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Greeting the Sunrise

*We'd scrambled upwards all the previous day,
And in the forest three times lost our way;*

*Then sun-scorched, grey with thirst, dog-tired, footsore,
Had pitched camp very late the night before:*

*And so you thought we dull grown-ups still slept,
As from your sleeping-bag you quietly crept,*

*Stripped, and stood forth into the golden dawn
To greet the glory of the day new born.*

*But through the tent-flap I too shared your joy —
The unselfconscious worship of a boy*

*In love with life and its long laughing years
(As to your untried youth it still appears) —*

*And when you stretched your arms to hail the sun
In morning ecstasy, we two were one.*

O. F. Simpson.

Bath-House in Kowloon

by

Stornoway

Russell Andrews made his way slowly along the waterfront of Victoria, not quite knowing what he was going to do next. He had come ashore with his mate Geoffrey Palmer, but Geoff had got involved with a couple of American sailors and had gone off to some nightclub where a rickshaw boy had promised all sorts of entertainment, and Russell, not in the mood for nightclubs, had been left alone. He had spent a couple of hours wandering through the narrow back streets looking at the bazaars and street stalls, elbowing his way through the dense crowds, buying a few souvenirs here and there. He had a small ivory figure, a sandalwood fan, and a couple of pairs of ivory chopsticks, and he was not quite sure just what he was going to do with these things. It was his first time in Hong Kong.

Then he had eaten a tremendous meal of shark-fin soup, prawns as big as baby lobsters, with chili, and rice, finishing with a bowl of lychees and a pot of jasmine-scented China tea. He had enjoyed the meal, but it would have been better if Geoff had stayed to enjoy it too. Eating alone was a solitary business. He had had trouble with the chopsticks at first, but the waiter had been very attentive, appearing every few minutes with a hot damp perfumed towel for his face and fingers. The waiter had been rather cute.

Hong Kong harbour was crowded with shipping. All along the Victoria side were sampans and ferries. Over on the Kowloon side were the big ships from overseas, and hundreds of Chinese junks. There were ships in midstream as well, freighters, naval craft, and a big aircraft carrier. His own ship was over at Kowloon docks, but he did not feel like going back to it right away. There was a continuous movement of Chinese along the waterfront. Some were idling, just killing time; others carried tremendous loads on long bamboo poles across their shoulders; some fished; small boys swam naked in the muddy water; sampans came and went. The night was hot, steamy, and oppressive. All the sounds and smells of the Far East were in the air.

Russell was tired from walking around and decided that he might as well, after all, go back to the ship. He could have crossed on the ferry, but he hailed a sampan instead. It was rather like a gondola, with a small cabin amidships that could be closed or left open. An old woman standing in the stern rowed with a stroke not unlike that used by gondoliers. Russell settled himself in the cabin.

«You want food junk?» the old woman demanded, as they left the quayside. «Good food. All fish alive in water. I bring it here for you.»

«No thanks. I've had food.»

The old woman rowed silently for a while. There were sampans and junks all over the harbour. The only sound apart from the splash of the single oar was that of a ship's sirens as a large liner was pushed into her berth by tugs, and a tanker headed for the open sea. The night sky was full of stars. Russell felt very content; he felt he would like to sleep all night on the sampan, being rowed around by the old woman.

«You want to go girl junk?» the old woman asked in a casual voice.

«Girl junk?» Russell answered, surprised at the idea.

«Many nice girls on junks. I get girl. You make love — one hour, two hours, what you want.»

«Where do we make love?»

«Here, on sampan. I row you round. I not watch.»

«Well, that's very decent of you,» Russell laughed. «I don't think so, not tonight.»

«I junk girl one time, long ago. I give good times.»

The old woman, who looked about eighty, though she was probably not much more than forty, giggled, as though remembering nights of love-making in a sampan, long ago, and then was silent for a while, but not for long.

«You sailor?» she called, after an interval.

«Yes.»

«Then maybe you like go boy junk?»

«Boy junk?»

«Yes. Nice boys, very young. I get you one.»

«And you row us around for one or two hours and you no watch?»

«I no watch.» The old woman laughed. She had an ancient, croaking laugh. «I seen everything. You sailor, you said. I take you boy junk.» She changed course skilfully with her single oar.

«No,» Russell called out to her. «No. I go Kowloon.»

«I take you boy junk. You look. You sailor.»

He wished Geoffrey were with him, for Geoff would enjoy this. Maybe Geoff would like to look the place over sometime, and with Geoff he would not mind having a look at it himself, but not alone. He argued a while with the old woman until she went back to her original course towards Kowloon. Arrived there, he gave her a couple of dollars and she seemed satisfied.

«Another time I take you junks,» she said. «I get what you want.»

No sooner had Russell left the sampan and was heading for the main streets of Kowloon than he was aware of soft footsteps padding alongside him. It was a rickshaw boy. He had a wide grin on his dark face.

«You want to go somewhere?» he demanded.

«No thanks,» said Russell curtly.

«I take you nightclub. Girls, drinks, dance. Very good.»

«No. I don't want to go anywhere.»

«I take you. You look. You no like, I take you somewhere else.» The rickshaw boy was persistent.

«No. I don't want to go anywhere.»

«Very nice girls, all clean.»

«I don't like girls.»

Russell crossed the road. So did the rickshaw boy. His voice was soft, persuasive. «Maybe you like boys», he persisted. «I take you boy house. You look. Cost nothing to look.»

Russell was beginning to get annoyed. «Listen Oscar,» he said firmly, «I don't want boys and I don't want girls. I just want to be left alone. I'd just as soon go home with you, but I don't want to do that either.»

The rickshaw boy brightened visibly. He was young, about twenty years old. His features were fine, and not the peasant features of the Cantonese type predominant in Hong Kong. All he wore was a brief pair of cotton shorts. White teeth flashed with pleasure.

«You like me?» he asked. «I take you my house. We alone; no other men. I very good boy.»

Russell could not help laughing. «No Oscar. I didn't mean that. I'm tired and I want to go back ship.»

The boy looked crestfallen.

«You tired? I take you bath-house. Chinese bath-house very good.»

Russell thought it over. He had been in a Japanese bath-house in Yokohama, where he had submitted to being undressed by a Japanese girl, and then bathed and massaged by her. It had all been quite

impersonal and he had not been embarrassed, until he eventually had to admit that he had come only for the bath, and not for anything else. The bath-girl had not minded. Her only concern was giving the bath and the massage. Another girl would have taken him over later, had he so desired.

«O. K.,» Russell said, and climbed into the rickshaw. The boy's bare feet padded along Nathan Road, turned into Haiphong Road, and eventually, after one or two turns into side streets pulled up at a large Neon-lighted building. Russell paid him off.

The boy grinned. «I look for you in three, four hours.» He padded away softly into the night.

There were notices in English and Chinese outside the bath-house outlining the service and giving a scale of charges. There was also a notice which read — «Under no circumstances are women admitted to this bath house». It would be, Russell reflected, a little different from the Japanese bath house. After a little deliberation with himself, he decided to take a «bath with service». He pushed open the door and went in.

A young Chinese about his own age received him inside. He smiled. «You take bath?»

He led the way along various curtained corridors. From somewhere in the distance Russell could hear Chinese music. From some of the cubicles came the sound of voices, and from others, the rhythmic sounds of massage. They went into a small cubicle softly lighted from a table lamp. There were two beds. The place looked very clean. Russell peeled off his coat and started to undress.

«No,» said the Chinese youth. «Bath with service. I do.» Again he flashed a smile. He took the coat and hung it up. Then he removed Russell's shoes, socks, shirt, trousers, and underwear. He wrapped a towel round Russell's middle and put some straw slippers on his feet, and indicated that he should lie down on one of the beds. Then he went out. A minute later another Chinese entered with a pot of scented tea and a damp perfumed towel. He poured the tea.

«Bath boy not long,» he said. «I tell you.»

Minutes passed. Russell lay propped up on one elbow sipping tea and smoking. He could hear the music, and from the next cubicle voices, and an occasional giggle. He was beginning to wonder what type of place he was in when a small boy appeared. He did not speak, but beckoned with his finger. Russell got up and followed him into a large ante-room where there were about a dozen Chinese in various stages of nudity lying round on couches sipping tea and talking animatedly. As Russell entered, the conversation stopped, and for a moment there was dead silence. So far as he could tell, he was the only European present. He felt a little embarrassed with all eyes on him, particularly when the small boy whipped the towel away and knelt down to remove his slippers. He tried to retain the towel to cover his nakedness but the boy was adamant. He folded it up and put it to one side. Someone laughed, but it was a friendly laugh. A door behind him opened and Russell felt a

hand on his shoulder pulling him into an inner room. He turned to face another Chinese youth, as naked as he was, and found himself in a room with three large square bathtubs and several marble slabs. A few Chinese were sitting in the baths. Others were lying round being washed. The youth indicated that Russell sit on one of the slabs.

«What do I do?» Russell demanded.

The Chinese youth smiled and shook his head. He said something in Chinese to another bath-boy who examined Russell critically and then winked at him. Russell's own bath-boy filled a wooden bucket several times with near-boiling water from one of the pools and poured it over him. Then he pushed him back on the slab. He went to work first with soap, applying it with firm, strong fingers, all over Russell's body. The room was hot and steamy, and it was pleasant to feel the pressure of the fingers on his arms, legs, and body. He grew languid, and almost fell asleep, to be wakened rudely by a further onslaught of very hot water from the wooden bucket. The boy then pulled him to his feet, and with a wide grin indicated that he should sit in the bath. He lowered himself very carefully. The water was very hot and he tried to get out, but the boy pushed him back again. There were about half a dozen Chinese in the bath; they did not seem to mind the heat.

«This is too hot for me,» Russell protested.

The Chinese sitting next to him smiled. «Next bath more hot,» he said in English.

«You mean I have to go through those too?» Russell asked.

«Yes. Bath not finished yet. You will feel very good afterwards.»

«It's now I'm worried about,» Russell said weakly. «I feel awful.»

He felt as though he would faint, but after a few minutes in the water he felt better and much more relaxed. Then the bath-boy motioned him to get out and back to the slab. This time he had rough-looking gloves on and he started to rub Russell down. The gloves felt like wire wool.

«What are you trying to do?» Russell asked. «You want to take all my skin off.»

The boy merely smiled and went on with the job, but more vigorously; it was obvious he understood no English. For ten minutes he rubbed away, first on one side and then on the other. After a while Russell got used to the torture and even started to enjoy it. Then the boy got busy again with soap and this was a pleasant relief. Then he washed him down with more buckets of water and led him to the second bath. If the first one was hot, this one was near boiling. Steam rose in clouds from the surface of the water.

«I think you want to boil me alive,» he said to the boy, who merely grinned and patted him on the head.

Here again it was pleasant once he got used to it, but this time it took longer. It was even more pleasant when he was once again taken back to the slab. This time there was a firm finger rub all over, while a second boy went to work on his feet, and then the third bath was

indicated. Russell lowered his foot into the water and withdrew it very quickly.

«No,» he said firmly. «I'm not going in there.» The bath-boy's fingers pressed on his shoulder indicating that he had no choice. The man who had spoken to him in English was sitting there looking very comfortable.

«Tell him, please, that I've had enough,» Russell pleaded. «Tell him that I don't want any more.»

The man smiled, and spoke in Chinese to the boy. The latter looked disappointed.

«Tell him it was very good, but I just can't take any more,» Russell added.

The man explained this to the boy who looked mollified. «He said he thought you might not think him good bath-boy,» the man explained to Russell.

Russell went back to the slab. More buckets of water came, at first very hot, but gradually cooling off. Then the boy dried him carefully with warm towels and took him back to the ante-room, as naked as when he first entered. The small boy was waiting with towel and slippers, and took him back to the cubicle, where he almost crashed down on to the bed. He was sweating. A minute passed and some fresh tea was brought to him with a damp lemon-scented towel for his face. He lay there smoking and drinking tea and feeling much more relaxed. Presently the first Chinese he had seen, the one who had undressed him, came into the cubicle.

«You feel good,» he asked. Russell replied cautiously, «I feel better but not good yet.»

«I make you feel good,» the youth said. He took off his slippers and squatted on the bed, tailor fashion.

«What goes on now?» Russell asked himself.

The youth lifted one of Russell's legs and placed it across his thighs, and after carefully arranging the towels, went to work with the massage. It was an odd, rhythmical massage, such as Russell had never had before. The plangent Chinese music could still be heard in the background, and the youth adapted the rhythm of his hands and fingers to that of the music. He did not talk. To Russell, it was very soothing; again he almost slept, as he abandoned himself to the sensuous pleasure of the massage. He watched the Chinese boy through half-closed eyes. He too seemed almost asleep, except for his hands which worked with regular monotonous movement from foot to thigh and back again. He was a good-looking boy. His skin was olive rather than brown, and smooth textured. His features were regular and finely cut. His eyes were very dark brown, almost black. He looked more like a northern Chinese than a Cantonese. He wore an open shirt and thin black silk Chinese trousers.

He worked for about fifteen minutes on one leg and then changed to the other. Russell smoked contentedly and sipped tea. He did not

want to talk; the pleasure of the moment was enough. The second leg finished, the boy motioned to Russell to turn over. Then he went to work on the back, from the neck to the lower spine, always to the same rhythm of the music in the background, the hands pounding, rubbing, squeezing muscles that Russell did not know existed. He was now beginning to feel really fine. The massage had gone on for an hour, when finally the boy rolled him over on to his back again, and went to work on face, chest, and belly.

«Where you from?» the boy asked, breaking the long silence.

«England,» Russell answered.

«You from ship?»

«Yes.»

The hands continued their rotary motion over Russell's middle.

«You Number One boy on ship?»

Russell laughed. «Not quite. I'm just an ordinary sailor.»

«Not Number One boy?» The boy looked disappointed.

«Number Two boy if you like but not Number One.»

«You take me on ship your boy? My name Han Kee. I very good boy.» He gave Russell a final slap on the abdomen, indicating that the massage was finished. «Maybe you give me cigarette? You very well made,» he added.

Russell gave him one and lit one for himself.

«You're a very good boy, and I'd like to take you on ship, but I'm afraid I can't.»

Han Kee shrugged his shoulders. «I from Peking. I come on junk.»

Russell now realised the situation. Han Kee was a refugee. Thousands were smuggled illicitly into Hong Kong every year on junks from Red China, while others, by eluding the guards or else bribing them, slipped over the border into the New Territories. Russell would have liked to have Han Kee on board as his boy, but regulations just did not permit the acquisition of personal servants as extra members of the crew. Russell laughed to himself as he thought of Geoffrey's face if he arrived back with Han Kee in tow.

«I student in Peking,» Han Kee volunteered. «No like Communist life, so I come. Here for me no papers. Watch police all time.»

Russell agreed that it was one hell of a predicament, but he could not see that there was anything he could do about it. He took Han Kee's hand and pressed it in sympathy. Han Kee returned the pressure.

«I finish here now,» said Han Kee. «What you do?»

Russell looked at his watch. It was well after midnight. «I'll go back to the ship I guess, or else take a walk around. There's nothing else to do.» He was feeling very fit after the bath and the massage and was ready for anything that would keep him entertained until he really had to go back to the ship.

«You like come my house?» Han Kee asked with a bland smile. «I make you tea and chow, and I have friend there. He student from

Peking too. We like to talk with Englishmen.»

Russell thought it over. «O. K., I'll come,» he said.

Han Kee helped him dress. Russell gave him a handful of Hong Kong dollars to pay for the bath and tips to the bath-boy and the others, and they left the bath-house together. Maybe he was doing a crazy thing in going to an unknown Chinese house with two unknown Chinese refugees, but what the hell? He had taken chances before, and in any case he had nothing much of material value on him except a few dollars, which Han Kee and his friend were welcome to if the going was tough. Besides, it might be fun to see what developed.

Outside the bath-house Han Kee whistled softly twice. A rickshaw boy came running towards them.

«This my friend, Hop Wah,» Han Kee said with a grin. «He from Peking too. He take us home. Not far from here.»

Hop Wah bowed low and smiled.

Russell laughed out loud. Hop Wah was the rickshaw boy who had taken him to the bath-house.

Nocturne

*Over the cold hill the half-sun burning
Dull in its embers, and one leaf turning
Slowly down air; the white winter nearing
Through black frozen hours, long hours before morning;
The dead dark coming, the cold heart yearning
For home, for that room safe walled from the warning
Of the death beyond dying, the fear beyond fearing —
But look! You are loved, you were missed from the room,
And someone with a lantern is coming through the clearing,
Someone with a lantern on the path toward home.*

Robert Hillyer in «The Relic and Other Poems» (Knopf).