

SERIAL STORY

THE MAKER OF MOONS

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Illustrations by J. J. Sheridan

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in New York, Roy Carleton, the story-teller, inspecting a queer reptile owned by George Godfrey of Tiffany's. Roy, and Barris and Pierpont, two friends, depart on a hunting trip to Cardinal Woods, a rather obscure locality. Barris revealed the fact that he had joined the secret service for the purpose of running down a gang of gold makers. Prof. LaGrange, on discovering the gang's formula, had been mysteriously killed. Barris received a telegram of instructions. He and Pierpont set out to locate the gold making gang. A valet reported seeing a queer Chinaman in the supposedly untanned woods. Roy went hunting. He felt asleep in a doll. On awakening he beheld a beautiful girl at a small lake.

CHAPTER V.

I sent him off to bed, saying I should keep the dogs with me all night; and when he was gone, I took a good long draught of ale, "just to shame the devil," said Barris, and lighted a cigar. Then I thought of Barris and Pierpont, and their cold bed, for I knew they would not dare build a fire, and in spite of the hot chimney corner and the crackling blaze, I shivered in sympathy.

"I'll tell Barris and Pierpont the whole story and take them to see the carved stone and the fountain," I thought to myself; what a marvelous dream it was—Ysande—if it was a dream.

Then I went to the mirror and examined the faint white mark above my eyebrow.

About eight o'clock next morning, as I sat listlessly eyeing my coffee cup which Howlett was filling, Gamin and Micoche set up a howl, and in a moment more I heard Barris step on the porch.

"Hello, Roy," said Pierpont, stamping into the dining-room, "I want my breakfast, by jingo! Where's Howlett—none of your cafe au lait for me—I want a chop and some eggs. Look at that dog, he'll wag the hinge of his tail in a moment—"

"Pierpont," said I, "this loquacity is astonishing but welcome. Where's Barris? You are soaked from neck to ankle."

Pierpont sat down and tore off his stiff, muddy leggings.

"Barris is telephoning to Cardinal Springs—I believe he wants some of his men—down! Gamin, you idiot! Howlett, three eggs poached and more toast—what was I saying? Oh, about Barris; he's struck something or other which he hopes will locate these gold-making fellows. I had a jolly time—he'll tell you about it."

"Billy! Billy!" I said, in pleased amazement, "you are learning to talk! Dear me! You load your own shells and you carry your own gun and you fire it yourself—hello! here's Barris, all over mud. You fellows really ought to change your rig—whew! what a frightful odor!"

"It's probably this," said Barris, tossing something onto the hearth, where it shuddered for a moment and then began to writhe; "I found it in the woods by the lake. Do you know what it can be, Roy?"

To my disgust I saw it was another of those spidery, wormy, crablike creatures that Godfrey had in Tiffany's.

"I thought I recognized that acrid odor," I said; "for the love of the saints, take it away from the breakfast," I replied, firmly. "Howlett, get a broom and sweep that thing into the road. What are you laughing at, Pierpont?"

Howlett swept the repulsive creature out and Barris and Pierpont went to change their dew-soaked clothes for dryer raiment. David came to take the dogs for an airing and in a few minutes Barris reappeared and sat down in his place at the head of the table.

"Well," said I, "is there a story to tell?"

"Yes, not much. They are near the lake on the other side of the woods—I mean these gold-makers. I shall collar one of them this evening. I haven't located the main gang with any certainty—shove the toast rack this way, will you, Roy—no, I am not at all certain, but I've nailed one, anyway. Pierpont was a great help, really, and, what do you think, Roy? He wants to join the secret service!"

"Little Willy!"

"Exactly. Oh, I'll dissuade him. What sort of a reptile was that I brought in? Did Rowlett sweep it away?"

"He can sweep it back again for all I care," I said indifferently. "I've finished my breakfast."

"No," said Barris, hastily, swallowing his coffee, "it's of no importance; you can tell me about the beast—"

"Serves you right if I had it brought in on toast," I returned.

Pierpont came in radiant, fresh from the bath.

"Go on with your story, Roy," he said; and I told them about Godfrey and his reptile pet.

"Now, what in the name of common sense can Godfrey find interesting in that creature?" I ended, tossing my cigarette into the fireplace.

"It's Japanese, don't you think?" said Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, "it is not artistically grotesque; it's vulgar and horrible—it looks cheap and unfinished—"

"Unfinished, exactly," said I, "like an American humorist—"

"Yes," said Pierpont, "cheap. What about that gold serpent?"

"Oh, the Metropolitan Museum bought it; you must see it, it's marvelous," said Barris.

Barris and Pierpont had lighted their cigarettes and, after a moment, we all rose and strolled out to the lawn, where chairs and hammocks were placed under the maple trees.

David passed, gun under arm, dogs heeling.

"Three guns on the meadows at four this afternoon," said Pierpont.

"Roy," said Barris as David bowed and started on, "what did you do yesterday?"

This was the question that I had been expecting. All night long I had dreamed of Ysande and the glade in the woods, where, at the bottom of the crystal fountain, I saw the reflection of her eyes. All the morning while bathing and dressing I had been persuading myself that the dream was not worth recounting and that a search for the glade and the imaginary stone carving would be ridiculous. But now, as Barris asked the question, I suddenly decided to tell him the whole story.

"See here, you fellows," I said abruptly, "I am going to tell you something queer. You can laugh as much as you please, too, but first I want to ask Barris a question or two. You have been in China, Barris?"

"Yes," said Barris, looking straight into my eyes.

"Would a Chinaman be likely to turn lumberman?"

"Have you seen a Chinaman?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I don't know; David and I both imagined we did."

Barris and Pierpont exchanged glances.

"Have you seen one, also?" I demanded, turning to include Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, slowly; "but I



"I Sat Listlessly Eyeing My Coffee."

know that there is, or has been, a Chinaman in these woods."

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes," said Barris, gravely; "the devil, if you like—a devil—a member of the Kuen-Yuin."

I drew my chair close to the hammock where Pierpont lay at full length, holding out to me a ball of pure gold.

"Well," said I, examining the engraving on the surface, which represented a mass of twisted creatures—dragons, I supposed.

"Well," repeated Barris, extending his hand to take the golden ball, "this globe of gold engraved with reptiles and Chinese hieroglyphics is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Where did you get it?" I asked, feeling that something startling was impending.

"Pierpont found it by the lake at sunrise this morning. It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," he repeated; "the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth."

We puffed our cigarettes in silence until Barris rose, and began to pace backward and forward among the trees, twisting his gray mustache.

"The Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers," he said, pausing before the hammock where Pierpont lay watching him; "I mean exactly what I say—sorcerers. I've seen them—I've seen them at their devilish business, and I repeat to you solemnly, that as there are angels above, there is a race of devils on earth, and they are sorcerers. Bah!" he cried, "talk to me of Indian magic and Yoga and all that claptrap! Why, Roy, I tell you that the Kuen-Yuin have absolute control of 100,000,000 people, mind and body, body and soul. Do you know what goes on in the interior of China? Does Europe know—could any human being conceive of the condition of that gigantic hell? You read the papers, you hear diplomatic twaddle about Li Hung Chang and the emperor, you see accounts of battles on sea and land, and you know that Japan has raised a toy temple along the jagged edge of the great unknown. But you never before heard of the Kuen-Yuin; no, nor has any European except a stray missionary or two, and yet I tell you that when the fires from this pit of hell have eaten through the continent to the coast, the explosion will inundate half a world—and God help the other half."

Pierpont's cigarette went out; he lighted another, and looked hard at Barris.

"But," resumed Barris, quietly, "sufficient unto the day, you know—I didn't intend to say as much as I did—it would do no good—even you and Pierpont will forget it—it seems so impossible and so far away—like the burning out of the sun. What I want to discuss is the possibility or probability of a Chinaman—a member of the Kuen-Yuin, being here, at this moment, in the forest."

"If he is," said Pierpont, "possibly the gold-makers owe their discovery to him."

"I do not doubt it for a second," said Barris, earnestly.

I took the little golden globe in my hand, and examined the characters engraved upon it.

"Harris," said Pierpont, "I can't believe in sorcery while I am wearing one of Sanford's shooting suits, in the pocket of which rests an ancient volume of the 'Duchess.'"

"Neither can I," I said, "for I read the Evening Post, and I know Mr. Godkin would not allow it. Hello! What's the matter with this gold ball?"

"What is the matter?" said Barris, grimly.

"Why—why—it's changing color—purple, no, crimson—no, it's green I mean—good heavens! these dragons are twisting under my fingers—"

"Impossible!" muttered Pierpont, leaning over me; "those are not dragons—"

"No!" I cried, excitedly; "they are pictures of that reptile that Barris brought back—see how they crawl and turn—"

"Drop it!" commanded Barris; and I threw the ball on the turf. In an instant we had all knelt down on the grass beside it, but the globe was again golden, grotesquely wrought with dragons and strange signs.

Pierpont, a little red in the face, poked it up, and handed it to Barris. He placed it on a chair, and sat down beside me.

"Whew!" said I, wiping the perspiration from my face; "how did you play us that trick, Barris?"

"Trick!" said Barris, contemptuously.

I looked at Pierpont, and my heart sank. If this was not trick, what was it? Pierpont returned my glance and colored, but all he said was: "It's devilish queer," and Barris answered: "Yes, devilish." Then Barris asked me again to tell my story, and I did, beginning from the time I met David in the spinney to the moment when I sprang into the darkening thicket where that yellow mask had grinned like a phantom skull.

"Shall we try to find the fountain?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes—and—the lady," suggested Pierpont, vaguely.

"Don't be an ass," I said, a little impatiently, "you need not come, you know."

"Oh, I'll come," said Pierpont, "unless you think I am indiscreet—"

"Shut up, Pierpont," said Barris, "this thing is serious; I never heard of such a glade or such a fountain, but it's true that nobody knows this forest thoroughly. It's worth while trying for Roy; can you find your way back to it?"

"Easily," I answered; "when shall we go?"

"It will knock our snipe shooting on the head," said Pierpont, "but when one has the opportunity of finding a live dream-lady—"

I rose, deeply offended, but Pierpont was not very penitent and his laughter was irresistible.

"The lady's yours by right of discovery," he said; "I'll promise not to infringe on your dreams—I'll dream about other ladies—"

"Come, come," said I, "I'll have Howlett put you to bed in a minute. Barris, if you are ready—we can get back to dinner—"

Barris had risen and was gazing at me earnestly.

"What's the matter?" I asked nervously, for I saw that his eyes were fixed on my forehead, and I thought of Ysande and the white crescent scar.

"Is that a birthmark?" said Barris.

"Yes—why, Barris?"

"Nothing—an interesting coincidence."

"What—for heaven's sake!"

"The scar—or rather the birthmark. It is the print of the dragon's claw—the crescent symbol of Yuo-Laou—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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