native dialect. "What?" Ronald frowned as he consulted his watch. "Why, he should have been here over an hour ago. I wonder—" Ronald was more worried than he cared to admit. There was always some degree of danger from river pirates, especially when the old robber, Kwong Loo, was known to be lurking in the neighborhood.

"Oh, come now, Ron," Sidney rallied his friend. "It's much too early to do any worrying. The patient, you remember, was 'much sick,' according to Chong Feng. Your father'll surely be back by dinner time."

No notice was taken of his outburst beyond a tighter pressure on his wrist. The Chinese who appeared to be the leader of the gang, gave the order to march. Further outcry, Ronald realized, was futile. Silent acquiescence was the best policy. That they were at the mercy of a bold bandit chief, who had sent his scouts to spy out the land, was next to certain. It explained the deserted village. Ransom was, of course, his object. Could that bandit chief be Sun Ming?

Up and up the narrow rough ravine moved the young prisoners and their guards, slipping sliding back, struggling for a new foothold, panting with exertion. Would they never reach the end of the trail? At length came a clearing. Beyond it, strangely out of place in such a wild setting, appeared a pretentious house, roomy and comfortable-looking.

Through a wide gateway the captives led the four youths, then across a courtyard to the main entrance of the house. The door opened, revealing Sun Ming! He hurried forward, sharply ordering the band to release their captives. Amazed consternation was written in his face. This gave way to a friendly smile of greeting. "Sun Ming will explain—" "It will take some explaining to square yourself."

At that, Sun Ming drew himself up with hurt pride. "Sun Ming has said he will explain," he reiterated with dignity. "If Mr. Ronald Forrest will honor him by entering his humble dwelling—" Ronald motioned Sun Ming to lead the way, although still thoroughly distrusting him. Into a large hall he and his companions followed Sun Ming. It was empty except for a single figure at the farthest end of the room. He wore a dark robe and turban. No, it was not a turban, but a bandage. The man thus swathed turned.

"Father?" In an agony of relief and joy, Ronald rushed to him. Exclamations, breathless questions followed. "But you are hurt, Dad!" cried Ronald. "Not so badly as you think, Son," returned Doctor Forrest. "Had it not been for Sun Ming, though—" "Do we owe him anything?" inquired Ronald, darkly. "Perhaps my life—" "But how? Sun Ming is a bandit!" Doctor Forrest shook his head. "Not since he has been in touch with the mission," he explained. "And before that, his banditry was of a variety as nearly excusable as banditry can be."

"Excusable banditry!" came Ronald's astonished echo. "I didn't say exactly that," remonstrated his father. "But I can understand his half-hearted looting for fear of being looted himself." "But what happened yesterday?" "It was a decoy message that brought me up river," resumed the doctor. "When Chong Feng and I had about reached our destination, we were surrounded and overpowered by that rascally river pirate, Kwong Loo, and for my pains, received a stinging blow from an oar which knocked me unconscious. Sun Ming, it seems, had got word of the plot to capture and hold me for a ransom. Summoning his former band, he launched a plucky counter-attack and—well, here I am. Chong Feng is busy with preparations for the return journey. Sun Ming has provided a special escort."

"Not those ruffians who tackled us, I hope!" exclaimed Ronald. "The very same, I imagine," smiled back the doctor. "As their chief's orders they were patrolling the neighborhood and rather too literally over-interpreted his instructions. But Sun Ming, by probably saving my life at risk of his own, has certainly retrieved himself. Do you not agree with me, Son?" "So much so, Dad," responded Ronald soberly, "that I hesitate to ask his forgiveness for my rash judgment of him."

"If you misjudged him, Ron," impudently broke in Sidney, "where do you think I come in?" Both young men looked questioningly at Sun Ming, whose face was eloquent with good-will and understanding. "I've made a complete turn-about on the subject of missions," confessed Sidney. "I guess there are other things that count in the East as well as trade."

SAFEGUARDING PURITY OF FARM WELL. Next in importance to the location of the farm well, which should be far removed from likely sources of contamination, are the protective measures which may be taken to safeguard the purity of the water. The first step after digging or drilling the well is to protect it from the entrance of the surface water. The well must have a good cover of concrete, stone or wood. If the well is deep, it should be fitted with a galvanized iron pipe reaching to the bottom, care being taken that the lower end of the pipe is efficiently sealed to the rock, also that the top of the pipe is sealed to the cover. Outside surface water may trickles down outside the pipe into the well.

If the well is shallow and wide, the walls of the well should be made impervious to an adequate depth. Ten or twelve feet is the usual depth recommended for the impervious wall, which may be of concrete, puddled clay or cemented tiles. The wall should be continued upwards one foot above the surface of the ground. By this means, surface water must filter through a depth of ten or twelve feet of earth before it can enter the well, and if the earth is in a reasonably clean condition, the water thus becomes purified. Further safeguards are the turling of the area immediately surrounding the well, fencing to prevent the approach of animals, and refraining from using fertilizer within the vicinity.

THE PROMISE OF SECRECY. A keeper of secrets is a bearer of troubles. When you promised one friend secrecy, you did not foresee that your duty to another friend might require the utterance of that very secret. Secrets are like a nest full of complications and conflicts of duty—all ready to hatch. If a man is entrusted with money, and he finds that its administration clouds his honor or threatens other duties, he can usually return it; but he cannot return entrusted information and be free of it. There may be occasions when it is a sacred duty to receive a secret and then to guard it, but it is not a duty to be lightly assumed, or even sought for curiosity's sake. Be an conscientious about entrusted information as about trusted money, and at least as slow to receive it.

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DEFINED

"Now Tommy," said the teacher. "Can you tell me what a quick doctor is?" "Oh, yes; he's a vet that cures ducks."

FADE DEAL

"Yesterday I got a parrot for my wife." "Um! I wouldn't mind an exchange like that."

Leave On World Hitch Hike



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