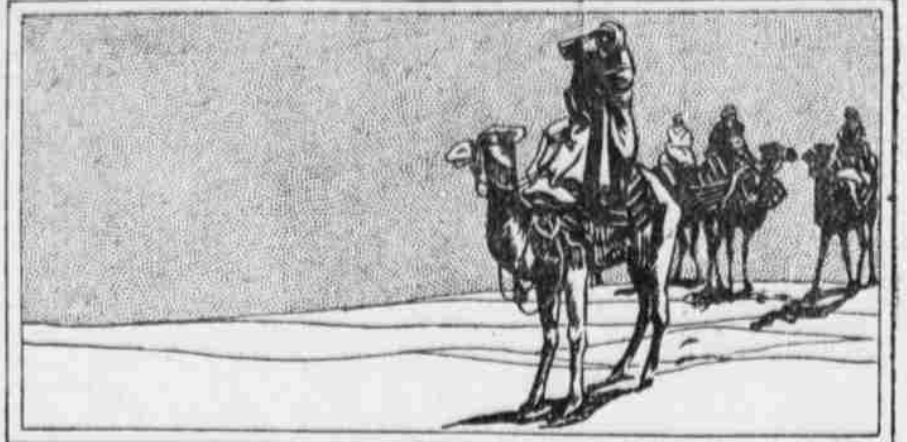




The Pet from CarP Bagdad

by HAROLD MAC GRATH
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The MAN ON THE BOX etc.
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SYNOPSIS.

George Percival Algernon Jones, vice-president of the Metropolitan Oriental Rug Company of New York, thinking for romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Fortune Cheedoye arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Fortune Cheedoye is the famous holy Yih-order rug which he admits having stolen from a paasha at Bagdad. Jones meets Major Callahan and later is introduced to Mrs. Cheedoye 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. Cheedoye and Fortune to a polo game. Fortune returns to Jones the money borrowed by her mother. Mrs. Cheedoye appears to be engaged in 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. Cheedoye, her brother, Major Callahan, Wallace and Fortune, as the United Romance and Adventure Company, plan a risky enterprise involving Jones. Fortune makes known to Mrs. Cheedoye her intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Cheedoye declares she will not permit it. Plans are laid to prevent Jones sailing for home. Fortune steals Jones' letters and cable dispatches. He wires agent in New York, in Jones' name, that he is sending home in New York to some friends. Fortune, keeper of the holy carpet, is on Fortune's trail. Fortune promises Fortune that he will see that Jones comes to no harm as a result of his purchase of the rug. Fortune agrees to buy the rug and demands the Yih-order rug. Fortune tells him Jones has the rug and suggests the abduction of the New York merchant as a means of securing his return. The rug disappears from Jones' room. Fortune quarrels with her mother when she refuses to explain her mysterious actions. Fortune gets a message purporting to be from Fortune 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 Fortune and Fortune also are captives. Fortune is badly battered and bruised. Fortune recovers consciousness and the sight of Fortune in 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. She offers to return it to Mahomed if he will free all three of them. Mahomed agrees to liberate Fortune and one of the men in return for the rug. A courier is sent to Cairo for the rug, but returns with the information that Mrs. Cheedoye and her brother have sailed for New York. Fortune spurs offered freedom which does not include her two companions. The caravan continues the journey toward Bagdad. Fortune tells Jones that Mrs. Cheedoye is the most adroit smuggler of the sea, and is involved by Fortune. The three captives are rescued by Henry Ackermann, who is in charge of a carpet caravan. Mahomed escapes. Mrs. Cheedoye discovers the absence of Fortune and leaves for New York, taking the girl's belongings with her. Through forged letters Mrs. Cheedoye, the man and their accomplices take possession of Jones' New York home.

should be. He threw off his blanket and ran to her.

"Fortune, you mustn't do that. You will catch cold."

"I cannot sleep," she said simply.

He took her by the hand and led her to the tent. "Try," he said. Then he did something he had never done before to any woman save his mother. He kissed her hand, turned quickly, and went over to his blanket. She remained motionless before the tent. The hand fascinated her. From the hand her gaze traveled to the man settling himself comfortably under his blanket.

"Pity, pity! that was ever to be her portion; pity! In Damascus the trio presented themselves at the one decent hotel, and but for Ackermann's charges upon the manager, it is doubtful if he would have accepted them as guests; for a more suspicious-looking trio he had never set eyes upon. (A hotel man weighs a person by the quality of his clothes.) Moreover, they carried no luggage. Ackermann went sponsor; and knowing something of the integrity of the rug-hunter, the manager surrendered. And when George presented his letter of credit at the Imperial Ottoman Bank, again it was Ackermann who vouched for him. It had been agreed to say nothing of the character of their adventure. None of them wanted to be followed by curious eyes.

With a handful of British gold in his pocket, George faced the future hopefully. He took his companions in and about town, hunting the shops for clothing, which after various difficulties they succeeded in finding. It was ill-fitting and cheap, but it would serve till they reached Alexandria or Naples.

"How are you fixed?" asked Fortune, gloomily surveying George's shabby cotton-wool suit.

"Cash in hand?"

"Yes."

"About four hundred pounds. At Naples I can cable. Do you want any?"

"Would you mind advancing me two months' salary?"

"Ryanne, do you really mean to stick to that proposition?"

"It's on my mind just now."

"Well, we'll go back to the bank and I'll draw a hundred pounds for you. You can pay your own expenses as we go. But what are we going to do in regard to Fortune?"

he'd have been alive today. Oh, damn it all; let's go back to the hotel and order that club-steak, or the best imitation they have. I'm going to have a pint of wine. I'm as dull as a ditch in a paddy-field."

"A bottle or two will not hurt any of us. We'll ask Ackermann. For God knows where we'd have been today but for him. And let him do all the yarning. It will please him."

"And while he gabs, we'll get the best of the steak and wine!" For the first time in days Fortune's laughter had a bit of the erstwhile rollicking tone.

The dinner was an event. No delicacy (mostly canned) was overlooked. The manager, as he heard the gulf-eas jingle in George's pocket, was filled with shame; not over his lack of perception. The tourists who sat at the other tables were scandalized at the popping of champagne-corks. Sanctimonious faces glared reproach. A jovial spirit in the Holy Land was an anachronism, not to be tolerated. And wine! Horrible! Doubtless, when they retired to their native back-porches, they retold with never-ending horror of having witnessed such a scene and having heard such laughter upon the sacred soil.

Even Fortune laughed, though Ryanne's ear, keenest then, detected the vague note of hysteria. If the meat was tough, the potatoes greasy, the vegetables flavorless, the wine flat, none of them appeared to be aware of it. If Ackermann could talk he could also eat; and the clatter of forks and knives was the theme rather than the variation to the symphony.

George felt himself drawn deeper and deeper into those tragic waters from which, as in death, there is no return. She was so lonely, so sad and forlorn, that there was as much brother as lover in his sympathy. How patient she had been during all those inconceivable hardships! How brave and steady; and never a murmur! The single glass of wine had brought the color back to her cheek and the sparkle into her eye; yet he

George concluded that he must acquire patience. She was far too loyal to run away without first giving him warning. In the event of her refusing Mortimer's roof and protection, he knew what his plans would be. Some one else could do the buying for Mortimer & Jones; his business would be to revolve round this lonely girl, to watch and guard her without her being aware of it. Of what use were riches if he could not put them to whatever use he chose? So he would wait near her, to see that she came and went unmolested, till against that time when she would recognize how futile her efforts were and how wide and high the wall of the world was.

That mother of hers! To his mind it was positively unreal that one so charming and lovely should be at heart strong as the wind and merciless as the sea. His mother had been everything; hers, worse than none, an eternal question. What a drama she had moved about in, without understanding!

George did not possess that easy and adjustable sophistry which made Ryanne look upon smuggling as a clever game between two cheats. His point of view coincided with Fortune's; it was thievery, more or less condoned, but the ethics covering it were soundly established. He had come very near being culpable himself. True, he would not have been guilty of smuggling for profit; but none the less he would have tried to cheat the government. His sin had found him out; he had now neither the rug nor his thousand pounds.

All these cogitations passed through his mind, disjointedly, as the dinner progressed toward its end. They bade Ackermann good-by and Godspeed, as he was to leave early for Beirut, upon his way to Smyrna. Fortune went to bed; Ryanne sought the billiard-room and knocked about the balls; while George asked the manager if he could send a cable from the hotel. Certainly he could. It took some time to compose the cable to Mortimer; and it required some gold besides. Mortimer must have a fair view of the case; and George presented it, requesting a reply to be sent to Cook's in Naples, where they expected to be within ten days.

"How much will this be?"

The porter got out his telegraph-book and studied the rates carefully.

"Twelve pounds six, sir."

The porter greeted each sovereign with a genuflection, the lowest being the twelfth. George pocketed the receipt and went in search of Ryanne.

But that gentleman was no longer in the billiard-room. Indeed, he had gone quietly to the other hotel and written a cable himself, the code of which was not to be found in any book. For a long time he seemed to be in doubt, for he folded and refolded his message half a dozen times before his actions became decisive. He tore it up and threw the scraps upon the floor and hastened into the street, as if away from temptation. He walked fast and indirectly, smoking innumerable cigarettes. He was fighting hard, the evil in him against the good, the chances of the future against the irreclaimable past. At the end of an hour he returned to the strange hotel. His lips were puffed and bleeding. He had smoked so many cigarettes and had pulled them so impatiently from his mouth, that the dry paper had cracked the delicate skin.

He rewrote his cable and paid for the sending of it. Then he poked about the unfamiliar corridors till he found the dingy bar. He sat down before a peg of whisky, which was followed by many more, each a bit stiffer than its predecessor. At last, when he had had enough to put a normal man's head upon the table or to cover his face with the mask of inanity, Ryanne fell into the old habit of talking alone.

"Horace, old top, what's the use? We'd just like to be good if we could, eh? But they won't let us. We'd grow raving mad in a monastery. We were honest at the time, but we couldn't stand the monotony of watching green olives turn purple upon the silvery bough. Nay, nay!"

He pushed the glass away from him and studied the air-bubbles as they formed, rose to the surface, and were dissipated.

"No matter what the game has been, somehow or other, they've bashed us, and we've lost out."

He emptied the glass and ordered another. He and the bartender were alone.

"After all, love is like money. It's better to live frugally upon the interest than to squander the capital and go bankrupt. And who cares, anyhow?"

He drank once more, dropped a half-sovereign upon the table, and pushed back his chair. His eyes were blood-shot now, and the brown of his skin had become a slaty tint; but he walked steadily enough into the read-



"Is It Bad News?"

ing-room, where he wrote a short letter. It was not without a perverted sense of humor, for a smile twisted his lips till he had sealed the letter and addressed the envelope to George Percival Algernon Jones. He stuffed it into a pocket and went out whistling "The Heavy Dragoons" from the opera of "Patience."

Before the lighted window of a shop he paused. He swayed a little. From a pocket of his new coat he pulled out a glove. It was gray and small and much wrinkled. From time to time he drew it through his fingers, staring the while at the tawdry trinkets in the shop-window. Finally he looked down at the token. He became very still. A moment passed; then he flung the glove into the gutter, and proceeded to his own hotel. He left the letter with the porter, paid his bill, and went out again into the dark, chill night.

He was now what he had been two months ago, the man who didn't care

was he. There used to be a rhyme about it, but I have forgotten that. Anyhow, there you are. I feel that I am conceding a point in regard to the money. It is contrary to the laws and by-laws of the United Romance and Adventure Company to refund. Still, I intend to hold myself to it.

With hale affection,

"RYANNE."

"What do you think of that?" demanded George hotly. "I never did a good action in my life that wasn't served ill. I'm a soft duffer, if there ever was one."

"I shall never be ungrateful for your kindness to me."

"Oh, hang it! You're different; you're not like any other woman in the world," he blurted; and immediately was seized with a mild species of fright.

Fortune stirred her coffee and delicately scooped up the swirling circles of foam.

"Old maids call that money," he said understandingly, eager to cover up his boldness. "My mother used to tell me that there were lots of wonders in a tea-cup."

"Tell me about your mother."

To him it was a theme never lacking in new expressions. When he spoke of his mother, it altered the clear and boyish note in his voice; it became subdued, reverent. He would never be aught than guileless; it was not in his nature to divine anything save his own impulses. While he thought he was pleasing her each tender recollection, each praise, was in fact a nail added to her crucifixion, self-imposed. However, she never lowered her eyes, but kept them bravely directed into his, in the midst of one of his panegyrics he caught sight of his watch which he had placed at the side of his plate.

"By Jove! quarter to nine. I've got an errand or two to do, and there's no need of your running your feet off on my account. I'll be back quarter after." He dug into his pocket and counted out fifty pounds in paper and gold. "You keep this till I get back."

She pushed it aside, half rising from her chair.

"Fortune, listen. Hereafter I am George, your brother George; and I do not want you ever to question any action of mine. I am leaving this money in case some accident befall me. You never can tell." He took her hand and firmly pressed it down upon the money. "In half an hour, sister, I'll be back. You did not think that I was going to run away?"

"No."

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes."

While he was gone she remained seated at the table. She made little pyramids of the gold, divided the even dates from the odd, arranged Maltese crosses and circles and stars. Pity, pity! Well, why should she rebel against it? Was it not more than she had had hitherto? What should she do? She closed her eyes. She would trouble her tired brain no more about the future till they reached Naples. She would till this one week drift her how it would.

CHAPTER XIX.

Fortune Decides.

George and Fortune were seated at breakfast. It was early morning. At ten they were to depart for Jaffa, to take the tubby French packet there to Alexandria. They could just about make it, and any delay meant a week or ten days longer upon this ragged and inhospitable coast.

"Ryanne has probably overslept. After breakfast I'll go and roust him out. The one thing that really tickles me," George continued, as he pared the tough rind from the skinny bacon, "is, we shan't have any luggage. Think of the blessing of traveling without a trunk or a valise or a steamer-roll!"

"Without even a comb or a hair-brush?"

"It's great fun," George broke his toast.

And Fortune wondered how she could tell him. She was without any toilet articles. She hadn't even a toothbrush; and it was quite out of the question for her to bother him about trifles, much as she needed them. She would have to live in the clothes she wore, and trust that the ship's stewardess might help her out in the absolute necessities.

Here the head-waiter brought George a letter. The address was enough for George. No one but Ryanne could have written it. Without excusing himself, he ripped off the envelope and read the contents. Fortune could not resist watching him, for she grasped quickly that only Ryanne could have written a letter here in Damascus. At first the tan upon George's cheeks darkened—the sudden effusion of blood; then it became lighter, and the mouth and eyes and nose became stern.

"Is it bad news?"

"It all depends upon how you look at it. For my part, good riddance to bad rubbish. Here, read it yourself."

She read:

"My Dear Percival: After all, I find that I can not reconcile myself to the dullness of your olive-groves. I shall send the five hundred to you when I reach New York. With me it is as it was with the devil. When he was sick, he vowed he would be a saint; but when he got well, devil a saint

was sure that behind this apparent liveliness lay the pitiful desperation of the helpless. He had not spoken again about old Mortimer. He would wait till after he had sent a long cable. Then he would speak and show her the answer, of which he had not a particle of doubt. As matters now stood, he could not tell her that he loved her; his quixotic sense of chivalry was too strong to permit this step, urge as his heart might upon it. She might misinterpret his love as born of pity, and that would be the end of everything. He was confident now that Ryanne meant nothing to her. Her lack of enthusiasm, whenever Ryanne spoke to her in these days; the peculiar horizontality of her lips and brows, whenever Ryanne offered a trifling courtesy—all pointed to distrust. George felt a guilty gladness. After all, why shouldn't she distrust Ryanne?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Everybody says, "Go up higher!" to the man who is getting there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Man Who Didn't Care.

It was the first of February when Ackermann's caravan drew into the ancient city of Damascus. That part of the caravan deserted by Mahomed put out for Cairo immediately they struck the regular camel-way. Fortune, George and Ryanne were in a pitiable condition, heart and body weary, in rage and tatters. George, now that the haven was assured, dropped his forced buoyancy, his prattle, his jests. He had done all a mortal man could to keep up the spirits of his co-fortunates; and he saw that, most of the time, he had wasted his talents. Ryanne, sullen and morose, often told him to "shut up," which wasn't exhilarating. And Fortune viewed his attempts without sensing them and frequently looked at him without seeing him. Now, all this was not particularly comforting to the man who loved her and was doing what he could to lighten the dreariness of the journey. He made allowances, however; besides suffering unusual privations, Fortune had had a frightful mental shock. A girl of her depth of character could not be expected to rise immediately to the old level. Sometimes, while gathered about the evening fire, he would look up to find her sad eyes staring at him, and it mattered not if he stared in return; a kind of clairvoyance blurred visibilities, for she was generally looking into her garden at Mentone and wondering when this horrible dream would pass. Subjects for conversation were exhausted in no time. Dig as he might, George could find nothing new; and often he recounted the same tale twice of an evening. Sardonic laughter from Ryanne.

Ackermann had given them up as hopeless. He was a strong, vain, dominating man, kindly at heart, however, but impatient. When he told a story, he demanded the attention of all; so, when Ryanne yawned before his eyes, and George drew pictures in the sand, and the girl fell asleep with her head upon her knees, he drew off abruptly and left them to their own devices. He had crossed and recrossed the silences so often that he was no longer capable of judging accurately another man's mental processes. That they had had a strange and numbing experience he readily understood; but now that they were out of duress and headed for the coast, he saw no reason why they should not act like human beings.

They still put up the small tent for Fortune, but the rest of them slept upon the sand, under the stars. Once, George awoke as the dawn was gliding the east. Silhouetted against the sky he saw Fortune. She was standing straight, her hands pressed at her sides, her head tilted back—a tense attitude. He did not know it, but she was asking God why these things



"Ryanne, Do You Really Mean to Stick to That Proposition?"

"See that she gets safely back to Mentone."

"Suppose she will not go there?"

"It's up to you, Percival; it's all up to you. You're the gay Lochinvar from the west. I'm not sure—no one ever is regarding a woman—but I think she'll listen to you. She wouldn't give an ear to a scallawag like me. This caravan business has put me outside the pale. I've lost caste."

"You're only desperate and discouraged; you can pull up straight."

"Much obliged!"

"You haven't looked at life normally; that's what the matter is."

"Solon, you're right. There's that poor devil back in Bagdad. I've killed a man, Percival. It doesn't mix well in my dreams."

"You said that it was in self-defense."

"And God knows it was. But if I hadn't gone after that damned rug,

was sure that behind this apparent liveliness lay the pitiful desperation of the helpless. He had not spoken again about old Mortimer. He would wait till after he had sent a long cable. Then he would speak and show her the answer, of which he had not a particle of doubt. As matters now stood, he could not tell her that he loved her; his quixotic sense of chivalry was too strong to permit this step, urge as his heart might upon it. She might misinterpret his love as born of pity, and that would be the end of everything. He was confident now that Ryanne meant nothing to her. Her lack of enthusiasm, whenever Ryanne spoke to her in these days; the peculiar horizontality of her lips and brows, whenever Ryanne offered a trifling courtesy—all pointed to distrust. George felt a guilty gladness. After all, why shouldn't she distrust Ryanne?