



The Carpet from Bagdad

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The MAN ON THE BOX etc.
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"Ten Pounds," Repeated Ryanne, a Hand in His Pocket.

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. Jones meets Major Callahan and later is introduced to Fortune Chedsoy by a woman to whom he had loaned 150 pounds at Monte Carlo some months previously, and who turns out to be Fortune's mother. Jones takes Mrs. Chedsoy and Fortune to a polo game. Fortune returns to Jones the money borrowed by her mother. Mrs. Chedsoy appears to be engaged in some mysterious enterprise unknown to the daughter. Ryanne interests Jones in the United Romance and Adventure company, a concern which for a price will arrange any kind of an adventure to order. Mrs. Chedsoy, her brother, Major Callahan, Wallace and Ryanne, as the United Romance and Adventure company, plan a risky enterprise involving Jones. Ryanne makes known to Mrs. Chedsoy his intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Chedsoy declares she will not permit it. Plans are laid to prevent Jones sailing for home. Ryanne steals Jones' letters and cable dispatches. He wires agent in New York. In Jones' name, that he is renting house in New York to some friends. Mahomed, keeper of the holy carpet, is on Ryanne's trail.

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

What to do? mused the rogue. On the morrow Mr. Jones would leave for Port Said. Ryanne shook his head and with his cane bent a light tattoo against the side of his shin. Abduction was rather out of his sphere of action. And yet, the suppression of Percival was by all odds the most important move to be made. He had volunteered this service and accomplished it he must, in face of all obstacles, or pool! went the whole droll fabric. For to him it was droll, and never it rose in his mind that he did not chuckle saturnely. It was a kind of nightmare where one hung in mid-air, one's toes just beyond the flaming dragon's jaws. The rewards would be enormous, but these he would gladly surrender for the supreme satisfaction of turning the poisoned arrow in the heart of that sneaking hypocrite, that smug church-worm, the sanctimonious, the sleek, the well-fed first-born. And poor Percival Algernon, for no blame of his own, must be taken by the scruff of his neck and thrust bodily into this tangled web of scheme and under-schemes. It was infinitely humorous. He had had a vague plan regarding Mahomed, guardian of the Holy Yliordes, but it was not possible for him to be in Cairo at this early date. That he would eventually appear Ryanne never doubted. He knew the Oriental mind. Mahomed-El-Gebel would cross every barrier less effective than death. It was a serious matter to the Moslem. If he returned to the palace at Bagdad, minus the rug, it would mean free transportation to the Arabian gulf, bereft of the most important part of his excellent anatomy, his head. Some day, if he lived, Ryanne intended telling the exploit to some clever chap who wrote; it would look rather well in print. To turn Mahomed against Percival as being the instigator would be an adroit bit of work; and it would rid him of both of them. Gioconda said

that she wanted no rough work. How like a woman! Here was a man's game, a desperate one; and Gioconda, not forgetting that it was her inspiration, wanted it handled with gloves! It was bare-hand work, and the sooner she was made to realize this, the better. It was no time for tugging fiddles. Mahomed out of it, there was a certain English bar in the Quarter Rosset, a place of dubious repute. Many derelicts drifted there in search of employment still more dubious. Dregs, scum; the bottom and the top of the kettle; outcasts, whose hand and apitmus were directed against society; black and brown and white men; not soldiers of fortune, like Ryanne, but their camp-followers. In short, it was there (and Ryanne still felt a dull shame of it) that Wallace, carrying the final instructions of the enterprise, had found him, sleeping off the effects of a shabby rout of the night before. It was there also that he had heard of the history and the worth of the Yliordes rug and the possibility of its theft. He laughed. To have gone upon an adventure like that, with nothing but the fumes of wine in his head!

For a few pieces of gold he might enroll under his shady banner three or four shining lights who would undertake the disposal of Percival. Not that he wished the young man any harm—no; but business was business, and in some way or another he must be made to vanish from the sight and presence of men for at least two months.

As for Major Callahan's unforeseen danger, the devil could look out for that.

Ryanne consulted his watch, a cheap but trustworthy article, costing a dollar, not to be considered as an available asset. He would give it away later in the day; for he had decided that while he was in funds there would be wisdom in the purchase of a fine gold Longines. A good watch, as every one knows, is always as easily converted into cash as a London bank-note, providing, of course, one is lucky enough to possess either. Many watches had he left behind, in this place or in that; and often he had exchanged the ticket for a small bottle with a green neck. Wherever fortune had gone against him heavily at cards, there he might find his latest watch.

And another good idea, he mused, as he swung the time-piece into his vest-pocket, would be to add the splendor of a small white stone to his modest scarf. There is only one well-defined precept among the sporting fraternity; when flush, buy jewelry. Not to the cause of vanity, not at all; but precious stones and gold watches constitute a kind of reserve-fund against the evil day. When one has money in the pocket the hand is quick and eager to find it. But jewelry is protected by a certain quality of caution; it is not too readily passed over bars and gaming-tables. While the pawnbroker stands between the passion and the green-baize, there's food for thought.

Having settled these questions to his satisfaction, there remained but one other, how to spend his time. It would be useless to seek the English Bar before noon. Might as well ram-

ble through the native town and the bazaars. He might pick up some little curio to give to Fortune. So he beckoned to an idle driver, climbed into the carriage, and was driven off as if empires hung upon minutes.

Ryanne never wearied of the bazaars of Cairo. They were to him no less enchanting than the circus-parades of his youth. In certain ways, they were not to be compared with those in Constantinople and Smyrna; but, on the other hand, there was more light, more charm, more color. Perhaps the magic nearness of the desert had something to do with it, the rainless skies, the ever-recurring suggestions of antiquity. His lively observation, his sense of the picturesque and the humorous, always close to the surface, gave him that singular impetus which makes man a prowler. This gift had made possible his success in old Bagdad. Some years before he had prowled through the narrow city streets, had noted the windings, the blind-alleys, and had never forgotten. Faces and localities were written indelibly upon his memory.

One rode to the bazaars, but walked through them or mounted donkeys. Ryanne preferred his own legs. So did Mahomed. Once, so close did he come that he could have put his two brown hands round the infidel's throat. But, patience. Did not the Koran teach patience among the higher laws? Patience. He could not, madly as he had dreamed, throttle the white liar here in the bazaars. That would not bring the Holy Yliordes to his hands. He must wait. He must plan to lure the man out at night, then to hurry him into the desert. Out into the desert, where no man might be his master. Oh, the Holy Yliordes should be his again; it was written.

The cries, the shouts, the tower of Babel reclaimed; the intermingling of the races of the world; the Englishman, the American, the German, the Italian, the Frenchman, the Greek, the Levantine, the purple-black Ethiopian, the bronze Nubian; the veiled women, the naked children; all the color-tones known to art, but predominating, that marvelous faded tint of blue, the Caïrene blue, in the heavens, in the waters, in the dyes.

"Make way, O my mother!" bawled a donkey-boy to the old crone peddling matches.

"Backsheesh! Backsheesh!" in the eight tones of the human voice. From the beggar, his brother, his uncle, his grandfather, his children and his children's children. "Backsheesh, backsheesh!"

"To the right!" was shrilled into Ryanne's ear; and he dodged. A troop of donkeys passed, laden with tourists, unhappy, fretful, self-conscious. A water-carrier brushed against him, and he whiffed the fresh dampness of the bulging goat-skin. A woman, the long, black head-veil streaming out behind in the clutch of the monkey-like hand of a toddling child, carried a terra-cotta water-jar upon her head. The gait with which she moved, the abruptness of the color-changes, caught Ryanne's roving eye and filled it with pleasure.

Dust rose and subsided, eddied and settled; beggars blind and one-eyed squatted in it, children tossed it in play, and beasts of burden shuffled through it.

The roar in front of the shops, the pressing and crowding of customers, the high cries of the merchants; the gurgle of the water-pipes, the pleasant fumes of coffee, the hardy loafers lolling before the khans or caravansaries; a veiled face at a lattice-window; the violet shadows in a doorway; the sunshine upon the soaring mosque; a true believer, rocking and mumbling over his tattered Koran; gold and silver and jewels; amber and copper and brass; embroideries and rugs and carpets; and the pest of fleas, the plague of flies, the insidious smells.

Ryanne found himself inspecting "the largest emerald in the world, worth twelve thousand pounds," which looked more like a fine hexagonal of onyx than a gem. It was one of the curiosities of the bazaars, however, and tourists were generally round it in force. To his experienced eye it was no more than a fine specimen of emerald quartz, worth what any fool of a collector was willing to pay for it. From this bazaar he passed on into the next, and there he saw Fortune.

And as Mahomed, always close at hand, saw the hard lines in Ryanne's face soften, the cynical smile become tender, he believed he saw his way to strike.

CHAPTER IX.

The Bitter Fruit.

Fortune had a hearty contempt for persons who ate their breakfast in bed. For her the glory of the day was the fresh fairness of the morning, when every one's step was buoyant, and all life stirred energetically. There was cheer and hope everywhere; men

aced their labors with clear eye and feared nothing; women sang at their work. It was only at the close of day that despair and defeat stalked the highways. So she was up with the sun, whether in her own garden or in these odd and mystical cities. Thus she saw the native as he was, not as he later in the day pretended to be, for the benefit of the Ferighi about to be stretched upon the sacrificial stone. She saw, with gladness, the honey-bee thrilling the soil; the plowman's share baring the soil; the morning, the morning, the two or three hours that were all, all her own. Her mother was always irritable and petulant in the morning, and her uncle never developed the gift of speech till after luncheon.

She had the same love of prowling that lured Ryanne from the beaten paths. She was not inquisitive but curious, and that ready disarming smile of hers opened many a portal.

She was balancing upon her gloved palm, thoughtfully, a Soudanese head-trinket, a pendant of twisted gold-wires, flawed emeralds and second pearls, really exquisite and not generally to be found outside the expensive shops in the European quarters, and there infrequently. The merchant wanted twenty pounds for it. Fortune shook her head, regretfully. It was far beyond her means. She sighed. Only once in a great while she saw something for which her whole heart cried out. This pendant was one of these.

"I will give you five pounds for it. That is all I have with me."

"Salaam, madame," said the jeweler, reaching for the pendant.

"If you will send it to the Hotel Semiramis this afternoon . . ." But she faltered at the sight of the merchant's incredulous smile.

"I'll give you ten for it; not a piastre more. I can get one like it in the Sharika Kamel for that amount."

Both Fortune and the merchant turned.

"You, Horace?"

"Yes, my child. And what are you doing here alone, without a dragoman?"

"Oh, I have been through here alone many times. I'm not afraid. Isn't it beautiful? He wants twenty pounds for it, and I cannot afford that."

She had not seen him in many weeks, yet she accepted his sudden appearance without question or surprise. She was used to his turning up at unexpected moments. Of course, she had known that he was in Cairo; where her mother and uncle were this secretive man was generally within calling. There had been a time when she had eagerly piled him with questions, but he had always erected barriers of evasion, and finally she ceased her importunities, for she concluded that her questions were such. No matter to whom she turned, there was no one to answer her questions, questions born of doubt and fear.

"Ten pounds," repeated Ryanne, a hand in his pocket.

The merchant laughed. Here were a young man and his sweetheart. His experience had taught him, and not unwisely, that love is an easy victim, too proud to haggle, too generous to bargain sharply. "Twenty," he reiterated.

"Salaam!" said Ryanne. "Good day!" He drew the somewhat resisting hand of Fortune under his arm and made for the door. "Sh!" he whispered. "Leave it to me." They gained the street.

The merchant was dazed. He had misjudged what he now recognized as an old hand. The two were turning up another street when he ran out, shouting to them and waving the pendant. Ryanne laughed.

"Ten pounds. I am a poor man, efendi, and I need the money. Ten pounds. I am giving it away." The merchant's eyes filled with tears, a trick left to him from out of the ruins of his youth, that ready service to forestall the merited rod.

Ryanne counted out ten sovereigns and put the pendant in Fortune's hand. And the pleasure in his heart was such as he had not known in many days. The merchant wisely hurried back to his shop.

"But . . ." she began protestingly.

"Tut, tut! I have known you since you wore short dresses and tam-o-shanters."

"I really cannot accept it as a gift. Let me borrow the ten pounds."

"And why can't you accept a little gift from me?"

She had no ready answer. She gazed steadily at the dull pearls and the flaky emeralds. She could not ask him where he had got those sovereigns. She could not possibly be so cruel. She could not dissemble in words like her mother. That gold she knew to be a part of a dishonest bargain whose forest had been a theft—more, a sacrifice. Her honesty was like pure gold, unalloyed, unmingled with sophistic subterfuges. That the

young man who had purchased the rug might be mildly peccable had not yet occurred to her.

"Why not, Fortune?" Ryanne was very earnest, and there was a pinch at his heart.

"Because . . ."

"Don't you like me just a little?"

"Why, I do like you, Horace. But I do not like any man well enough to accept expensive gifts from him. I do not wish to hurt you, but it is impossible. The only concession I'll make is to borrow the money."

"Well, then, let it go at that." He was too wise to press her.

"And can you afford to throw away ten pounds?" with assumed lightness.

"My one permanent impression of you is the young man who was always forced to borrow car-fare whenever he returned from Monte Carlo."

"A fool and his money. But I'm a rich man now," he volunteered. And briefly he sketched the exploit of the Yliordes rug.

"It was very brave of you. But has it ever occurred to you that it wasn't honest?"

"Honest?" frankly astonished that she should question the ethics. "Oh, I say, Fortune; you don't call it dishonest to get the best of a pagan! Aren't they always getting the best of us?"

"If you had bargained with him and beaten him down, it would have been different. But, Horace, you stole it; you admit that you did."

"I took my life in my hands. I think that evened up things."

"No. And you sold it to Mr. Jones?"

"Yes, and Mr. Jones was only too glad to buy it. I told him the facts. He wasn't particularly eager to bring up the ethics of the case. Why, child, what the deuce is a Turk? I shouldn't cry out if some one stole my Bible."

"Good gracious! do you carry one?"

"Well, there's always one on the room-stand in the hotels I patronize."

"I suppose it all depends upon how we look at things."

"That's it. A different pair of spectacles for every pair of eyes."

"If only he weren't in love with her!" thought the girl. He would then be an amusing comrade. But whenever he met her he quietly pressed his lips.

He had never spoken openly of love, for which she was grateful, but his attentions, his little kindnesses, his unobtrusive protection when those other men were at the villa, made the reading between the lines no difficult matter.

"He will come to no harm physically?"

"Lord, no! It will be mild and innocuous. Of course, if any one told him that an adventure was toward for his especial benefit, it would spoil all. I can rely upon your silence?"

She was silent. He witnessed her indecision with distrust. Perhaps he had said too much.

"Won't you promise? Haven't I always been kind to you, Fortune, times when you most needed kindness?"

"I promise to say nothing. But if any harm comes to that young man, either in jest or in earnest, I will never speak to you again."

"I see that, after getting Percival Algernon into an adventure, I've got to cloister him safely out of it. Well, I accept the responsibility." Some days later he was going to recall this assurance.

"Sometimes I wonder . . ." pensively.

"Wonder about what?"

"What manner of man you are."

"I should have been a great deal better man had I met you ten years ago."

"What? When I was eleven?" with a levity intended to steer him away from this channel.

"You know what I mean," he answered, moody and dejected.

She opened her purse and dropped the pendant into it, but did not speak.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"What shall you do if this Mahomed you speak of comes?"

"Turn him loose upon our friend Jones," with a laugh.

"And what will he do to him?"

"Carry him off to Bagdad and chop off his head," Ryanne jested.

"Tell me, is there any possibility of Mr. Jones coming to harm?"

"Can't say." Her concern for Percival annoyed him.

"Is it fair, when he paid you generously?"

He did not look into the grave eyes. They were the only pair that ever disconcerted him. "My dear Fortune, it's a question which is the more valuable to me, my skin or Percival's."

"It isn't fair."

"From my point of view it's fair enough. I warned him; I told him the

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