

SERIAL STORY

THE MAKER OF MOONS

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Illustrations by J. J. Sheridan

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in New York. Roy Gardner, the story-teller, is a queer reptile owned by George Gaudrey 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 unpopulated woods. Roy went hunting. He fell asleep in a dell. On awakening he beheld a beautiful girl at a small lake. A lightning bolt, resembling a dragon's claw, on Roy's forehead had a mysterious effect upon the girl, who said her name was Ysande. Suddenly she disappeared. Flushing in terror, Roy beheld a horrible Chinese visage peering at him from the woods. Barris and Pierpont returned. Barris exhibited a reptile, like that owned by Gaudrey. A ball of supposed gold, he held, suddenly became alive. He told the Kuen-Yuin, a Chinese nation of sorcerers, numbering 70,000, and explained that the Moon Maker, their ruler, whose crescent symbol was a dragon claw, was supposed to have recently returned to earth. Barris, Pierpont and Roy failed to find Ysande's dell. Later, Roy, hunting, came to the beautiful spot where he found Ysande. She told him how her father, evidently a Chinaman, made gold and of his mysterious actions. Suddenly all turned black and Roy awoke to find himself stunned and bleeding on his own doorstep. Roy recovered quickly. Barris, under a mysterious spell, told of his stay among the Chinese sorcerers, his love there and its false ending. Several of the gold-makers, those who were not sorcerers, were either castrated or killed. Roy wandered into the woods and found Ysande.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

No animal swimming out in the darkness along the shore, no heavy salmon surging, could have set the whole shore afloat as though the wash from a great boat were rolling in. Could it have been the overflow, through the Weir Brook, of some cloudburst far back in the forest? This was the only way I could account for it, and yet when I had crossed the Weir Brook I had not noticed that it was swollen.

And as I lay there thinking, a faint breeze sprang up and I saw the surface of the lake whitened with lifted lily pods.

All around me the alders were sighing; I heard the forest behind me stir; the crossed branches rubbing softly, bark against bark. Something—it may have been an owl—sailed out of the night, dipped, soared, and was again engulfed, and far across the water I heard its faint cry, Ysande.

Then first, for my heart was full, I cast myself down upon my face, calling on her name. My eyes were wet when I raised my head—for the spray from the shore was drifting in again—and my heart beat heavily: "No more, no more." But my heart lied, for even as I raised my face to the calm stars, I saw her standing still, close beside me; and very gently I spoke her name, Ysande. She held out both hands.

"I was lonely," she said, "and I went to the glade, but the forest is full of frightened creatures and they frightened me. Has anything happened in the woods? The deer are running toward the heights."

Her hand still lay in mine as we moved along the shore, and the lapping of the water on rock and shallow was no lower than our voices.

"Why did you leave me without a word, there at the fountain in the glade?" she said.

"I leave you?"

"Indeed you did, running swiftly with your dog, plunging through thickets and brush—oh—you frightened me."

"Did I leave you so?"

"Yes—after—"

"After?"

"You had kissed me—"

Then we leaned down together and looked into the black water set with stars, just as we had bent together over the fountain in the glade.

"Do you remember?"

"Yes. See, the water is inlaid with silver stars—everywhere white lilies floating and the stars below, deep, deep down."

"What is the flower you hold in your hand?"

"White water-lilies."

"Tell me about Yue-Laou, Dell Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin," I whispered, lifting her head so I could see her eyes.

gentle of China—and has fashioned from their warped bodies a monster which he calls the Xin. This monster is horrible, for it not only lives in its own body, but it has thousands of loathsome satellites—living creatures without mouths, blind, that move when the Xin moves, like a mandarin and his escort. They are part of the Xin although they are not attached. Yet if one of these satellites is injured the Xin writhes in agony. It is fearful—this huge living bulk and these creatures spread out like severed fingers that wriggle around a hidden hand.

"Who told you this?"

"My stepfather."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes. I have seen one of the Xin's creatures."

"Where, Ysande?"

"Here in the woods."

"Then you believe there is a Xin here?"

"There must be—perhaps in the lake."

"Oh, Xins inhabit lakes?"

"Yes, and the seven seas. I am not afraid here."

"Why?"

"Because I wear the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Then I am not safe," I smiled.

"Yes, you are, for I hold you in my arms. Shall I tell you more about the Xin? When the Xin is about to do to death a man, the Yeth-hounds gallop through the night—"

"What are the Yeth-hounds, Ysande?"

"The Yeth-hounds are dogs without heads. They are spirits of murdered children, which pass through the woods at night, making a wailing noise."

"Do you believe this?"

"Yes, for I have worn the yellow lotus—"

"The yellow lotus—"

"Yellow is the symbol of faith—"

"Where?"

"In Yian," she said, faintly.

"After a while I said: 'Ysande, you know there is a God?'"

"God and Xans are one."

"Have you ever heard of Christ?"

"No," she answered, softly.

The wind began again among the tree tops. I felt her hands closing in mine.

"Ysande," I asked again, "do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Yes, the Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers. Yue-Laou is a sorcerer."

"Have you seen sorcery?"

"Yes, the reptile satellite of the Xin—"

"Anything else?"

"My charm—the golden ball, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin. Have you seen it change—have you seen the reptiles writhe—"

"Yes," I said, I, shortly, and then remained silent, for a sudden shiver of apprehension had seized me. Barris also had spoken gravely, ominously of the sorcerers, the Kuen-Yuin, and I had seen with my own eyes the graven reptiles turning and twisting on the glowing globe.

"Still," said I, aloud, "God lives and sorcery is but a name."

"Ah," murmured Ysande, drawing closer to me, "they say, in Yian, the Kuen-Yuin live; God is but a name."

"They lie," I whispered, fiercely.

"Be careful," she pleaded; "they may hear you. Remember that you have the mark of the dragon's claw on your brow."

"What of it?" I asked, thinking also of the white mark on Barris' arm.

"Ah, don't you know that those who are marked with the dragon's claw are followed by Yue-Laou, for good or for evil—and the evil means death if you offend him?"

"Do you believe that?" I asked, impatiently.

"I know it," she sighed.

"Who told you all this? Your stepfather? What in heaven's name is he, then—a Chinaman?"

And the creature on the shore below? What was my horror to see a moon, large, silvery, rise like a bubble from between his fingers, mount higher, higher into the still air and hang aloft in the midnight sky, while another moon rose from his fingers, and another and yet another until the vast sun of Heaven was set with moons and the earth sparkled like a diamond in the white glare.

A great wind began to blow from the east and it bore to our ears a long mournful howl—a cry so unearthly that for a moment our hearts stopped.

"The Yeth-hounds!" sobbed Ysande; "do you hear?—they are passing through the forest! The Xin is near!"

Then all around us in the dry sedge grasses came a rustle as if some small animal were creeping, and a damp acrid odor filled the air. I knew the smell. I saw the spidery, crab-like creatures swarm out around me and drag their soft yellow hairy bodies across the shrinking grasses. They passed, hundreds of them, poisoning the air, tumbling, writhing, crawling with their blind, mouthless heads raised. Birds, half asleep and confused by the darkness, fluttered away before them in helpless flight; rabbits sprang from their forms, weasels glided away like flying shadows. What remained of the forest creatures rose and fled from the loathsome invasion. I heard the squeak of a terrified hare, the short stampeding of a deer and the lumbering gallop of a bear; and all the time I was choking, half suffocated by the poisoned air.

Then, as I struggled to free myself from the silken snare about me, I cast a glance of deadly fear at the sorcerer below, and at the same moment I saw him turn in his tracks.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes.

"Barris!" I shouted, half leaping up in my agony.

I saw the sorcerer spring forward. I heard the bang! bang! bang! of a revolver, and as the sorcerer fell on the water's edge, I saw Barris jump out into the white glare and fire again, once, twice, three times, into the writhing figure at his feet.

Then an awful thing occurred. Up out of the black lake reared a shadow, a nameless, shapeless mass, headless, sightless, gigantic, gaping from end to end.

A great wave struck Barris and he fell, another whirled him back into the water and then—and then the thing fell over him—and I fainted.

This, then, is all that I know concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin. I do not fear the ridicule of scientists or of the press for I have told the truth. Barris is gone and the thing that killed him is alive today, in the Lake of the Stars, while the spider-like satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods.

The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles that creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

Gen. Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written:

Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him or he will kill me. He made and gave to me the woman I loved—he made her—I saw him—she made her out of a white water-lily bud. When our child was born, he came again before me and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysande, may be my child. God help you if you love her, for Yue-Laou will give—and take away, as though he were Xans, which in God, I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest—or he will kill me.

FRANKLIN BARRIS.

Now, the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first government party to drag the Lake of the Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assemble, and a well-armed force, for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysande and myself unconscious on the lake shore, the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear, and Ysande fears, that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the golden serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes color.

David and the dogs are waiting for me in the courtyard as I write. Pierpont is in the gunroom loading shells, and Howlett brings him mud after some of my ale from the wood. Ysande bends over my desk—I feel her hand on my arm, and she is saying: "Don't you think you have done enough today, dear? How can you write such silly nonsense without a shadow of truth or foundation?"

THE END.

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—Peoria Star, January 16, 1909.

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