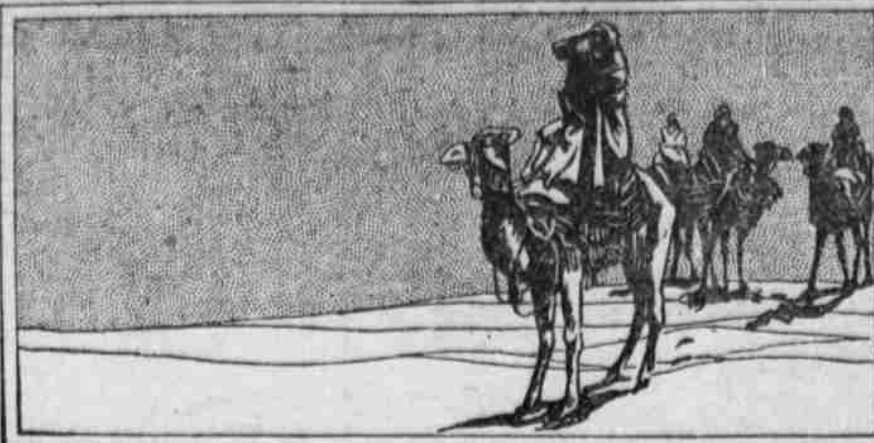




The Carpet from Carp Bagdad

by HAROLD MACGRATH
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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, threatening romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Horace Ryanne arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Ryanne tells Jones the famous holy Yildor 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 150 pounds at Monte Carlo some months previously, and who turns out to be Fortune's mother. Jones takes Mrs. Chedsoye and Fortune to a polo game. Fortune returns to Jones the money borrowed by her mother, Mrs. Chedsoye 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. Chedsoye, 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. Chedsoye his intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Chedsoye 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. Ryanne promises Fortune that he will see that Jones comes to no harm as a result of his purchase of the rug. Mahomed accuses Ryanne and demands the Yildor rug. Ryanne tells him Jones has the rug and suggests the abduction of the New York merchant as a means of securing its return. The rug 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 Ryanne at the English Club 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 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. Chedsoye and her brother have sailed for New York. Fortune spins offered freedom which does not include her two companions. The caravan continues the journey toward Bagdad. Ryanne tells Jones that Mrs. Chedsoye is the most adroit smuggler of the age, and is overheard by Fortune. The three captives are rescued by Henry Ackermann, who is in charge of Mrs. Chedsoye's discovery. Ryanne discovers the absence of Fortune and leaves for New York, taking the girl's belongings with her. Through forged letters Mrs. Chedsoye, the major and their accomplices take possession of Jones' New York home. Jones, Ryanne and Fortune arrive at Damascus. Ryanne fails in his resolution to lead a better life. Ryanne secretly leaves for New York.

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

George came in under the time-limit of his adventure. He had been upon the most difficult errand imaginable, at least from a bachelor's point of view. He carried two hand-bags. One of these he deposited in Fortune's lap. "Shall I open it?" "If you wish."



"Everything Will Come Out All Right in the End," He Encouraged.

She noted his embarrassment, and her immediate curiosity was not to be denied. She slipped the catch and looked inside. There were combs and brushes, soap and tooth-powder and talc, a manicure-set, a pair of soft woolen slippers, and . . . She glanced up quickly. The faintest rose stole under her cheeks. It was 'droll; it was pathetically funny. She would have given worlds to have seen him making the purchases. "You are not offended?" he stammered.

papers got hold of it, there would be no living." "You leave it to me," said the big-hearted German. "From here to Naples she shall be as mine own daughter. You have not told me all!" "No; only what I had of necessity to tell." "Well, you know best. I shall do my share to make her feel at home. She is as pretty as a flower." To this George agreed, but not verbally. The steamer weighed anchor at six

o'clock that evening, with only a handful of passengers for the trip to Naples. George had wired from Damascus to Cairo to have his luggage sent on, and he saw it put aboard himself. Without letting Fortune know, he had also telegraphed the hotel to forward whatever she had left; but the return wire informed him that Mrs. Chedsoye had taken everything. They were leaning against the starboard rail, watching the slowly converging lights of the harbor. Fortune had borrowed a cloak from her stewardess and George wore the muff of the first-officer. The captain had offered him, but George had declined. He would have been lost in its ample folds.

"I can not understand why they made no effort to find you," he mused. "It doesn't seem quite human." "Don't you understand? It is simple. My mother believes that Horace and I ran away together. If not that, I ran away myself, as I that day threatened to do. In either case, she saw nothing could be done in trying to find out where I had gone. Perhaps she knows exactly what did happen. Doubtless she has sent on my things to Mentone, which, of course, I shall never see again. No, no! I can not go back there. I have known the misery of suspense long enough." She lowered her head to the rail.

He came quite near to her. His arms went out toward her, only to drop down. He must wait. It was very hard. But nothing prevented his putting forth a hand to press hers reassuringly, and saying: "Don't do that, Fortune. It makes my heart ache to see a woman cry."

"I am not crying," came in muffled tones. "I am only sad, and tired, and tired."

"Everything will come out all right in the end," he encouraged. "Of course you are tired. What woman wouldn't be, having gone through what you have? Here, let's sit in the steam-er-chairs till the bugle blows for dinner. I'm a bit fagged out myself."

They lay back in the chairs, and no longer cared to talk. The lights twinkled, but fainter and fainter, till at last only the pale line between the sky and the sea remained. She turned her head and looked sharply at him. He was sound asleep. "Poor boy!" she murmured softly. "How care-worn!" There was something grotesque in the mask of desert tan and shaven skin. How patient he had been through it all, and how kind and gentle to her! She remembered now of seeing him that night in Cairo, and of remarking how young and fresh he seemed in comparison to the men she knew and had met. And she must leave him, to go into the world and fight her own battles. If God had but given to her a brother like this! But brother he never could be, no, not even in the pleasant sense of adoption. She did not want pity. To think of his getting those things for her in Damascus! Pity suggested that she was weak and helpless, whereas she knew that she was both patient and strong. . . . What did she want? She glanced up and down the deck. It was totally deserted save for them. Then, "clad in the beauty of a thousand stars," she leaned over and down and brushed his hand with her lips.

And George slept on. Only the blare of the bugle brought him back to mundane affairs. He was hungry, and he announced the fact with gusto. They would dine well that night. The captain placed Fortune at his right and George at his left, and broached a bottle of fine old Johannisberger. And the three of them had coffee in the smoking-room. If the other passengers had any curiosity, they did not manifest it openly.

Upon finding that they had no real need of staying over in Naples, the captain urged that they take the return voyage with him. He saw more than either of the young people, with those blue Teutonic eyes of his. George promised to let him know within a dozen hours of the sailing. Certainly Fortune would decide one way or the other within that time.

Both had seen the Veauvian bay many times, with never-fading love and interest. They sailed across the bay in the bright clearness of the morning.

"You are going back with me," George announced in a tone which inferred that nothing more was to be said upon the subject. But, for all his confidence, there was a great and heavy fear upon his heart as he asked for mail at the little inclosure at Cook's, in the Galleria Vittoria. There was a cable; nothing more. "Now, Fortune . . . " "Have I ever given you permission to call me by that name?" "Why?" "Have I?" "No." "Then I give you that permission now."

"What do you frighten a man like that for?" he cried. "What I was going to say . . . "

"Fortune." "What I was going to say, Fortune, was this: Here is the cable from Mortimer. I'm not going to open it till after dinner tonight. We'll go up to the Bertolini to dine. You'll stay there for the night, while I put up at the Bristol, which is only a little ways up the Corso. I'm not going to ask you a question till coffee. Then we'll thrash out the subject till there isn't a grain left."

She made no protest. Secretly she was pleased to be bullied like this. It proved that among all these swarming peoples there was one interested in her welfare. But she knew in her heart what she was going to say when the proper time came. She did not wish to spoil his dinner. She was also going to put her courage to its supreme test; borrow a hundred pounds, and bravely promise to pay him back. If she failed to pay it, it would be because she was dead. For she could not survive a comparison between herself and her mother. Here in Naples she might find something, an opportunity. She spoke French and Italian fluently; and in this crowded season of the year it would not be difficult to find a situation as a maid or companion. So long as she could earn a little honestly, she was not afraid. She was desperately resolved.

Such a dinner! Long would she remember it; and longer still, how little either of them ate of it! She knew enough about these things to appreciate it. It must have cost a pretty penny. She smiled, she laughed, she jested; and always a battle to dam the uprising tears.

The dining-room was filled; women in beautiful evening gowns and men in sober black. But the two young people were oblivious. Their fellow-diners, however, bent more than one glance in their direction. Ill-fitting clothes, to be sure, but it was observed that they ate to the manner born. The girl was beautiful in a melancholy way, and the young man was well-bred and pleasant of feature, though oddly burned.

Coffee. George produced the cable. It was still sealed.

"You read it first," he said, passing it across the table.

Her hands shook as she ripped the sealed flap and opened the message. She read. Her eyes gathered dangerously.

"Be careful!" he warned. "You've been brave so long; be brave a little longer."

"I did not know that there lived such good and kindly men. Oh, thank him, thank him a thousand times for me. Read it." And she no longer cared if any saw her tears.

"Bring her home, and God bless you both." "MORTIMER."

"I knew it!" he cried exultantly. "He and my father were the finest two men in the world. The sky is all clear now."

"Is it?" sadly "Oh, I do not wish to pain you, but it is charity; and I am too proud."

"You refuse?" He could not believe it.

"Yes. But when things grow dark, and the day turns bitter, I shall always remember those words. I can see no other way. I must fight it out alone."

Love makes a man dumb or eloquent; and as George saw all his treasured dreams fading swiftly, eloquence became his buckler in this battle of love unspoken and pride in arms. Each time he paused for breath, she shook her head slowly.

The diners were leaving in twos and fours, and presently they were all alone. Servants were clearing up the tables; there was a clatter of dishes and a tread of hurrying feet. They noted it not.

"Well, one more plea!" And he swept aside his self-imposed restrictions. "Will you come for my sake? Because I am lonely and want you? Will you come for my sake?"

This time her head did not move. "Is it pity?" she whispered.

"Pity!" His hands gripped the linen and the coffee-cups rattled. "No! It is not pity. Because you were lonely, because you had no one to turn to, I could not in honor tell you. But now I do. Fortune, will you come for my sake, because I love you and want you always and come?"

"I shall come."

CHAPTER XX.

March Hares.

George, in that masterful way which was not wholly acquired, but which had been a latency till the episodic journey—George paid for the dinner, called the head-waiter and thanked him for the attention given it, and laid a generous tip upon the cover. From the dining-room, the two young people, outwardly calm but inwardly filled with the Great Tumult, went to the manager's bureau and arranged for

Fortune's room. This settled, Fortune went down to the cavernous entrance to bid George good night. They were both diffident and shy, now that the great problem was solved. George was puzzled as to what to do in bidding her good night, and Fortune wondered if he would kiss her right here, before all these horrid cab-drivers.

"I shall call for you at nine," he said. "We've got to do some shopping."

A tinkle of laughter. "These ready-made suits are beginning to look like the deuce."

"Do you always think of everything?"

"Well, what I don't remember, the clerk will," slyly. "Till recently I believe I never thought of anything. I must be off. It's too cold down here for you." He offered his hand nervously.

She gave her's freely. He looked into her marvelous eyes for a moment. Then he turned the palm upward and kissed it, lightly and lovingly; and she drew it across his face, over his eyes, till it left in departing a caress upon his forehead. He stood up, breathing quickly, but not more so than she. A little tableau. Then he jammed his battered fedora upon his head and strode up the Corso. He dared not turn. Had he done so, he must have gone back and taken her in his arms. She followed him with brave eyes; she saw him suddenly veer across the street and pause at the parapet. It was then that she became conscious of the keenness of the night-wind. She went in. Somehow, all earth's puzzles had that night been solved.

George lighted a cigar, doubtless the most costly weed to be found in all Naples that night. The intermittent glowing of the end faintly outlined his face. Far away across the shimmering bay rose Capri in a kind of magic, amethystine transparency. A light or two twinkled where Sorrento lay. His gaze roved the half-circle, and finally rested upon the grim dark ash-heap, Vesuvius. Beauty, beauty everywhere; beauty in the sky, beauty upon earth, in his heart and mind. He was twenty-eight, and all these wonderful things had happened in a little more than so many days!

"God's in his heaven."

All's right with the world!" He flung the half-finished cigar into the air, careless as to where it fell, or that in falling it might set Naples on fire. It struck a roof somewhere below; a splutter of sparks, and all was dark again.

"I shall come." All through his dreams that night he heard it. "I shall come."

Next morning he notified the captain to retain their cabins. After that they proceeded to storm the shops.



They Stormed the Shops; Irresponsible Children, Both of Them.

They were like March hares; irresponsible children, both of them. What did propriety matter? What meaning had circumspection? They two were all alone; the rest of the world didn't count. It never had counted to either of them. Certainly they should have gone to a parsonage; Mrs. Grundy would prudently have suggested it. The trivialities of convention, however, had no place at that moment in their little Eden. They were a law unto themselves.

Into twenty shops they went; modest after modiste was interviewed; and Fortune at length found two mod-

els. These were pretty, and, being models, quite inexpensive. Once, George was forced to remain outside in the carriage. It was in front of the lingerie shop. He put away each receipt, just like a husband upon his honeymoon. Later, receipts would mean as much, but from a different angle of vision. He bought so many violets that the carriage looked as though it were ready for the flower carnival. He laughingly disregarded her protests. It was the Song of Songs.

"My shopping is done," she said at last, dropping the bundles upon the carriage floor. "Now, it is your turn."

"You have forgotten a warm steamer-cloak," he reminded her.

"So I have!"

This oversight was easily remedied; and then George sought the tailor-shops for ready-made clothes. He had more difficulty than Fortune; ready-made suits were not the easiest things to find in Naples. By noon, however, he had acquired a Scotch woolen for day wear and a fairly decent dinner suit, along with other necessities.

"Well, I say!" he murmured, struck by a revealing thought.

"Have you forgotten anything?" "No. On the contrary, I've just remembered something. I've got all I need or want in my steamer-trunk; and till this minute I never once thought of it."

How they laughed! Indeed, so high were their spirits that they would have laughed at any inconsequent thing. They lunched at the Gambirinus, and George mysteriously bought up all the pennies from the hunchback tobacco vendor. Later, as they bowed along the sea-front, George created a small riot by flinging pennies to small boys and whining beggars. At five they went aboard the ship, which was to leave at sundown, some hours ahead of scheduled time. The captain himself welcomed them as they climbed the swaying ladder. There were a hundred first-class passengers for the final voyage. The two, however, sat at the right and left of the captain; but the table was filled, and they maintained a guarded prattle. Every one at once assumed that they were a bridal couple, and watched them with tolerant amusement. The captain had considerably left their names off the passenger list as published for the benefit of the passengers and the saloon-sitting. So they moved in a sort of mystery which rough weather prevented being solved.

One night, when the sea lay calm and the air was caressingly mild, George and Fortune had gone forward and were leaning over the starboard-rail, where it meets and joins the forward beam-rail. They were watching for the occasional flicker of phosphor-

escence. Their shoulders touched, and George's hand lay protectively over hers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

He Hadn't the Heart to Do It. Grouchy Patron—Goodness, man! Why don't you rid this place of flies? There must be a million of them! Restaurant Proprietor—Sorry, sir, but I can't. Kind of a sentiment, you see. The money that gave me my start here came as a prize in a contest in which I swatted 3,646 more flies than my nearest competitor!—Puck.