The Carpet from Bagdad

by HAROLD MacGRATH

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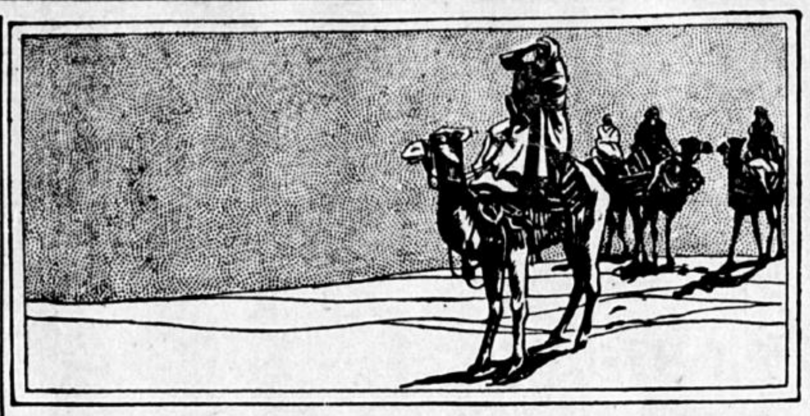

"Along Comes a Pack of Cards or a Bottle of Wine, and Back I Slip."

SYNOPSIS.

George Percival Algernon Jones, vice-president of the Metropolitan Oriental Rug company of New York, thirsting for romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Horace Ryanne arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Ryanne sells Jones the famous holy Yhiordes 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 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 accosts Ryanne and demands the Yhiordes 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 calling him to meet Ryanne 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 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 spurns 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.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

Ryanne folded his arms and stared at the sand. George sat down and aimlessly hunted for the stub of the cigar he had dropped; a kind of reflex action.

The two men were all alone. The camel-boys were asleep. Mahomed had now ceased to bother about a guard.

"I can't see where she gets this ridiculous sense of honesty," said Ryanne gloomily.

George leaned over and laid his hand upon Ryanne's knee. "She gets it the same way I do, Ryanne—from here," touching his heart; "and she is right."

"I believe I've missed everything worth while, Percival. Till I met you I always had a sneaking idea that money made a man evil. The boot seems to be upon the other foot."

"Ryanne, you spoke about becoming honest, once you get out of this. Did you mean it?"

"I did, and still do."

"It may be that I can give you a lift. You worked in your father's bank. You know something about figures. I own two large fruit-farms in California. What do you say to a hundred and fifty a month to start with, and begin life over again?"

Ryanne got up and restlessly paced. [illegible] had been beaten out of him, the [illegible] humor which had always been so pleasant to excite, [illegible] given him a foothold [illegible] was gone. He had [illegible] a hurt, biting, bitter [illegible] he stopped in front [illegible] and looked up [illegible] with your finger into water and withdraw it, what happens? Nothing. Well, the man who gives me a benefit is sticking his finger into water. I'm just as unstable. How many promises have I made and broken! I mean, promises to myself. I don't know. This moment I swear to be good, and along comes a pack of cards or a bottle of wine, and back I slip. Would it be worth while to trust a man so damned weak as that? Look at me. I am six-foot two, normally a hundred and eighty pounds, no fat. I am as sound as a cocoanut. There isn't a boxer in the States I'm afraid of. I can ride, shoot, fence, fight; there isn't a game I can't take a creditable hand in. So much for that. There's the other side. Morally, I'm putty. When it's soft you can mold it any which way; when it's hard, it crumbles. Will you trust a man like that?"

"Yes. Out there you'll be away from temptation."

"Perhaps. Well, I accept. And if one day I'm missing, think kindly of the poor devil of an outcast who wanted to be good and couldn't be. I'm fagged. I'm going to turn in. Good-night."

He picked up his blanket and saddle-bags and made his bed a dozen yards away.

George set his gaze at the fire, now falling in places and showing incandescent holes. A month ago, in the rut of commonplace, moving round in oiled grooves of mediocrity. Bang! like a rocket. Why, never had those liars in the smoke-rooms recounted anything half so wild and strange as this adventure. Smugglers, card-sharps, an ancient rug, a caravan in the desert! He turned his head and looked long and earnestly at the little tent. Love, too; love that had put into his diffident heart the thrill and courage of a Bayard. Love! He saw her again as she stepped down from the carriage; in the dining-room at his side, leaning over the parapet; ineffably sweet, hauntingly sad. Would she accept the refuge he had offered? He knew that old Mortimer would take her without question. Would she accept the shelter of that kindly roof? She must! If she refused and went her own way into the world, he would lose her for ever. She must accept! He would plead with all the eloquence of his soul, for his own happiness, and mayhap hers. He rose, faced the tent, and, with a gesture not unlike that of the pagan in prayer, registered a vow that never should she want for protection, never should she want for the comforts of life. How he was going to keep such a vow was a question that did not enter his head. Somehow he was going to accomplish the feat.

What mattered the ragged beard upon his face, the ragged clothes upon his body, the tattered cloths upon his feet, the grotesque attitude and ensemble? The Lord of Life saw into his heart and understood. And who might say with what joy Pandora gazed upon her work, knowing as she did what still remained within her casket?

From these heights, good occasionally for any man's soul, George came down abruptly and humanly to the prosaic question of where would he make his bed that night? To lie down at the north side of the fire meant a chill in the morning; the south side, the intermittent, acrid breath of the fire itself; so he threw down his blanket and bags east of the fire, wrapped himself up, and sank into slumber, light but dreamless.

What was that? He sat up, alert, straining his ears. How long had he been asleep? An hour by his watch. What had awakened him? Not a sound anywhere, yet something had startled him out of his sleep. He glanced over the camp. That bundle was Ryanne. He waited. Not a movement there. No sign of life among the camel-boys; and the flaps of the two tents were closed. Bah! Nerves, probably; and he would have lain down again had his gaze not roved out toward the desert. Something moved out there, upon the misty, moonlit space. He shaded his eyes from the fire, now but a heap of glowing embers. He got up, and shiver after shiver wrinkled his spine. Oh, no; it could not be a dream; he was awake. It was a living thing, that long, bobbing camel-train, coming directly toward the oasis, no doubt attracted by the firelight. Fascinated, incapable of movement, he watched the approach. Three white dots; and these grew and grew and at length became . . . pith-helmets! Pith-helmets! Who but white men wore pith-helmets in the desert? White men! The temporary paralysis left him. Crouching, he ran over to Ryanne and shook him.

"What . . . "

But George smothered the question with his hand. "Hush! For God's sake, make no noise! Get up and stand guard over Fortune's tent. There's a caravan outside, and I'm going out to meet it. Ryanne, Ryanne, there's a white man out there!"

George ran as fast as he could toward the incoming caravan. He met it two or three hundred yards away. The broken line of camels bobbed up and down oddly.

"Are you white men?" he called.

"Yes," said a deep, resonant voice. "And stop where you are; there's no hurry."

"Thank God!" cried George, at the verge of a breakdown.

"What the devil . . . Flanagan, here's a white man in a dress-suit! God save us!" The speaker laughed.

"Yes, a white man; and there's a white woman in the camp back there, a white woman! Great God, don't you understand? A white woman!" George clutched the man by the foot desperately. "A white woman!"

The man kicked George's hand away and slashed at his camel. "Flanagan, and you, Williams, get your guns in shape. This doesn't look good to me, twenty miles from the main gamelieh. I told you it was odd, that fire. Lively, now!"

George ran after them, staggering. Twice he fell headlong. But he laughed as he got up; and it wasn't exactly human laughter, either. When he reached camp he saw Mahomed and the three strangers, the latter with their rifles held menacingly. Fortune stood before the flap of her tent, bewildered at the turn in their affairs. Behind the leader of the new-comers was Ryanne, and he was talking rapidly.

"Well," the leader demanded of Mahomed, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!"

"Take care! It wouldn't come hard to put a bullet into your ugly hide. You can't abduct white women these days, you beggar! Well, what have you to say?"

Mahomed folded his arms; his expression was calm and unafraid. But down in his heart the fires of hell were raging. If only he had brought his rifle from the tent; even a knife; and one mad moment if he died for it! And he had been gentle to the girl; he had withheld the lash from the men; he had not put into action a single plan arranged for their misery and humiliation! Truly his blood had turned to water, and he was worthy of death. The white man, always and ever the white man won in the end. To have come this far, and then to be cheated out of his revenge by chance! Kismet! There was but one thing left for him to do, and he did it. He spoke hurriedly to his head-boy. The boy without hesitation obeyed him. He ran to the racing-camel, applied a kick, flung on the saddle-bags, stuffed dates and dried fish and two water-bottles into them, and waited. Mahomed walked over to the animal and mounted.

"Stop!" The white man leveled his rifle. "Get down from there!"

Mahomed, as if he had not heard, kicked the camel with his heels. The beast lurched to its feet resentfully. Mahomed picked up the guiding-rope which served as a bridle, and struck the camel across the neck.

Click! went the hammer of the rifle, and Mahomed was at that moment very near death. He gave no heed.

"No, no!" cried Fortune, pushing up the barrel. "Let him go. He was kind to me, after his fashion."

Mahomed smiled. He had expected this, and that was why he had gone about the business unconcernedly.

"What do you say?" demanded the stranger of Ryanne.

Ryanne, having no love whatever for Mahomed, shrugged.

"Humph! And you?" to George.

"Oh, let him go."

"All right. Two to one. Off with you, then," to Mahomed. "But wait! What about these beggars of yours? What are you going to do with them?"

"They have been paid. They can go back."

The moment the camel felt the sand under his pads, he struck his gait eastward. And when the mists and shadows crept in behind him and his rider, that was the last any of them ever saw of Mahomed-El-Gebel, keeper of the Holy Yhiordes in the Pasha's palace at Bagdad.

"Now, then," said the leader of the strange caravan, "my name is Ackermann, and mine is a carpet-caravan in from Khuzistan, bound for Smyrna. How may I help you?"

"Take us as far as Damascus," answered Ryanne. "We can get on from there well enough."

"What's your name?" directly.

"Ryanne."

"And yours?"

"Fortune Chedsoye."

"Next?"

"Jones."

The humorous bruskness put a kind of spirit into them all, and they answered smilingly.

"Ryanne and Jones are familiar enough, but Chedsoye is a new one. Here, you!" whirling suddenly upon the boys who were pressing about. He volleyed some Arabic at them, and they dropped back. "Well, I've heard some strange yarns myself in my time, but this one beats, them all. Shanghaied from Cairo! Humph! If some one had told me this, anywhere else but here, I'd have called him a liar. And you, Mr. Ryanne, went into Bagdad alone and got away with that Yhiordes! It must have been the devil's own of a job."

"It was," replied Ryanne laconically. He did not know this man Ackermann; he had never heard of him; but he recognized a born leader of men when he saw him. Gray-haired, lean, bearded, sharp of word, quick of action, rude; he saw in this carpet-hunter the same indomitable qualities of the ivory-seeker. "You did not stop at Bagdad?" he asked, after the swift inventory.

"No. I came direct. I always do," grimly. "Better turn in and sleep; we'll be on the way at dawn, sharp."

"Sleep?" Ryanne laughed.

"Sleep?" echoed George.

Fortune shook her head.

"Well, an hour to let the reaction wear away," said Ackermann. "But you've got to sleep. I'm boss now, and you won't find me an easy one," with a humorous glance at the girl.

"We are all very happy to be bossed by you," she said.

"Twenty days," Ackermann mused. "You're a plucky young woman. No hysterics?"

"Not even a sigh of discontent," put in George. "If it hadn't been for her pluck, we'd have gone to pieces just from worry. Are you Henry Ackermann, of the Oriental Company in Smyrna?"

"Yes; why?"

"I'm George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, New York. I've heard of you; and God bless you for this night's work!"

"Mortimer & Jones? You don't say! Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch! Why, if you're Robert E. Jones' boy, I'll sell you every carpet in the pack at cost." He laughed; and it was laughter good to hear, dry and harsh though it was. "Your dad was a fine gentleman, and one of the best judges of his time. You couldn't fool him a knot. He wrote me when you came into this world of sin and tribulation. Didn't they call you Percival Algernon, or something like that?"

"They did!" And George laughed, too.

"You're a sight. Any one sick? Got a medicine-chest aboard?"

"No. only banged up and discouraged. I say, Mr. Ackermann, got an extra pipe or two and some 'baccy?"

"Flanagan, see what's in the chest."

Shortly Flanagan returned. He had half a dozen fresh corn-cob pipes and a thick bag of tobacco. George and Ryanne lighted up, about as near contentment as two men in their condition could possibly be.

Said Flanagan to Fortune: "Do you chew?"

Fortune looked horrified.

"Oh, I mean gum!" roared Flanagan.

No, Fortune did not possess that dubious accomplishment.

"Mighty handy when you're thirsty," Flanagan advised.

They built up the fire and sat round it cosily. They were all more or less happy, all except Fortune. So long as she had been a captive of Mahomed, she had forced the thought from her mind; but now it came back with a full measure of misery. Never, never would she return to Mentone, not even for the things that were rightfully hers. Where would she go and what would she do? She was without money and the only thing she possessed of value was the Soudanese trinket Ryanne had forced upon her that day in the bazaars. She heard the men talking and laughing, but without sensing. No, she could not accept charity. She must fight out her battle all alone. . . . The child of a thief: for never would her clear mind accept smuggling as other than thieving. . . . Neither could she accept pity; and she stole a glance at George, as he blew clouds of smoke luxuriantly from his mouth and nose, his eyes half closed in ecstasy. How little it took to comfort a man!

Ryanne suddenly lowered his pipe and smote his thigh. "Hell!" he muttered.

"What's up?" asked George.

"I want you to look at me, Percival; I want you to take a good look at this thing I've been carrying round as a head."

"It looks all right," observed George, puzzled.

"Empty as a dried cocoanut! I never thought of it till this moment. I wondered why he was in such a hurry to get out. I've let that copper-hided devil get away with that nine hundred pounds!"

"I'm George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, New York."

CHAPTER XVII.

Mrs. Chedsoye Has Doubts.

Mrs. Chedsoye retired to her room early that memorable December night. Her brother could await the return of Horace. She hadn't the least doubt as to the result; a green young man pitted against a seasoned veteran's duplicity. She wished Jones no harm physically; in fact, she had put down the law against it. Still, much depended upon chance. But for all her confidence of the outcome, a quality of restlessness pervaded her. She tried to analyze it, ineffectually at first. Perhaps she did not look deep enough; perhaps she did not care thoroughly to examine the source of it. Insistently, however, it recurred; and by repeated assaults it at length conquered her. It was the child.

Did she possess, after all, a latent sense of motherhood, and was it stirring to establish itself? She really did not know. Was it not fear and doubt rather than motherly instinct? She paused in front of the mirror, but the glass solved only externals. She could not see her soul there in the reflection; she saw only the abundant gifts of nature, splendid, double-handed, prodigal. And in contemplating that reflection, she forgot for a space what she was seeking. But that child! From whom did she inherit her peculiar ideas of life? From some Puritan ancestor of her father's; certainly not from her side. She had never bothered her head about Fortune, save to house and clothe her, till the past forty-eight hours. And now it was too late to pick up the thread she had cast aside as not worth considering. To no one is given perfect wisdom; and she recognized the flaw in hers that had led her to ignore the mental attitude of the girl. She had not even made a friend of her; a mistake, a bit of stupidity absolutely foreign to her usual keenness. The child lacked little of being beautiful, and in three or four years she would be. Mrs. Chedsoye was without jealousy; she accepted beauty in all things unreservedly. Possessing as she did an incomparable beauty of her own, she could well afford to be generous. Perhaps the true cause of this disturbance lay in the knowledge that there was one thing her daughter had inherited from her directly, almost identically; indeed, of this pattern the younger possessed the wider margin of the two: courage. Mrs. Chedsoye was afraid of nothing except wrinkles, and Fortune was too young to know this fear. So then, the mother slowly began to comprehend the spirit which had given life to this singular perturbation. Fortune had declared that she would run away; and she had the courage to carry out the threat.

Resolutely Mrs. Chedsoye rang for her maid Celeste. Thoughts like these only served to disturb the marble smoothness of her forehead.

The two began to pack. That is to say, Celeste began; Mrs. Chedsoye generally took charge of these maneuvers from the heights, as became the officer in command. Bending was likely to enlarge the vein in the neck; and all those beautiful gowns would not be worth a soldi without the added perfection of her lineless throat and neck. She was getting along in years, too, a fact which was assuming the proportions of a cross; and more and more she must husband those lingering (not to say beguiling) evidences of youthfulness.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Your Temper and Your Cat's.

Cats are of a high strung and sensitive nature, easily influenced by their surroundings. If you wish a fine tempered, nice little home loving cat you must possess some of these attributes yourself.

You cannot expect to have a very amiable animal if you are cranky all the time. Give the animal credit for being a good imitator. If you are vile tempered and given to striking the kitten, find no fault if the cat has a like manner and strikes people and smaller animals.—Dumb Animals.

Human Burrs in the World

Unwise People Who Bore Their Friends With Their Display of Lack of Tact.

Do you ever encounter inquisitive people who are really annoying—people who have not the least interest in your affairs, but simply "want to know" out of idle curiosity? A great share of America's reputation for rudeness may be laid entirely to the charge of their riling questions. Equally undesirable is the person who confides her family troubles to all her friends. Instead of putting the stoutest kind of padlock on the closet door where the family skeleton lurks, some women shamelessly drag it out and parade in the public eye.

The too-friendly individual who runs in at all hours without ringing and offers her services upon every occasion, and the woman who monopolizes or tries to monopolize all the time and attention of her friends is likewise to be avoided. "Dearie, if you are thinking of going shopping this week, let me know and I'll go with you. Stop for me if you go to the matinee on Wednesday."

It never occurs to them that their company might not be appreciated. But just as the burrs of the field make us appreciate the flowers more than ever, so do the human burrs teach us to rejoice in the pleasant, considerate, sensible friends that fall to one's lot for the latter outnumber the former many, many times.—Exchange.

Esperanto.

The artificial key-language known as "Esperanto" is the invention of Dr. Zamenhof, a native of Grodno, in Russian Poland, who first produced his system in 1887 by the publication of "An International Language." The leading characteristics of Esperanto are its "simplicity of construction, the facility by which it may be acquired and the practical ease and euphony of its pronunciation," to use the language of its advocates. The alphabet is composed of twenty-eight letters, each letter having an invariable sound, the vocabulary consisting of some 900 roots selected from the most familiar tongues. Since 1887 Esperanto has greatly increased in use, but many think it will never be made to serve the purpose for which its inventor designed it—a universal language.

Girl Walks to Work Asleep.

Miss Nellie Lerra, a pretty young girl of Point township, in her sleep early this morning arose from her bed and walked to a local cap factory, where she was an employe. She was barefooted and attired only in a flimsy low-necked night gown. She was not seen by anybody and finally reached the factory and was about to try to enter when the tooting of a locomotive close by woke her.

Realizing her predicament, the girl grew excited and ran back home at top speed. She fell senseless from nervous exhaustion to the floor of her home.—Northumberland Correspondent Pittsburg Post.

BIGGEST RACE PROBLEM.

"Bre'er Jones, does you think de devil is a black man or a white man?"

"I dunno; an' all I does know is—de biggest race problem is how ter keep ten yards ahead of him!"

URGING GREAT SALE OF CANNED FOODS

Dealers, grocers, jobbers and manufacturers all over the country are joining hands during the week of March 31st to April 5th in an effort to acquaint housewives with the economy and quality of canned foods.

It is now a well known fact that heat is the only preservative used in preparing these economical foods. The cans are sealed and sterilized at a temperature of 250 degrees, which prevents any contamination and keeps the contents fresh and wholesome as the day the tins were filled in the canneries.

National Canned Foods Week, during which dealers and grocers will make canned foods their sales-features, is for the purpose of demonstrating to housewives that the cost of living can be cut with such foods, and that they may be served in hundreds of delightful ways, and thus served daily without monotony.

The farmer's wife especially finds it advantageous to relieve herself of all the cooking possible and Canned Foods enable her to do this and at the same time improve the quality of her meals.

Women in every community should observe National Canned Foods Week by going to the dealers and putting in a supply. The saving and general satisfaction in the use of Canned Foods is entirely worth while.—Adv.

Too Much.

"My feelings have been lacerated."

"Did it take?"

PILES CURED IN 6 TO 14 DAYS

Your druggist will refund money if PAZO OINTMENT fails to cure any case of Itching, Blind, Bleeding or Protruding Piles in 6 to 14 days. 50c.

His Contribution.

"Did old Closefist give you anything for the charity benefit fund?"

"Oh, yes; he gave me his candid opinion of it."

Important to Mothers

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, a safe and sure remedy for infants and children, and see that it Bears the Signature of Chas. H. Fletcher. In Use For Over 30 Years.

Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria

Mistake.

Bobby was saying his prayers in a very low voice.

"I can't hear you, dear," his mother whispered.

"I wasn't talking to you," replied Bobby, firmly.—Harper's Magazine.

Reasonable Favor.

"So you have determined to sue me for breach of promise?"

"Yes."

"With damages?"

"Of course."

"Well, say, I've got just one favor to ask of you. Don't sue me for less than $100,000. I haven't got a dollar in the world that I can call my own and it might help my credit."

In Private.

As he started out with the bushel of ashes he walked into a clothesline that he didn't see.

When he had picked himself out of the ash pile and recovered his hat he stood in the back yard and relieved his feelings.

"Henry," called his wife.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Don't stand out there to do it. Come straight into the house and tell me that it's all my fault."

His Best Friend.

"Well, what did you do when the problem came up?"

"Wasted time. Went out and asked the adivce of 17 friends."

"What did you get?"

"Seventeen different solutions."

"And then?"

"Then I took the advice of an eighteenth friend and won out."

"And who was your eighteenth friend?"

"Myself."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

A Jolly Good Day Follows A Good Breakfast

Try a dish of

Post Toasties

tomorrow morning.

These sweet, thin bits made from Indian Corn are cooked, toasted and sealed in tight packages without the touch of human hand.

They reach you fresh and crisp—ready to eat from the package by adding cream or milk and a sprinkling of sugar, if desired.

Toasties are a jolly good dish—

Nourishing Satisfying Delicious