

“YOUR new friend,” said Lord Li, “was causing trouble at the docks. I wouldn’t have minded if they had just seen to the expulsionists, but now the Americans are demanding an audience. A setback for our negotiations, apparently.”

He was tense and fidgety – not at all the right mood for the pleasure district.

“That’s not what you came to discuss,” said Taka. “Why don’t you forget about it? Tea?” She gestured with the pot.

“All right,” he said; and his frown receded, just a little.