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DEDICATION

For Jade Lady,
to whom I bow three times.

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CHAPTER I

Upstream, a thousand miles or more from the sea, mist blanketed the Yangtze, muffling the voice of the river and all night sounds, whether of beast or bird or insect. The valley slept beneath a gray blanket.

A gray veil hid the lower slopes of the nearby hills. Their rocky heights reached into the glamour of haze lighted by a rising moon. They became islands in a sea of gray.

Near the crest of a headland towering above the river, a point of light winked from the dark masonry nestled among overshadowing trees. The deep note of a bell stirred the stillness. Though subdued at last to a murmur, it persisted, ringing as if the music had life of its own, and loved that rich life.

A second note, full-throated and majestic, in its turn slowly died to a whisper; a third and final was followed by the clanging dissonance of quick blows against the bronze.

“Gate, gate, parasamgate, Bodhi, Svaha!”

Although the voice tried bravely for resonance and failed, it did not quaver. The man intoning a Sanskrit *mantram* did his best. He hoped that the spirits of the Ancestors would be pleased. This was the fifteenth night of the Seventh Moon, the festival in honor of the dead.

Trees for centuries untended embraced the ruined monastery in which the monk, Shih Sheng Kang, was speaking to all the lonely and forgotten dead. The walls, riven by quake and time, had scattered half their substance, strewing the first court with blocks of masonry. Roots thrust paving slabs out of their beds. Beams had fallen, dropping tiles from the curved eaves to lie among accumulated rubbish.