



The Carpet from Carpal Bagdad

by HAROLD MAC GRATH
Author of HEARTS AND MASKS
The MAN ON THE BOX etc.
Illustrations by M. G. KETNER
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SYNOPSIS.

George Percival Algeron Jones, vice president of the Metropolitan Oriental Rug Company of New York, thirsting for romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Fortune, a young girl, arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Fortune sells Jones the famous holy Yliorides rug, which he admits having stolen from a pasha at Bagdad. Jones meets Major Callahan and later is introduced to Fortune Chedsoye by a woman to whom he had loaned his pashas at Monte Carlo some months previously, and who turns out to be Fortune's mother. Jones takes Mrs. Chedsoye and steals a note and some money borrowed by her mother. Mrs. Chedsoye appears to be engaged to some mysterious enterprise unknown to the daughter. Fortune 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. Chedsoye, her brother, Major Callahan, Wallace Erdine and Ryanne, as the United Romance and Adventure Company, plan a risky enterprise involving Jones. Ryanne makes known to Mrs. Chedsoye his intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Chedsoye declares she will not permit it. Plans are laid to prevent Jones selling the rug. Fortune disappears from Jones' room. Fortune quarrels with her mother when the latter refuses to explain her mysterious actions. Fortune gets a message purporting to be from Ryanne asking her to meet him in a secluded place that evening. Jones receives a message asking him to meet Fortune at the English Bar the same evening. Jones is carried off into the desert by Mahomed and his accomplices after a desperate fight. He discovers that Ryanne and Fortune also are captives, the former is badly battered and unconscious. Ryanne recovers consciousness and the night of Fortune's captivity reveals to him the fact that Mahomed intends to get vengeance on him through the girl. Fortune acknowledges that she stole the rug from Jones' room.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

"Why not tell Mahomed at once, and have him send a courier back for the rug?" suggested Fortune.

"By Jove, that clears up everything. We'll do it immediately." George felt better than he had at any stage of the adventure. Here was a simple way out of the difficulty.

"Softly," said Ryanne, "Let us come down to the lean fairs. If that rug is in your room, Fortune, your mother has discovered it long before now. She will turn it over to your estimable uncle. None of us will ever see it again, I'm thinking. The Major knows that Jones gave me a thousand pounds for it." Struck by a sense of impending disaster, Ryanne began to fumble in his pockets. Gone! Every shilling of it gone! "He's got that, too; Mahomed; the cash you gave me, Jones. Wait a moment; don't speak; things are whirling about some. Over nine hundred pounds; every shilling of it. We mustn't let him know that I've missed it. I've got to play weak in order to grow strong. . . . But they will at least start up a row as to your whereabouts, Fortune."

"No," thoughtfully, "no, I do not think they will."

The undercurrent was too deep for George. He couldn't see very clearly just then. The United Romance and Adventure Company; was that that? Was there not something sinister behind that name, concerning him? He looked patiently from the girl to the adventurer.

Ryanne stared at the yellow desert beyond. His brain was clearing rapidly under the stimulus of thought. He himself did not believe that they would send out search-parties either for him or for Fortune. He could not fathom what had given Fortune her belief; but he realized that his own was based upon the recollection of that savage mood when he had thrown down the gauntlet. Now they would accept it. He had run away with Fortune as he had boldly threatened to do. The mother and her precious brother would proceed at once to New York without him. He had made a fine muddle of it all. But for a glass of wine and a grain too much of confidence, he had not been here this day.

Mahomed, himself astray by this time, came over to the group, leisurely. The three looked like conspirators to his suspicious eye, but unlike conspirators they made no effort to separate because he approached. He understood; as yet they were not afraid of him. That was one of the reasons he hated white men; they could seldom be forced to show fear, even when they possessed it. Well, these three should know what fear was before they saw the last of him. He carried a kurbash, a cowhide whip, which he twirled idly, even suggestively. First, he came to George.

"If you have Yliorides, there is still a chance for you. Cairo is but fifty miles away. Bagdad is several hundred." He drew the whip casually through his fingers.

"I do not lie," replied George, a truculent sparkle in his eyes. "I told you that I had it not. It was the truth."

A ripple of anxiety passed over Mahomed's face. "And you?" turning upon Ryanne, with suppressed savagery. How he longed to lay the lash upon the dog!

"Don't look at me," answered Ryanne washfully. "If I had it I should

of be here." Ah, for a bit of his old strength! He would have strangled Mahomed then and there. But the rug and the beating had weakened him terribly.

"If I give you the rug," interposed Fortune, "will you promise freedom to us all?"

Mahomed stepped back, nonplussed. He hadn't expected any information from this quarter.

"I have the rug," declared Fortune calmly, though she could scarcely hear her own voice, her heart beat so furiously.

"You have it?" Mahomed was confused. Here was a turn in the road upon which he had set no calculation. All three of them!

"Yes. And upon condition that you liberate us all, I will put it into your hands. But it must be my writing this time."

A white man would have blushed under the reproach of her look. Mahomed smiled amiably, pleased over his cleverness. "Where is the kisweh?"

"The kisweh?"

"The Holy Yliorides. Where is it?"

"That I refuse to tell you. Your word of honor first, to bind the bargain."

Ryanne laughed. It acted upon Mahomed like a goad. He raised the whip, and had Ryanne's gaze averted the part of an inch, the blow would have fallen.

"You laugh?" started Mahomed.

"Why, yes. A bargain with your honor makes me laugh."

"And your honor?" returned Mahomed fiercely. He wondered why he held his hand. "I have matched trickery against trickery. My honor has not been tricker. I fed you, I gave you drink; in return you lied to me, dishonored me in the eyes of my friends, and one of them you killed."

"It was my life or his," exclaimed Ryanne, not relishing the recital of this phase. "It was my life or his; and he was upon my back."

Fortune shuddered. Presently she laid her hand upon Mahomed's arm. "Would you take my word of honor?"

Mahomed sought her eyes. "Yes, I read truth in your word of honor to you, and my word of honor to you, you shall go free."

"But my friends?"

"One of them," Mahomed laughed unpleasantly. It was an excellent idea. "One of them shall go free with you. It will be for you to choose which. Now, you dog, laugh, laugh!" and the tongue of the kurbash bit the dust within an inch of Ryanne's feet.

"What shall I do?" asked Fortune miserably.

"Accept," urged Ryanne. "If you are afraid to choose one or the other of us, Jones and I will spin a coin."

"I agree," said George, very unhappily.

"Have you any paper, Jones?"

George searched. He found the dance-card to the ball at the hotel. In his pocket he discovered the little pencil that went with it.

"You write," said Mahomed to Fortune.

"I intend to," Fortune took the card and pencil and wrote as follows:

"Mother: Horace, Mr. Jones and I are prisoners of the man who owned the rug which you will find in the large steamer-roller. Give it to the courier who brings this card. And under no circumstances set spies upon his track." In French she added: "We are bound for Bagdad. In case Mahomed receives the rug and we are not liberated, wire the embassy at Constantinople and the consulate at Bagdad."

FORTUNE.

She gave it to Mahomed.

"Read it out loud," he commanded. While he spoke English fluently, he could neither read nor write it in any serviceable degree. The note he had given to Fortune had been written by a friend of his in the bazars who had upon a time lived in New York. Fortune read slowly, slightly flushing as she evaded the French script.

"That will do," Mahomed agreed.

He shouted for one of the boys, bade him saddle the hagin or racing camel, which of all those twelve, alone was his, and be off to Cairo. The boy dipped his bow into the kettle, ate greedily, saddled the camel, and five minutes later was speeding back toward Cairo at a gait that would bring him there late that night.

Fortune and George and Ryanne watched him till he disappeared below a dip and was gone from view. In the minds of the three watchers the same question rose: would he be too late? George was cheerful enough thereafter, but his cheerfulness was not of the infectious kind.

At noon the caravan was once more upon its way. Ryanne was able to ride. The fumes of whatever drug had been administered to him had finally evaporated, and he felt only bruised, old, disheartened. An evil day for him when he had set forth for Bagdad in quest of the rug. He was confident that there would be no rug awaiting the courier, and what would be Mahomed's procedure when the boy returned empty-handed was not difficult to imagine. Mahomed was right; so far honor had not entered into the contest. According to

his lights, the Arab was only paying coin for coin. But for the girl, Ryanne would have accepted the situation with a shrug, to await that moment when Mahomed, eased by the sense of security, would naturally relax his vigilance. The presence of Fortune changed the whole face of the affair. Mahomed could have his eyes and heart if he would but spare her. He must be patient; he must accept insults, even physical violence, but some day he and Mahomed would play the final round.

His past, his foolish, futile past: all the follies, all the petty crimes, all the low dissipations in which he had indulged, seemed trooping about his camel, mocking and gibbering at him. Why hadn't he lived clean like Jones there? Why hadn't he fought temptation as he had fought men? Envyment was no excuse; bringing-up offered no palliation; he had gone wrong simply because his inclinations had been wrong. On the other hand, no one had ever tried to help him back to a decent living. His mother had died during his childhood, and her influence had left no impression. His father had been a money-maker, consumed by the pleasure of building up pyramids of gold. He had never reasoned with his youngest-born; he had paid his bills without protest or reproach; it was so much a month to be written down in the expense account. And the first-born had been his natural enemy since the days of the nursery. Still, he could not acquit himself; his own arraignment was as keen as any judge could have made. Strong as he was physically, brilliant as he was mentally, there was a mortal weakness in his blood; and search as he might the history of his ancestors, their lives shed no light upon his own.

In stating that his face had been granted that dubious honor and concern of the perpetrators of the rogues' gallery, he had merely given, rein to a seizure of soul-bitterness. But there was truth enough in the statement

and disappeared within. She looked neither at Ryanne nor at George. She knew that George, his soul filled with unlucky quixotic sense of chivalry which had made him so easy a victim to her mother, would not accept his liberty at the price of Ryanne's, Ryanne, to whom he owed nothing, not even mercy. And if she had had to ask one of the two, George would have been the natural selection, for she trusted him implicitly. Perhaps there still lingered in her mind a recollection of how charmingly he had spoken of his mother.

She could have set out for Cairo alone; even as she could have grown a pair of wings and sailed through the air! The fate that walked behind her was malevolent, cruel, unjust. She had wronged no one, in thought or deed. She had put out her hand confidently to the world, to be laughed at, distrusted, or ignored. Was it possible that a little more than a month ago she wandered, if not happy, in the sense she desired, at least in a peaceful state of mind, among her camels and roses at Mentone? Her world had been, in this short time, remolded, reconstructed; where once had bloomed a garden, now yawned a chasm; and the psychological earthquake had left her dizzy. That Mahomed, now wrought to a kind of Berserk rage, might begin reprisals at once, did not alarm her; indeed, her feeling was rather of dull, aching indifference. Nothing mattered now.

But Ryanne and George were keenly alive to the danger, and both agreed that Fortune must go no farther.

Ryanne, under his bitter railery and seeming scorn for sacred things, possessed a latent magnanimity, and it now pushed up through the false layers. "Jones, it's my funeral. Go tell her. You two can find the way back to the canal, and once there you will have no trouble. Don't bother your head about me."

"But what will you do?"

"Take my medicine," grimly.

"Ryanne, you are offering the cowardly part to me!"

"You fool, it's the girl. What do I care about the rest of it? You're as brave as a lion. When you put up your fists the other night, you solved that puzzle for yourself. For God's sake, do it while I have the courage to let you! Don't you understand? I love that girl better than my heart's blood, and Mahomed can have it drop by drop. Go and go quickly! He will give you food and water."

"You go. She knows you better than me."

"But will she trust me as she will you? Percival, old top, Mahomed will never let me go till he's taken his pound of flesh. Fortune!" Ryanne called. "Fortune, we want you!"

She appeared at the flap of the tent.

"Jones here will go back with you. Go, both of you, before Mahomed changes his mind."

"Miss Chedsoye, he is wrong. He's the one to go. He was hurt worse than I was. Pride doesn't matter at a time like this. You two go," desperately.

Fortune shook her head. "All or none of us; all or none of us," she repeated.

And Mahomed, having witnessed and overheard the scene, laughed, a laughter identical to that which had struck the barmaid's ears sinisterly. He had not studied his white man without gathering some insight into his character. Neither of these men was a poltroon. And when he had made the offer, he knew that the conditions would erect a barrier over which none of them would pass voluntarily. So much for pride as the Christian dogs knew it. Pride is a fine buckler; none knew that better than Mahomed himself; but a wise man does not wear it at all times.

"What is it to be?" he demanded of Fortune.

"What shall I say to him?"

"Whatever you will." Ryanne was tired. He saw that argument would be of no use.

"All or none of us." And Fortune looked at Mahomed with all the pride of her race. "It is not because you wish me to be free; it is because you wish to see one of my companions made base in my eyes. I will not have it!"

"The will of Allah!" He could not repress the fire of admiration in his own eyes as they took in her beauty, the erect, slender figure, the scorn upon her face, and the fearlessness in her great, dark eyes. Such a woman might have graced the palace of the Great Caliph. He had had in mind many little cruelties to practice upon her, that he might see the men writhe, impotent and helpless to aid her. But in this tense and dramatic scene, a sense of shame took possession of him; his pagan heart softened; not from pity, but from the respect which one brave person gives free-handed to another.

Mahomed was not a bad man, neither was he a cruel one. He had been terribly wronged, and his eastern way had but one angle of vision: to avenge himself, believing that revenge alone could soothe his outraged pride and re-establish his honor as he viewed it



"I Have You Three, Then; and You Shall Pay."

that he had been short in his accounts many thousands at his father's bank; gambling debts; and in making no effort to replace the loss, he was soon found out by his brother, who seemed only too glad to dishonor him. He was given his choice: to sign over his million, due him a year later (for at this time the father was dead), or go to prison. The scandal of the affair had no weight with his brother; he wanted the younger out of the way. Like the hot-headed fool he was, he had signed away his inheritance, taken a paltry thousand and left America, facing imprisonment if he returned. That was the kind of a brother he had. Once he had burned his bridges, there came to him a dozen ways by which he could have extricated himself. But once a fool, always a fool!

Disinherited, outcast, living by his wits, ingenious enough; the finer senses cautioning under the contact with his inferiors; a gambler, a hard drinker periodically; all in all, a fine

of the courier, who arrived two days later, dead tired. The persons to whom the card had been sent had called for Naples with the steamer Ludwig. Mahomed turned upon the three miserables.

"I have you three, then; and by the beard of the Prophet, you shall pay, you shall pay! You have robbed and beaten and dishonored me; and you shall pay!"

"Am I guilty of any wrong toward you?" faltered the girl. Her mother had gone. She had hoped against hope.

"No," cried Mahomed. He laughed. "You are free to return to Cairo. You are alone! Free to take your choice of these two men to accompany you. Free, free as the air. Well, why do you hesitate?"

CHAPTER XV.

Fortune's Riddle Solved.

Fortune, without deigning to reply, walked slowly and proudly to her tent,

and disappeared within. She looked neither at Ryanne nor at George. She knew that George, his soul filled with unlucky quixotic sense of chivalry which had made him so easy a victim to her mother, would not accept his liberty at the price of Ryanne's, Ryanne, to whom he owed nothing, not even mercy. And if she had had to ask one of the two, George would have been the natural selection, for she trusted him implicitly. Perhaps there still lingered in her mind a recollection of how charmingly he had spoken of his mother.

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from within. Had the courier returned with the Holy Yliorides, it is not impossible that he would have liberated them all. But now he dared not; he was not far enough away. To Bagdad, then, and as swiftly as the exigencies of desert travel would permit. One beacon of hope burned in his breast. The Pasha might be deposed, and in that case he could immediately dispose of his own goods and chattels and seek new pastures. It would come hard, doubly hard, since he never could regain the position he was to lose.

Nine hundred pounds English, and a comfortable fraction over; the yellow-haired dog would have nothing in the end for his pains. It would be what the Fernigh called a good joke.

A week passed. Christmas. And not one of them recalled the day. Perhaps it was because years had passed since that time when it meant anything to them. The old year went out a-lagging! neither did they take note of this. Having left behind civilization, customs and habits were forgotten.

Sometimes they rode all day and all night, sometimes but half a day, and again, when the water was sweet, they rested the day and night. Never a human being they saw, never a caravan met or crossed them. In this week, the secret marvels of the desert became theirs. They saw it gleam and waver and glitter under skies of brass, when the north wind let down and a breeze came over from the Persian Gulf. They saw it covered with the most amazing blues and greys and greens. They saw it under the rarest azure and a stately fleet of billowy clouds; under the dawn, under the set of sun, under the moon and stars; and unfailingly the interminable reaches of sand and rock and scrubby bush, chameleon-like, readjusted its countenance to each change in the sky. George, who was a poet without the gift of expression, never ceased to find new charms; and nothing pleased his fancy more than to see the cloud-shadows scud away across the sands. Once, toward the latter end of day, Fortune cried out and pointed. Far away, palely yet distinctly, they saw an ocean liner. She stood out against the yellowing sky as a magic-lantern picture stands out upon the screen, and faded similarly. It was the one and only mirage they saw, or at least noticed.

Once another caravan, composed wholly of Arabs, passed. What hope the prisoners had was instantly snuffed out. Before the strangers came within hailing, Mahomed hustled his captives into his tent and swore he would kill either George or Ryanne if they spoke. He forgot Fortune, however. As the caravan passed she screamed. Instantly Mahomed clapped his hand roughly over her mouth. The sheik of the passing caravan looked keenly at the tent, smiled grimly and passed on. What was it to him that a white woman lay in yonder tent? His one emotion was of envy. After this the prisoners became apathetic.

Upon the seventh day, they witnessed the desert's terrifying anger. The air that had been cool, suddenly grew still and hot; the blue above began to fade, to assume a dusty, copperish color. The camels grew restless. Quickly there rose out of the horizon saffron clouds, approaching with incredible swiftness. Little whirlwinds of sand appeared here and there, rose and died as if for want of air. Mahomed veered the caravan toward a kind of bluff composed of sand and precipitous boulders. All the camels were made to kneel. The boys muffled up their mouths and noses, and Mahomed gave instructions to his captives. Fortune buried her head in her coat and nestled down beside her camel, while George and Ryanne used their handkerchiefs. George left his camel and sought Fortune's side, found her hand and held it tightly. He scarcely gave thought to what he did. He vaguely meant to encourage her; and possibly he did.

The storm broke. The sun became obscured. Pebbles and splinters of rock sang through the pall of whirling sand. A golden tone enveloped the little gathering.

Had there been no natural protection, they must have ridden on, blindly and desperately, for to have remained still in the open would have been to await their tombs. It spent its fury in half an hour; and the clearing air became cold again. The caravan proceeded. The hair of every one was dimly yellow, their faces and their garments.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Australia Would Save Birds.

Strong protest is being made in South Australia against the continual slaughter of such rare birds as the ibis, the egret, cranes and spoonbills to supply the demands of milliners. The slaughter renders South Australia even more prone to plagues of grasshoppers, and is a prime cause of the decline of its fish resources. As the wading birds disappear the crustaceans that destroy fish spawn increase in multitude.