

DREAM OF THE RAREBIT FRIEND



THE KINGDOM OF SLENDER SWORDS

An International Romance by **Hallie Erminie Rives**
 Author of *Satan Sanderson*, *Hearts Courageous*, *The Castaway*, Etc.

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CHAPTER XII—Continued.

She leaned her dark head against his blue-clad shoulder and drew the scroll from his trembling fingers.

"I wind your words about my heart," she said. "Waiting is best. Perhaps the evil times will withdraw. I have prayed to the Christian God concerning it. But your eyes are awfully wearied. Let me read to you a while."

He seated himself on the mat, his gaunt hands buried in his sleeves, and, snuffing the wick in the andon, she began to read the archaic "grass-writing." It was the Eshudai Zatsawa of Kyuso Moro.

"Be not samurai through the wearing of two swords, but day and night have a bell-choker. As he hearkens it out, the insect chirped like a silver cymbal. 'Find more ones,' he said laconically.

"And what shall you do with them, I wonder."

He took one foot from its clog and wriggled bare toes in the grass. "Give him to new little sister," he said.

"So you have a new little sister?" exclaimed Barbara. "How fine that must be!"

A glass of something like disappointment spread over the diminutive face. "Small like," he said. "More better want a brother to play with me."

"Maybe you might exchange her for a brother," she hazarded, but the dropped head shook despondently.

Barbara laughed outright, a peal of silver sound that echoed across the garden—then suddenly drew back. A man on horseback was passing across the drive toward the main gate of the compound. It was Daunt, bareheaded, his handsome tanned face flushed with exercise, the breeze ruffling his moist, curling hair. She flashed him a smile as his riding-crop flew to his brow in salute. The sun glinted from his Damascus handle, wrought into the long, grotesque muzzle of a fox. Between the edges of the blue silk curtains she saw him turn in the saddle to look back before he disappeared.

She stood peering out a long time toward the low white cottage across the clipped lawn. The laughter had left her eyes, and gradually over her face grew a wave of sick color. She dropped the curtain and caught her hands to her cheeks. For an instant she had seemed to feel the pressure of strong arms, the touch of coarse tweed vividly reminiscent of a pipe.

What had come over her? The one day that had dawned at sea in golden fire and died in crimson and purple over a file of convicts—the dreaming sight with its temple bells striking through silver mist and violet shadows—these had left her the same Barbara that she had always been. But somewhere, somehow, in the closed quiet between the then and now, something new and strange and sweet had waked in her—something that the sound of a voice in the garish sunlight had started into clamorous reverberations.

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CHAPTER XV.

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"Have you so much about you?" he countered.

"That's a subterfuge."

"You wouldn't be flattered to hear them, I'm afraid."

"The reflection is certainly a sad blow to my self-esteem!"

"Well," he said darily, "I was thinking how I would like to pick you up in my arms before all these people and run right out in the center of that field."

She flushed to the tips of her ears. "And then—"

"Just run, and run, and run away!"

"What a heroic exploit!" she said with

subtle mockery, but the flush deepened.

"You know to what lengths I can go in my longing to be a hero!" he muttered.

"Running off with girls under your arm seems to have become a mania. But isn't your idea rather prosaic in this age of flying machines? To swoop down on one in an aeroplane would be so much more thrilling! This is the field where you practice, too, isn't it? Is that building away over there where you keep your Glider?"

"Yes. At first I made the models in a Japanese house of mine near here. I keep it still, for sentiment."

"How fine to meet a man who admits to having sentiment! I'm tremendously interested in Japanese houses. You must show it to me."

"I will. And when will you let me take you for a fly?"

"I'm relieved," she said, "to find you willing to ask permission."

Her eyes sparkled into his, and both laughed. Patricia was chatting animatedly with Count Vovnich, a young diplomatist, whose monocle looked absurdly contemplative and serene under a menacing helmet. The confusion of many colors, the pomp and dandyism under the day's golden azure, was singing in Barbara's veins.

Daunt, watching Barbara, saw the light leading in her brown eyes, the excitement coming and going in her face. Again and again he fixed his gaze before him, as infantry, cavalry and artillery marched and pounded and rumbled past. In vain. Like a willful drunkard it returned to intoxicate itself with the sight of her eager beauty, that made the scene for him only a splendor of light and color, a blur, an extraneous impression of masses of swaying bodies moving like marionettes, of glistening bayonets, horses, clattering ammunition wagons and fluttering pennants.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Silent Understanding.

Phil descended from his rick-sha at the Tokyo club and paid the coolie.

The building faced an open square before the imperial hotel and the Parliament buildings, along one of the smaller picturesque streets, which the fever for modernization was now filling in to make a conventional boulevard. A motor shed stood at the side of the plaza and an automobile or two was generally in evidence. The structure was small but comfortable enough, with reading and card rooms and a billiard room of many tables. The door was opened by a servile bell boy in buttons. Phil tossed his hat on to the hall rack and entered. He strode through the office and entered a large, glass-fronted piazza where a number of Japanese, some in foreign, some in native costume, were watching a game of go. Presently he reappeared in the next room. Here his eye lightened. Sitting in a corner of one of the huge sofas which sank under his enormous weight was Dr. Bersonin. A little round table was before him, on which sat a tall glass frosted with cracked ice.

"Sit down," said the expert. "How do you come to be in Tokyo? The Review, I presume." He struck a call bell on the table and gave an order to the waiter.

Phil lighted a cigarette. "No," he said. "I've come to stay for a while."

"You haven't given up your bungalow on

the Bluff?" asked Bersonin quickly. There was an odd eagerness in his colorless face—a look of almost dread, which Phil, lighting his cigarette, did not see. It changed to relief as the other answered:

"No. Probably I shan't be here more than a few days."

The expert settled back in his seat. "You'll not find the hotel everything it should be, I'm afraid," he observed more casually.

"I'm not there," Phil answered. "I've got a little Japanese house."

"So! A menage de garçon, eh?" The big man held up his clinking glass to the light, and under cover of it his deep-set yellowish eyes darted a keen, detective look at Phil's averted face. "Well," he went on, "how are your affairs? Has the stern brother appeared yet?"

Phil shifted uneasily. "No," he replied. "I expect him pretty soon, though." He drained the glass the boy had filled. "You've been tremendously kind, doctor," he went on hurriedly, "to lend me so much, without the least bit of security."

"Pshaw!" said Bersonin. "Why shouldn't I? He put his hand on the other's shoulder with a friendly rest. "I only wish money could give me as much pleasure as it does you, my boy."

Phil moved his glass on the table top in silent circles. "But suppose one hasn't the 'wherewithal' you talk of? What's the fun without money, even when you're young? I've never been able to discover it."

"Find the money," said Bersonin.

"I wish someone would tell me how!"

Bersonin's head turned toward the door. He sat suddenly rigid. It came to Phil that he was listening intently to the talk between the two men in the next room.

"I needn't point out—it was a measured voice, cold and incisive and deliberate—that when the American fleet came, two years ago, conditions were quite different. The cruise was a national tour de force; the visit to Japan was incidental. Besides, there was really no feeling then between the two nations—that was all a creation of the yellow press. But the coming of this European squadron today is a different thing. It is a season of general sensitiveness and distrust, and when the ships belong to a nation between which and Japan there is a real and serious diplomatic tension, well, in my opinion the time is, at best, inopportune."

"Perhaps—a younger voice was speaking now, less certain, less poised and a little hesitant—perhaps the very danger makes for caution. People are particularly careful with matches when there's a lot of powder about."

"True, as far as intention goes. But there is the possibility of some contrivance. You remember the case of the Ajax in the Eighties. It was blown up in a friendly harbor—clearly enough by accident, at least so far as the other nation was concerned. But it was during a time of strain and hot blood, and you know how narrowly a great clash was averted. If war had followed, the frontiers shouting, 'Remember the Ajax!' As it was, there was a panic in three hours. Solid securities fell to the lowest point in their history. The yellow press pounded down the market and a few speculators on the short side made gigantic fortunes."

A moment's pause ensued. Bersonin's fingers were rigid. There seemed suddenly to Phil to be some significance between his silence and the conversation—as if he wished it to sink into his Phil's mind. The voice continued:

"What has happened once may happen again. What if one of those dreadnoughts by whatever accident should go down in this friendly harbor? It doesn't take a vivid imagination to picture the headlines next morning in the newspapers at home!"

The ice in the tumblers clinked; there was a sound of pushed-back chairs.

As their departing footsteps died in the hall Bersonin's gaze lifted slowly to Phil's face. It had in it now the look it had held when he gazed from the roof of the bungalow on the Bluff across the anchor-

age beneath. Phil did not start or shrink. Instead, the slinking evil that ruled him met half-way the bolder evil in that glance, from whose sinister suggestion the veil was for a moment lifted, recognizing a tacit kinship. Neither spoke, but as the hard young eyes looked into the cavernous, topaz eyes of Dr. Bersonin, Phil knew that the thought that lay coiled there was a thing unholily and unafraid. His heart beat faster, but it warmed. He felt no longer awed by the other's greater age, standing and accomplishments. He was conscious of a new, half-insolent sense of easy comradeship.

"Suppose," said Bersonin slowly, "I should show you how to find the money?"

A sharp sarcasm darted across Phil's face. "Money? How much he needed it, longed for it! It could put him on his feet, clear off his debts, square his bridge-balance, and—his brother notwithstanding!—enable him to begin another chapter of the careless life he loved! He looked steadily into the expert's face.

"Tell me!" he almost whispered.

Bersonin rose and held out his hand. He did not smile.

"Come with me tonight," he said. "I dine late, but we'll take a spin in my car and have some tea somewhere beforehand. Tell me where your house is and I'll send Ishida with the motor car for you."

Phil gave him the address and he went out with no further word. A great, brass-fitted automobile, with a young, keen-eyed Japanese sitting beside the chauffeur, throbbed up from the shed. Bersonin climbed ponderously in. A gray-haired diplomatist, entering the club with a stranger, pointed the big man out to the other as he was whirled away.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Barbara Awoke.

When Barbara awoke next morning she lay for a moment staring open-eyed from her big pillow at the white wall above, where a hanging-shelf projected to guard the sleeper from falling plaster in earthquake. The room was filled with a soft light that filtered in through the split-bamboo blinds. Then she remembered: it was her first whole day in Japan.

From a distance, high and clear, she heard a strain of bugles from some squad of soldiers going to barracks, or perhaps the parade-ground, where she remembered an imperial review of troops was to be held that morning.

She felt full of joy, as had never felt before. Slipping a thin rose-colored robe over her nightgown, she threw open the window and leaned out.

As she stood there bathed in the sunlight, her hands dividing the curtains, Barbara made a gracious part of the glimmering setting. Her thick, ruddy hair sprang curling from her strongly modeled forehead, and fell about her white shoulders, a warm red-tinted mass against the delicate tinted curtain. There was a thoughtful straightness in the lines of the tall figure, in the curve of the cheek and the round directness of the chin, and her eyes, bent on the lucent green, were the color of brown sea water under sapphirine cloud-shadows.

Barbara started suddenly, to see on the lawn just below her window, a figure three feet high, with a round, cropped head, gazing at her from a solemn, inquiring countenance. He wore a much-

CHAPTER XIV.

A Face in the Crowd.

They rode to the parade ground—Barbara and Patricia with the ambassador, behind

his pair of Kentucky grays—along wide streets grown festive overnight and buzzing with rick-sha and pedestrians. Every gateway held crossed flags bearing the blood-red rising sun and colored paper lanterns were swung in festoons along the sandy blocks of shops as wide open as tiers of cut honeycomb.

The horses trotted on, to drop to a walk presently on a brick incline. High, slanting retaining walls were on either side and double rows of cherry trees, whose interlacing branches wove a roof of soft pink bloom.

"Why, there's little Ishikichi," said Patricia. "I never saw him so far from home before. Isn't that a queer looking man with him!"

The solemn six-year-old, Barbara's window acquaintance of the morning, was trotting from the inclosure, his small fingers clutching the hand of a foreigner. The latter was of middle age. His coat was a heavy, double-breasted "reefer." His battered hat, wide-brimmed and soft-crowned, was a joke. But his linen was fresh and good and his clumsy shoes did not conceal the smallness and shapeliness of his feet. He was lithe and well built, and moved with an easy swing of shoulder and a step at once quick and graceful. His back was toward them, but Barbara could see his long, gray-black hair, a square brow above an aquiline profile at once bold and delicate, and a drooping mustache shot with gray. Many people seemed to regard him, but he spoke to no one save his small companion. His manner, as he bent down, had something caressing and confiding.

At the sound of wheels the man turned all at once toward them. As his gaze met Barbara's, she thought a startled look shot across it. At side view his face had seemed a dark olive, but now in the vivid sunlight it showed blanched. His eyes were deep in arched orbits. One, she noted, was curiously prominent and dilated. From a certain bird-like turn of the head, she had an impression that this one eye was nearly if not wholly sightless. All this passed through her mind in a flash, even while she wondered at his apparent astonishment.

For as he gazed, he had dropped the child's hand. She saw his lips compress in an expression grim and forbidding. He made an involuntary movement, as though mastered by a quick impulse. Then, in a breath, his face changed. He sprang back, turned sharply into the park and was lost among the trees.

"What an odd man!" exclaimed Patricia. "I suppose he resented our staring at him. He's left the little chap all alone, too. Stop the horses a moment, Tucker," she directed, and as they pulled up she called to the child.

But there was no reply. Ishikichi looked at her a moment frowningly, then, without a word, turned and stalked sulkily, after his companion.

"What an infant 'thunder cloud'!" said Patricia, as the carriage proceeded. "That must be where our precious prodigy gets his English. Poor little!" she added. "He was the inseparable of the son of Toru, the flower dealer opposite the embassy. Barbara, and the dear little fellow was run over and killed last week by a foreign carriage. No doubt he's grieving over it, but in Japan even the babies are trained not to

show what they feel. I wonder who this new friend is?"

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