

Lin spoke again. "Does this English duke know barbarians are forbidden inside the city walls?" He glared at Charles while his minion translated.

Charles breathed in. "I have been informed of that belatedly. I apologize that my curiosity and desire to learn about your ways drove me to break the rules. I understand that the commissioner, a man of great learning, often wishes to gather information about our ways as well." He looked directly at Lin, whose eyes glittered, though whether with amusement or anger, Charles could not say.

"The commissioner asks if there are no books in your country."

Charles smiled at that. "My private library has ten thousand volumes. What few I have about China were written by Englishmen. How accurate can they possibly be?"

The translator earnestly murmured in the great man's ear. *Amused this time, no question.*