

SHANGHAI SPARROW

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First published 2014 by Solaris
An imprint of Rebellion Publishing Ltd,
Riverside House, Osney Mead,
Oxford, OX2 0ES, UK

www.solarisbooks.com

ISBN: 978-1781081846
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

To all the women whose contributions to the sciences never made it into the books, and to those who will come after them: "Never doubt that you can change history. You already have." *Marge Piercy*

London

EVELINE DUCHEN SIPPED her tea, ladylike as all get-out, and smiled at the cook.

Ma Pether would've killed her if she knew Evvie was actually in the house. "Scope the place out," she said. "Look over the grounds if you can see 'em, see who's about, how many servants. Check where the back doors and windows are, and whether there's cover. You know what to look for." What she hadn't said was, "Wait till a maid comes to shake the rugs out and go up to her bold as brass pretending to be looking for work, get invited in for a cup of tea and sit gossiping for an hour."

But this way was so much better! Heart fizzing in her chest with excitement and satisfaction, Eveline accepted another slice of cake. "Ooh, this is lovely. I don't s'pose you could give me the recipe, my Ma'd love to make this." Eveline was used, by now, to ignoring the brief stab she felt at the thought of her mother. She told herself she didn't even notice any more.

"You can read?"

"Yes ma'am, my papa taught me. He was a clergyman." He had actually been a schoolmaster, and she barely remembered his face.

The cook nodded solemnly, adjusting the black mourning band on her arm that Evvie had spotted as soon as she came in. "I lost my George just a few months back."

"I'm ever so sorry to hear that."

"Your papa taught you manners too, I see," the cook said. "Most of 'em around here – cheek! And *young men*," she said, looking meaningfully at the skinny maid, who blushed and hid her face behind the candlesticks she was polishing. "Not like where I'm from. She's a good girl, if she'd only keep her mind on her business."

The maid went even pinker and polished furiously.

"Where's it you're from, ma'am?" Evvie said.

"Dorset."

Eveline nodded, carefully stowing the cook's soft burr in her mind for later reference.

"Lovely down there," the cook said, looking blindly out the soot-grimed window at the passing legs and feet, seeing other sights long gone, "but we had to come to London for the work. Still used to see a lot of the Folk, back home, too... well, them that's left. I don't know, you hear things, but I always liked seeing 'em about, and they never did me no harm."

Eveline kept her face carefully neutral. She had her own opinion about the Folk.

"Ooh, I don't know about that," the maid said. "Bogles and nixies and what-all. And they play dreadful tricks, I heard."

"On slovens and fools and them that breaks rules, we used to say," the cook said. "And speaking of rules, if that's your young man coming down the steps, Miss, I'll thank you to tell him we don't allow *followers*. At the very door! What the mistress would say..."

Evvie glanced up to see a set of dark blue trousered legs coming down the area steps and, atop them, a brass-buttoned dark blue coat. A policeman, a bloody peeler! If he saw her face... oh, Ma'd have the hide off her. She leaned forward and whispered to the cook, "Can I use your...you know?"

"Out the other door, on the left. Mind the latch, it sticks."

Quick as a ferret, Evvie was out the back door. She turned around and pressed her ear to the kitchen door, heard the cook's gruff tones. *See him off*, Evvie thought; *go on, cook! This is a respectable house!*

But the cook laughed. Obviously the peeler had some charm about him. Now what? Evvie glanced around her: to her left, the privy, and what looked like the door to a coal cellar. Steps down to an overgrown garden – good cover, Ma'd be pleased – but there was a great bank of shrubs and nettles before the wall at the end of the garden. She wore the neat, inconspicuous

clothes of a respectable maid-of-all-work, part of Ma's stock (Ma had more costumes than a travelling theatre). They were well enough for moving about without drawing attention, but if she tore them getting over the wall, there'd be hell to pay – and no telling who might be walking past on the other side, ready to raise hue-and-cry after her.

Besides, if she disappeared the minute the peeler turned up, there was every chance it might put the wind up them. She could imagine the conversation now: “Oh, where's that nice lass who was here looking for a job... funny she disappeared just as you arrived,” “That's odd, sounds like suspicious behaviour, that does, let's have a description of her...” and then she'd be in enough hot water to drown a coach-and-four.

She slipped into the privy and pulled the door shut – she could blame the sticking latch if they thought she'd been in here too long. Her brain ticking away like clockwork, she bit her lower lip and stared at a spider-web, where a fly buzzed furiously as it tried to escape its fate.

EVVIE PEERED THROUGH the kitchen door; the peeler was a youngish fellow with ginger side-whiskers, his uniform jacket somewhat strained about the middle and his wide leather belt on its last notch. Evvie hovered until he was looking at the giggling maid, and the cook was looking towards the door.

She stepped as though to come in, glanced at the peeler, and threw the cook a wide-eyed gaze like a trapped rabbit. Then she ducked her head, and crept up to the cook, still keeping her eyes on the ground. "Thanks very much for the cake, ma'am. I gotta go, I promised myself I'd try another dozen streets today," she said, in a rapid half-whisper, still shooting glances at the peeler.

"I'm sorry we couldn't get you a place. At least let me put you up some of that cake to take away, we'll never get through it all, not with the family out in the country till next month," the cook said, giving her a curious look.

"Oh, no, really..."

The cook took her wrist in the firm grip of someone who spent hours of her life kneading dough. "It won't take a moment," she said sternly, and led Evvie through into the scullery.

She leaned back against the countertop and folded her arms. "Now, miss," she said. "Perhaps you'll tell me what all that was about?"

"All what, ma'am?" Evvie said, flicking glances towards the door.

"You look like you seen Satan and all his devils in that kitchen. You in trouble?"

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Because you were looking at that bobby like I don't know what. I've a good mind to go back in there and..."

"It's just I know him," Evvie said. "From a place I used to work. He came round after one of the maids there, and she... well, she ended up turned out." Evvie glanced significantly down at her own flat stomach. "I heard them outside one night, she was crying, begging him to do right by her, and he just called her a bad name, hit her and walked right off. And him a policeman!"

"Oh, ho," the cook said. "Like that, is it?"

"Only I'm afraid he'll recognise me," Eveline said. "He's the sort to make trouble, just to shut me up about what he done."

"Don't you worry about that." The cook swiftly wrapped the remaining cake in a bit of clean muslin, and thrust it into Evvie's hand, then pointed. "See that door there? You go through that, and along a bit of hallway with a black-and-white floor, and let yourself out the front. That piece of worthlessness that calls himself a butler won't trouble you, he's fast asleep in his pantry with the paper over his face and some of the master's best beer in his belly, I've no doubt. And I'll deal with young Mister Brass-buttons, I've seen off tougher than him."

"I hope your girl is all right."

"She's due off for Whitsun, like the rest of us – I'll take her home along of me, keep an eye on her."

"You're ever so kind," Eveline said. She stood on tiptoe and kissed the cook's cheek.

"Get along with you," the cook said, smiling. "Right." She took a deep breath, pumping up her considerable bosom until her starch-stiffened apron creaked, and headed back towards the kitchen.

Eveline slipped out of the house, grinning to herself as she heard raised voices coming from the kitchen behind her. She moved swiftly away, and the voices were soon drowned out by the clatter of hooves and the rumble of wheels, and the *chuff-chuff-chuff* of a steam hansom. Briefly louder than everything else, above it all, a zeppelin throbbed slowly overhead on its

way to the Beddington aerodrome, dignified as an elderly duchess looking for her seat at the opera.

Never mind that she'd disobeyed – Ma'd be pleased as punch after this. Eveline could give her the layout, she'd made sure a nosey copper was given short shrift that would have him far less interested in hanging about, *and* she knew when the staff would be away. Always better if the staff were out of the way; Ma wasn't a one for violence, but it didn't mean someone wouldn't do something stupid and maybe get hurt.

Eveline wasn't bothered about respectability – the respectable world had spat her family out and left them to rot, and cutting a coin or two from its coat-tails bothered her not at all. But she didn't like violence, and she wouldn't be party to murder, not if she could help it.

After this, she might get some extra food, or even a word or two of the praise Ma doled out as parsimoniously as she did everything else. But whether she did or not, Evvie knew she'd made a fine job of it. She began to hum the tune to a filthy music-hall song, and dawdled towards home as a smeared red sun struggled to burn its way through the ever-present smog.

Shanghai

“THERE! NOW THAT beastly horse had better win, that was my best glove.” The woman – the wife of one of Shanghai’s many prominent businessmen – took her friend’s arm. “I do think betting actual money would be far more exciting.”

“Oh, no, too vulgar. People might take one for any sort of person,” said her friend, adjusting one of the several thick diamond bracelets that adorned her wrists; a present from her husband, and, unknown to her, only slightly more valuable than those he had recently bestowed on his latest mistress, a sixteen-year-old Eurasian girl.

“Who *is* that young man?” the glove-gambler whispered behind her fan, watching a slim, upright figure moving through the racetrack crowd.

“He’s attached to the Consulate, I believe. Hopeforth, I think. Something like that.”

“He’s rather dashing, isn’t he?”

“Oh, really, Elizabeth.”

“Well, he is.”

“Yes, dear, but that doesn’t mean one must *notice* him.”

The roar as the horses were released for the last race covered the rest of their conversation. Thaddeus Holmforth, whose preternaturally sharp hearing was no great advantage in such circumstances, straightened his already-rigid shoulders. Betting, in public, in a place like this – and they were British! They should know better. One couldn’t expect much from the French or the Germans or, certainly, the Americans.

The personal insult was nothing. But they represented the Empire, and should, like Caesar’s wife, be above both suspicion and vulgarity.

Holmforth himself did not bet, nor was he greatly interested in horses; he came to the races only in order to maintain an agreeable appearance. The Chinese, of course, bet like maniacs... but then, they were a degenerate race, in Holmforth’s view. If only his countrymen – and women – would set a better example!

Of course, these were *riches* of the most *nouveaux*. Shanghai was a regrettable example of what happened when business was allowed to take over and good government was sidelined. He had had hopes, at the beginning of his posting, that he might play some small part in things here... but China would have to be left to other men. He had a greater prize in mind, though China would be instrumental in grasping it.

And his contact would be arriving at his apartment shortly. Holmforth did not bother summoning a rickshaw – he could travel more quickly on his own feet.

He moved swiftly along the Bund, where the great banks and manufactories swelled and gleamed, fat with money from steel and tea, opium and porcelain. Shanghai roared and stank, chattering with a dozen languages and two dozen dialects. He had learned to ignore most of the noise, though he clenched his fists unconsciously as he walked.

His looks were European enough that the locals gave him a respectfully wide berth. A velocipede growled past him, the driver clearing the way with his whip. An addled scarecrow in rags barely escaped its wheels, crawled to the mouth of a nearby alleyway and collapsed. *The poor are always with us, but few of them are much use.* They needed a firm hand, to be of any worth. But here, they scrambled like dogs on a dunghill, working for scraps until they dropped, opium-riddled, to death.

Of course, they might be lucky enough to obtain a position with one of the great houses, helping their masters create the glittering social events with which Shanghai abounded. To some, Holmforth would be invited; a ball, perhaps, but not dinner. A charity concert – his money was, after all, the same colour as everyone else’s. Where concerts were concerned, he almost always found a reason to stay away. He hated music. If it was bad it hurt his ears, if it was good... it was unbearable.

Holmforth's rooms were adequate; he did not care much for such things. His houseboy was reasonably efficient and apparently discreet, which was all that mattered. As the boy – a man of fifty with a manner so self-effacing he was nearly invisible – made him tea, Holmforth paced, checking his watch every few moments, and stared out of the window into the pullulating mass below.

He need not have hurried. He should have remembered these damn Orientals had no sense of time.

Eventually, a rickshaw pulled up outside the building, its ragged and skeletal driver slumping in the shafts. A shiver of anticipation rippled through him.

The figure that emerged from the rickshaw was small, wearing an immense coolie hat that gave him something of the appearance of an animated mushroom. He paid off the driver, and a few moments later Holmforth heard the creaking of the stairs.

Holmforth opened the door carefully, cane in his hand. The man who entered bowed, taking no notice of the cane. Beneath the coolie hat he had a calm face with a slight, permanent smile.

“Well?” Holmforth said. He spoke Cantonese well, having a knack for languages. He avoided pidgin, finding it uncomfortably clownish.

The man bowed again, and extracted from his sleeve a roll of rice-paper.

Holmforth took it, pushing the teapot out of the way, checked that the table was dry, and unrolled it.

Mechanisms curled across the page, carefully drawn in deep blue ink. Holmforth read the notations with growing excitement. There was something here, he knew it. He concealed, with ease, the surge of triumph that rose in him; he had learned young not to show his feelings, and if this smiling devil knew Holmforth was pleased, his price would go up.

“Have you seen Wu Jisheng operating the machine? Does he do it himself?”

“Yes, I have seen him getting into it. But it is not complete. If you will forgive...” He bent over the page. “This, here, is done. But these, this – none of this exists. He is trying to obtain the materials he needs. But since the recent troubles, he is having difficulty.”

Holmforth tapped the page with one finger. This alone would not be sufficient to convince his masters. He needed to have a working device, not these hints, suggestions. He needed his own operator, too. He already had someone in mind.

And it would have to be done here, in Shanghai. He had neither the resources nor the influence to simply appropriate the device, though once he had proved its worth, that should not prove difficult.

The opium wars had broken open China like a child's piggy bank, but much of the coin had been scooped up by the fat fingers of merchants, instead of going into the Empire's coffers where it belonged. This... this was a real prize. *If* it could be proved to work. But not yet. Not until Holmforth had all the pieces in place.

He had to ensure that Wu Jisheng did not get any farther, for the moment. And he must not draw the attention of the Imperial court.

“Should it seem that he may start to obtain what he needs,” Holmforth said, “I would like things diverted. Delayed. Can you arrange that? Nothing to draw attention – simply ensure that any supplies he orders for the work are diverted. *That* should not create difficulties.” He was well aware of the healthy trade in ‘lost’ goods that somehow ended up in the households of local mandarins.

The man bowed, and waited.

Holmforth gave him silver, a substantial portion. Not Her Majesty's money, but his own. “Twice as much again, if I am pleased with the results. Return in ten days.” That should be time enough.

With one final bow, the man was gone.

Holmforth seldom smiled, but he did so now. He stared out of the window, no longer seeing the surging crowd. First, he would book passage home. He would take a zeppelin, though it probably meant a refuelling stopover in Africa, which he loathed; but hang the expense. There was no time to waste. His fingers prickled with impatience.

Before his posting to the Shanghai Consulate, Holmforth had spent the last few years toiling in a Government post whose major purpose, he realised after the first month, was largely obstruction. Yet it was that post which had brought James Lathrop before him, and without Lathrop, the potential of Wu Jisheng's creation would have passed him by.

Working in a tiny draughty office in an obscure corner of Whitehall, Holmforth had become accustomed to the parade of the deluded, the desperate, and the merely fraudulent who were shunted off onto him – the ones, at least, who, like Holmforth himself, had *connections*, and could not be completely ignored for fear they might prove an embarrassment.

Thaddeus Holmforth treated every single one of them with a precise and unwavering seriousness. He took notes. He recorded their ramblings, pleadings and blatant deceptions. Because it was his job, and if he did it well enough, his worth – one day, despite everything – would be recognised.

Paunchy, sweating, and overdressed, Lathrop had seated himself, without being invited, in the creaking chair in Holmforth's office; wiped his face with an embroidered linen handkerchief, and looked him over. "Oh, there must be some mistake. I was told I would be speaking to the person in charge of scientific advances."

"Well, there is no-one with precisely that title," Holmforth said. "I am, as it were, the first port of call."

"Really? Well I must say... this is important stuff, you know. And I have responsibilities, serious responsibilities, at home, I can't be dashing up to town every five minutes just to speak to someone who isn't in a position to –"

"I assure you that I am the person you need to speak to, Mr Lathrop. My function is to assess the information and pass it on to the proper person."

"Well, if you're sure."

"Unless, of course, you feel you would rather seek private interest?"

"Oh, well..." Lathrop slumped back in his chair, his lower lip protruding. "I suppose it will do."

At that point it became obvious to Holmforth that Lathrop had already attempted to raise private funding for his venture, whatever it was, and had failed.

"Now, if you would be so kind as to explain?" Holmforth said.

"Ethereic Science," Lathrop said. "The use of sound to, among other things, affect mood and behaviour. My... I have designed a number of instruments, which used correctly have an astonishing ability to tranquilise and pacify." He began to lay out charts and schematics on the desk, all written in a surprisingly neat, small hand.

Holmforth, against his will, found himself intrigued. Lathrop did not exactly sell it well: he frequently backtracked, muddled his references and at times barely seemed to understand his own discoveries. But there was a persuasive elegance in what he described that was far more appealing than the man himself.

To tranquilise and pacify. If it worked, it was something Holmforth had every reason to believe might hold interest for his superiors.

"And what is this notation here?" He said.

"Oh, that was something to do with... I mean, I made some experimentation with the Folk." Lathrop gave him a sidelong glance. "They seemed intrigued by the sounds. But I found no profit in taking it further. Should it be of interest, of course, given sufficient investment, I could make further experiments."

“I see. Well, thank you for bringing this to me,” Holmforth said. “I feel this might well be of interest. I shall contact you as soon as I have a response.”

It took, as expected, another hour to persuade the man out of his office, after which Holmforth wrestled open every window in order to rid the place of the pervasive reek of sweat, over-scented pomade, and self-importance.

Then he took the matter to the head of his department, Rupert Forbes-Cresswell.

“Ethereic Science?” Forbes-Cresswell said. Sun poured through the high window of his much larger office, haloing his thick blond hair. “My dear fellow, it’s nothing but one of those fads, like the health-giving properties of electricity.”

“I thought there were some interesting points in his work. He appeared to have some evidence for its effectiveness.”

“Oh, it’s obvious people are affected by sounds. Especially weaker minds: women, children, the lower orders. One only has to attend the music hall to see it in action.”

“I haven’t done so.”

“It provides an interesting evening’s study of the vulgar, though I did end up having to throw away a perfectly good coat afterwards. If you want to know more, there’s always old Frobisher. He became interested, briefly. But I can tell you what he’ll say; he gave me quite the treatise on the subject. Sound manipulation of this sort is an ability, not a science. It tends to manifest in certain people, usually women – rather the way some simpletons can calm horses. Possibly because their voices are different, you know. Frobisher thought it might be why lullabies are effective! It could be this Lathrop is some sort of hermaphrodite, and that is why he has the ability? Or he could be simply deluded. Oh, the Higher Folk, of course, have some ability to use sound to manipulate the senses, singing, and so on...” He let the sentence hang, but Holmforth said nothing. “There may be a connection there. Do you have any reason to believe Duchen may be, ah...”

“I don’t believe so,” Holmforth said. “He had apparently made some experiments and found they were intrigued by the sounds, but didn’t see worth in taking it further.”

“I’m afraid I don’t either,” Forbes-Cresswell said. “He may have stumbled upon something that imitates a natural effect by accident, but all these instruments...” He swept a hand over the paper Holmforth had put on his desk. “Rubbish, really, I’m afraid. An attempt to gild a not very impressive lily.”

“Well, in that case, I’m sorry to have taken up your time.”

“Not at all, not at all. Do give my regards to your father, next time you rusticate.”

Holmforth bowed himself out of the office, his face utterly calm. He had a great deal of practice in hiding his humiliation. And until he had been posted to Shanghai, and first encountered a rumour about what Wu Jisheng was up to, in among all the other fragments, half-truths, blatant lies and wild exaggerations, he thought he had forgotten the incident.

But now, he had the evidence in his hands. Etheric science existed, and could be used in ways that no-one had imagined. There had been that single notation in the margins of Lathrop’s work, of course – but the man had had no idea what he had found.

And Wu Jisheng’s ability seemed to militate against the idea that it was a female trait. Perhaps it had to do with his being Oriental.

In any case there was little doubt, in what few works he had managed to find that actually took Etherics seriously, that innate ability was a factor. Lathrop would have to be brought here. His vanity would no doubt be flattered.

Holmforth would show his superiors what Etheric mechanisms could do, in the right hands. *His* hands. And they would see that he had been right, that the borders of the British Empire should not stop with India, or Russia. The borders of Empire should extend beyond this world, to encompass and bring under its wing not just the primitive and barbaric peoples of the Earth, but the Folk as well. Others might believe they were no longer relevant, the last

fragment of a dying race, but Holmfirth knew better. They had wealth that could be put to good use. Besides, their arrogance was an insult to the Empire, and their immorality a bad example. It was beyond time they were brought to heel.

The Crepuscular

“O MOST EXALTED, Highly Honoured, and Elegant Mistress; I humble myself at your feet, which allows me to appreciate your exquisite slippers. As always, you outdo all others in taste.”

The fox, his tail quivering and his eyes brilliant, tilted his head at an angle precisely calculated to charm.

The lady at whose feet he sat smiled. Her slippers were indeed exquisite, embroidered all over with mermaid scales whose constantly shifting sea-shades echoed those of her eyes. The eyes themselves, at this moment, danced merrily, sunlight upon gentle waves. She was fond, in her way, of the fox, and found him a source of amusement.

“Well, little fox, what do you want?”

“Lady, I bring news.”

“I know you would not be so foolish as to come here without *something* to entertain me. What news?”

“Pearl divers off an island under the sway of Oro have found a great treasure. A pearl of exceptional beauty and size, dark as my lady’s hair, and nearly as lustrous. Already it is on its way to the temple, where it will be placed in a statue of laughable ugliness but great value in the eyes of the priests. And it will become an offering, and a Gift.”

“I see. And why should this concern me?”

“Because it is a Gift of some... merit, Lady. In my unworthy and no doubt mistaken opinion.”

“Some merit. How *much* merit?”

“A thousand hours of work by three separate craftsmen, one of whom lost his sight on the endeavour, the eldest of them dying as he set his chisel, having prayed and fasted overmuch in order that he might be inspired, and the youngest, possibly the best craftsman the island has ever produced, having cut his thumb, an injury that will eventually cripple him and prevent his ever creating so fine a piece again.”

“Ah.” In her eyes, a thin cloud veiled the sun, the sparkle faded from the sea.

“Forgive my presumption, but I thought your Ladyship would wish to know.”

“You are correct, little fox. And what, in your *opinion*, do you deserve in return for this information?”

“What could I ask more than your Ladyship’s pleasure?”

“Oh, you could ask many things. Some of them I might even grant.”

“Your Ladyship’s generosity is outweighed only by your Ladyship’s beauty. I ask merely the freedom to suggest something that might, if your Ladyship should deign to consider it, outweigh this Gift in value.”

“And what has my clever fox found, to overbear so weighty a Gift?”

“A pebble.”

The fox kept his eyes on her slippers, but from their darkening colours he could see that in her eyes, now, there would be the suggestion of reefs, of depths where no diver would ever find the wreckage. He was something of a gambler by nature, and rather enjoyed the shiver of risk.

“A pebble.”

“Yes, your Ladyship.”

“Explain.”

“A child has spent hundreds of hours searching for this pebble. She has collected and discarded stone after stone, to find the perfect one. She knows it must be perfect. She has built a cairn upon the grave of her little cat; this stone is to mark the apex. She has ignored calls to supper, she has searched in the rain and as darkness fell, and despite scoldings and

beatings. Only if she found the perfect stone could she finish the shrine, and release her grief." He paused, and added, "She is seven years old."

"Hmm." The scales on her slippers became still, the colours those of a lake beneath an empty sky. He kept his eyes lowered.

"Seven," she said.

"Yes."

"A significant number, even to them."

"So I believe," the fox said, and silently cursed himself. A misstep.

"You do not believe; *you* know." But her tone was musing, not yet dismissive.

"Yes, lady."

"At such an age, constancy of that nature is a rarity among them."

"Indeed."

"A pity to waste it upon a cat." She disliked cats; those with the knack passed between the mortal and magical worlds without shame, they refused to grovel, and they could go where she could not.

"Alas." The fox himself admired cats; they tended to be, like himself, survivors.

"Now, little fox." She bent down and put one long, pale finger beneath his chin, tilting his head up so that he must look into her eyes. "You know that if you were wrong, on a matter of such delicacy, I would be... displeased?"

Enough to skin me alive and hang me writhing by my own pelt from the arm of your throne, to provide amusement to your guests for a hundred mortal years? He let a little of his genuine terror show, but only a little. Though, of course, she would use fear, she did not bask in it. She far preferred adoration. He narrowed his eyes as she scratched his chin, and let a small moan of pleasure escape his throat.

"Good. Then fetch it for me." She sat up. "And when I have it, you may receive a gift of your own."

"Ma'am."

The fox bowed and danced his way out of the Presence, careful to display nothing but delight. Smugness was something the Court preferred to keep entirely to themselves.

The child would know something had changed, of course, when she next visited her little shrine. The heart, the soul, the intention would be gone. What was left would be just a stone. She would probably believe the change was in her, the first dulling of the gemlike passions of childhood.

With the cat, who might chose to be irritated, he would have to make other accommodation. Find something it wanted, or could be persuaded it wanted, and obtain it – or provide a means of getting it. That was what the fox did, and he was exceptionally good at it.

