



# The Pet from Carp Bagdad

by HAROLD M<sup>AC</sup> GRATH  
Author of HEARTS AND MASKS,  
The MAN ON THE BOX etc.  
Illustrations by M. G. KETTNER  
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"And Yet This Moment He Asked a Hundred for It."

### SYNOPSIS.

George Percival Algernon Jones, vice-president of the Metropolitan Oriental Rug Company of New York, thirsting for romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Horace Ryanne arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Ryanne sells Jones the famous holy Yliordes rug which he admits having stolen from a pasha at Bagdad.

### CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

Some light steps, a rustle, and he wheeled in time to see a woman open a door, stand for a minute in the full light, and disappear. It was she. George opened the door of his own room, threw the rug inside, and tipped along the corridor, stopping for the briefest time to ascertain the number of that room. He felt vastly more guilty in performing this harmless act than in smothering his mentor.

There was no one in the head-porter's bureau; thus, unobserved and unembarrassed, he was free to inspect the guest-list. Fortune Chedsoye. He had never seen a name quite like that. Its quaintness did not suggest to him, as it had done to Ryanne, the pastoral, the bucolic. French it reminded him of the old French courts, of rapiers and buckles, of powdered wigs and furbelows, masks, astrologers, love-intrigues, of all those colorful, notable scenes so charmingly described by the genial narrator of the exploits of D'Artagnan. And abruptly out of this age of Lebrun, Watteau, Mollero, reached an ice-cold hand. If that elderly codger wasn't her father, who was he and what?

The Major—for George had looked him up also—was in excellent trim for his age, something of a military dandy besides; but as the husband of so young and exquisite a creature! Out upon the thought! He might be her guardian, or, at most, her uncle, but never her husband. Yet (O poisonous doubt!), at the table she had ignored the Major, both his jests and his attentions. He had seen many wives, joyfully from a safe distance, act toward their husbands in this fashion. Oh, rot! If his name was Callahan and hers Chedsoye, they could not possibly be tied in any legal bonds. He dismissed the ice-cold hand and turned again to the comforting warmth of his arbor.

He had never spoken to young women without presentation, and on these rare occasions he had broached the weather, suggested the possibilities of the weather, and concluded with an apostrophe on the weather at large. It was usually a valedictory. For he was always positive that he had acted like a fool, and was afraid to speak to the girl again. Never it failed, ten minutes after the girl was out of sight, the brightest and cleverest things crowded upon his tongue, to be but wasted on the desert air. He was not particularly afraid of women older than himself, more's the pity. And yet, had he been as shy toward them as toward the girls, there would have been no stolen Yliordes, no sad-eyed maiden, no such thing as The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd.; and he would have stepped the even tenor of his way, unknown of grand passions, swift adventure, life.

George was determined to meet Fortune Chedsoye, and this determination, the first of its kind to take definite form in his mind, gave him a novel sensation. He would find some way, and he vowed to best his old enemy, diffidence, if it was the last fight he ever put up. He would maneuver to get in the way of the Major. He never found much trouble in talking to men. Once he exchanged a word or two with the uncle or guardian, he would make it a point to renew the acquaintance when he saw the two together. It appeared to him as a bright idea, and he was rather proud of it. Even now he was conscious of clenching his teeth strongly. It's an old saying that he goes farthest who shuts his teeth longest. He was going to test the precept by immediate practice.

He had stood before the list fully three minutes. Now he turned about face, a singular elation tingling his blood. Once he set his mind upon a thing, he went forward. He had lost many pleasurable things in life because he had doubted and faltered, not because he had reached out toward them and had them drawn back. He was going to meet Fortune Chedsoye; when or how were but details. And as he discovered the Major himself idling before the booth of the East Indian merchant, he saw in fancy the portulic rise and the drawbridge fall to the castle of enchantment. He strolled over leisurely and pretended to be interested in the case containing medloere jewels.

"This is a genuine Bokhara embroidery?" the Major was inquiring.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How old?"

The merchant picked up the tag and squinted at it. "It is between two and three hundred years old, sir."

To George's opinion the gods themselves could not have arranged a more propitious moment.

"You've made a mistake," he interposed quietly. "That is Bokhara, but the stitch is purely modern."

The dark eyes of the Indian flashed. "The gentleman is an authority?"

"Upon that style of embroidery, absolutely," George smiled. And then, without more ado, he went on to explain the difference between the antique and the modern. "You have one good piece of old Bokhara, but it isn't rare. Twenty pounds would be a good price for it."

The Major laughed heartily. "And just this moment he asked a hundred for it. I'm not much of a hand in judging these things. I admire them, but have no intimate knowledge regarding their worth. Nothing tonight," he added to the bitter-eyed merchant. "The Oriental is like the amateur fisherman; truth is not in him. You seem to be a keen judge," as they mosed away from the booth.

"I suppose it's because I'm inordinately fond of the things. I've really a good collection of Bokhara embroideries at home in New York."

hurry, the clamor. Over here they dine, there they eat. There's as much difference between those two performances as there is between The Mikado and Florodora. From Portland in Maine to Portland in Oregon, the same dress, same shops, same ungodly high buildings. Here it is different, at the end of every hundred miles.

George agreed conditionally. (The Major wasn't very original in his views.) He would have shed his last drop of blood for his native land, but he was honest in acknowledging her faults.

Conversation idled in various channels, and finally became anchored at jewels. Here the Major was at home, and he loved emeralds above all other stones. He proved to be an engaging old fellow, had circled the globe three or four times, and had had an adventure or two worth recounting. And when he incidentally mentioned his niece, George wanted to shake his hand.

Would Mr. Jones join him with a peg to sleep on? Mr. Jones certainly would. And after a mutual health, George diplomatically excused himself, retired, buoyant and happy. How simple the affair had been! A fellow could do anything if only he set his mind to it. Tomorrow he would meet Fortune Chedsoye, and may Beelzebub shrive him if he could not manage to control his recalcitrant tongue.

As he passed out of sight, Major Callahan smiled. It was that old familiar smile which, charged with gentle mockery, we send after departing fools. It was plain that he needed another peg to keep company with the first, for he rose and gracefully wended his way down-stairs to the bar. Two men were already leaning against the friendly, inviting mahogany. There was a mug of champagne standing between their glasses. The Major ordered a temperate whisky and soda, drank it, frowned at the mug, paid the reckoning, and went back up-stairs again.

"Don't remember old friends, eh?" said the shorter of the two men, caressing his incriminated proboscis. "A smile wouldn't have hurt him any, do you think?"

"Shut up!" admonished Ryanne. "You know the orders; no recognition on the public floors."

"Why, I meant no harm," the other protested. He took a swallow of wine. "But, dash it! here I am, more'n four thousand miles from Old Broadway, and still walking blind. When is the show to start?"

"Not so loud, old boy. You've got to have patience. You've had some good pickings for the past three months, in the smoke-rooms. That ought to soothe you."

"Well, it doesn't. Here I come from New York, three months ago, with a wad of money for you and a great game in sight. It takes a week to find you, and when I do . . . Well, you know. No sooner are you awake, than what? Off you go to Bagdad, on the wildest goose-chase a man ever heard of. And that leaves me with nothing to do and nobody to talk to. I could have cried yesterday when I got your letter saying you'd be in today."

"Well, I got it."

"The rug?"

"Yes. It was wild; but after what I'd been through I needed something wild to steady my nerves; some big danger, where I'd simply have to get together."

"And you got it?" There was frank wonder and admiration in the purpy gentleman's eyes. "All alone, and you got it? Honest?"

"Honest. They nearly had my hide, though."

"Where is it?"

"Sold."

"Who?"

"Percival."

"Horace, you're a wonder, if there ever was one. Sold it to Percival? You couldn't beat that in a thousand years. You're a great man."

"Praise from Sir Hubert."

"Who's he?"

"An authority on several matters."

"How much did he give you for it?"

"Tut, tut! It was all my own little jaunt, Wallace. I should hate to lie to you about it."

"What about the stake I gave you?"

Ryanne made a sign of dealing cards.

"Threw it away on a lot of dubs, after all I've taught you!"

"Cards aren't my forte."

"There's a yellow streak in your hide, somewhere, Horace."

"There is, but it is the tiger's stripe, my friend. What I did with my money is my own business."

"Will she allow for that?"

"Would it matter one way or the other?"

"No, I don't suppose it would. Sometimes I think you're with us as a huge joke. You don't take the game serious enough." Wallace emptied his glass and tipped the bottle carefully. "You're out of your class, somehow."

"So?"

"Yes. You have always struck me as a man who was hunting trouble for one end."

"And that?" Ryanne seemed interested.

Wallace drew his finger across his throat. Ryanne looked him squarely in the eye and nodded affirmatively.

"I don't understand at all."

"You never will, Wallace, old chap. I am the prodigal son whose brother ate the fattest calf before I returned home. I had a letter today. She will be here tomorrow sometime. You may have to go to Port Said, if my plan doesn't mature."

"The Ludwig?"

"Yes."

"Say, what a Frau she would have made the right man!"

Ryanne did not answer, but glowered at his glass.

"The United Romance and Adventure Company," Wallace twirled his glass. "If you're a wonder, she's a marvel. A Napoleon in petticoats! It does make a fellow grin, when you look it all over. But this is going to be her Austerlitz or her Waterloo. And you really got the rug; and on top of that, you have sold it to George P. A. Jones! Here's—"

"Many happy returns," ironically.

They finished the bottle without further talk. There was no conviviality here. Both were fond of good wine, but the more they drank, the tighter grew their lips. Men who have been in the habit of guarding dangerous secrets become taciturn in their cups.

From time to time, flittingly, there appeared against one of the windows, just above the half-curtain, a lean, dark face, which, in profile, resembled the kite—the hooked beak, the watchful, preyful eyes. There were two hangings written upon that Arab face, food and revenge.

"Allah is good," he murmured.

He had but one eye in use, the other was bandaged. In fact, the face exhibited general indications of rough warfare, the skin broken on the bridge of the nose, a freshly healed cut under the seeing eye, a long strip of plaster extending from the ear to the mouth. There was nothing of the beggar in his mien. His lean throat was erect, his chin protrusive, the set of his shoulders proud and defiant. Ordinarily, the few lingering guides would rudely have told him to be off about his business; but they were familiar with all turbans, and in the peculiar twist of this one, soiled and ragged though it was, they recognized some prince from the eastern deserts. Presently he strode away, but with a stiffness which they knew came from long journeys upon racing-camels.

George dreamed that night of magic carpets, of sad-eyed maidens, of fierce Bedouins, of battles in the desert, of genti swilling terrifically out of squat bottles. And once he rose and turned on the lights to assure himself that the old Yliordes was not a part of these vivid dreams.

He was up shortly after dawn, in white riding-togs, for a final canter to Mena House and return. In two days more he would be leaving Egypt behind. Rather glad in one sense, rather sorry in another. Where to put the rug was a problem. He might carry it in his steamer-roll; it would be handier there than in the bottom of his trunk, stored away in the ship's hold. Besides, his experience had taught him that steamer-rolls were only indifferently inspected. You will observe that the luster of his high ideals was already dimming. He reasoned that inasmuch as he was bound to smuggle and lie, it might be well to plan something artistically. He wished now that he was going to spend Christmas in Cairo; but it was too late to change his booking without serious loss of time and money.

He had a light breakfast on the veranda of the Mena House, climbed up to the desert, bantered the donkey-boys, amused himself by watching the descent of some German tourists who had climbed the big Pyramid before dawn to witness the sun rise, and threw pennies to the horde of blind beggars who instantly swarmed about him and demanded, in the name of Allah, a competence for the rest of their days. He finally escaped them by footing it down the incline to the hotel gardens, where his horse stood waiting.

It was long after nine when he sid from the saddle at the side entrance of the Semiramis. He was on his way to the bureau for his key, when an exquisitely gloved hand lightly touched his arm.

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Jones?" said a voice of vocal honey.

George did. In his confusion he dropped his pith-helmet, and in stooping to pick it up, bumped into the porter who had rushed to his aid. Remember her! Would he ever forget her? He never thought of her without dubbing himself an outrageous ass. He straightened, his cheeks aflame,



"This is the Gentleman I've Often Told You About."

blushing was another of those uncontrollable asinities of his. It was really she, come out of a past he had hoped to be eternally inresuscitant; the droll, the witty woman, to whom in one mad moment of liberality and Galahadism he had loaned without security one hundred and fifty pounds at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo; she, for whom he had always blushed when he recalled how easily she had melted him! And here she was, serene, lovely as ever, unchanged.

"My dear," said the stranger (George couldn't recall by what name he had known her); "my dear," to Fortune Chedsoye, who stood a little behind her, "this is the gentleman I've often told you about. You were at school at the time. I borrowed a hundred and fifty pounds of him at Monte Carlo. And what do you think? When I went to pay him back the next day, he was gone, without leaving the slightest clue to his whereabouts. Isn't that droll? And to think that I should meet him here!"

That her name had slipped his memory, if indeed he had ever known it, was true; but one thing lingered incandescently in his mind, and that was, he had written her, following minutely her own specific directions and inclosing his banker's address in Paris, Naples and Cairo; and for many, passings of moons he had opened his foreign mail eagerly and hopefully. But hope must have something to feed upon, and after a struggle lasting two years, she rendered up the ghost.

It wasn't the loss of money that hurt; it was the finding of dross metal where he supposed there was naught but gold. Perhaps his later shyness was due as much to this disillusioning incident as to his middle names.

"Isn't it droll, my dear?" the enchantress repeated; and George grew redder and redder under the beautiful, grateful eyes. "I must give him a draft this very morning."

"But . . . Why, my dear Madame," stammered George. "You must not . . ."

Fortune laughed. Somehow the quality of that laughter pierced George's confused brain as sometimes a shaft of sunlight rips into a fog, suddenly, stiletto-like. It was full of malice.

### CHAPTER V.

#### The Girl Who Wasn't Wanted.

If any one wronged George, defrauded him of money or credit, he was always ready to forgive, agreeing that perhaps half the fault had been his. This was not a sign of weakness, but of a sense of justice too well leavened with mercy. Humanity errs in the one as much as in the other, doubtless with some benign purpose in perspective. Now, it might be that this charming woman had really never received his letter; such things have been known to go astray. In any case he could not say that he had written. That would have cast a doubt upon her word, an unpardonable rudeness. So, for her very beauty alone, he gave her the full benefit of the doubt.

"You mustn't let the matter trouble you in the least," he said, his helmet now nicely adjusted under his arm. "It was so long ago I had really forgotten all about it." Which was very well said for George.

"But I haven't. I have often wondered what you must have thought of

me. Monte Carlo is such a place! But I must present my daughter. I am Mrs. Chedsoye."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Jones; and in the sad eyes there was a glimmer of real friendliness. More, she extended her hand.

It was well worth while, that hundred and fifty pounds. It was well worth the pinch here and the pinch there which had succeeded that loan. For he had determined to return to America with a pound or two on his letter of credit, and the success of this determination was based upon many a sacrifice in comfort, sacrifices he had never confided to his parents.

It was not in the nature of things to confess that the first woman he had met in his wanderings should have been the last. As he took the girl's hand, with the ulterior intent of holding it till death do us part, he wondered why she had laughed like that. The echo of it still rang in his ears. And while he could not have described it, he knew instinctively that it had been born of bitter thought.

They chatted for a quarter of an hour or more, and managed famously. It seemed to him that Fortune Chedsoye was the first young woman he had ever met who could pull away sudden barriers and open up pathways for speech, who, when he was about to flounder into some cul-de-sac, guided him adroitly into an alley round it. Not once was it necessary to drag in the weather, that perennial if threadbare topic. He was truly astonished at the ease with which he sustained his part in the conversation, and began to think pretty well of himself. It did not occur to him that when two clever and attractive women set forth to make a man talk (always excepting he is dumb), they never fail to succeed. To do this they contrive to bring the conversation within the small circle of his work, his travels, his preferences, his ambitions. To be sure, all this is not fully extracted in fifteen minutes, but a woman obtains in that time a good idea of the ground plan.

Two distinct purposes controlled the women in this instance. One desired to interest him, while the other sought to learn whether he was stupid or only shy.

At last, when he left them to change his clothes and hurry down to Cook's, to complete the bargain for the Yliordes, he had advanced so amazingly well that they had accepted his invitation to the polo-match that afternoon. He felt that invisible Mercurial wings had sprouted from his heels, for in running up the stairs, he was aware of no gravitative resistance. That this anomaly (an acquaintance with two women about whom he knew nothing) might be looked upon askance by those who conformed to the laws and by-laws of social usages, worried him not in the least. On the contrary, he was thinking that he would be the envy of every other man out at the club that afternoon.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### Champagne Bottles.

Great skill is required in manufacturing champagne bottles, which must be almost mathematically even in the thickness of the glass. The glass must be perfectly smooth and the necks exact in every particular to insure perfect corking.