

**The Carpet from Bagdad**

by **HAROLD MAC GRATH**  
 Author of **HEARTS AND MASKS**  
**The MAN ON THE BOX etc.**  
 Illustrations by **M. G. KETNER**  
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CHAPTER VIII.

**The Purloined Cable.**  
 George, having made his bargain with conscience relative to the Yliordes rug, slept the sleep of the untroubled, of the just, of the man who had nothing in particular to get up for. In fact, after having drunk his breakfast cocoa and eaten his buttered toast, he evinced his satisfaction by turning his face away from the attracting morning light and passing off into sleep again. And thereby hangs this tale.

So much depended upon his getting this mail as it came in that morning, that Fate herself must have resisted stoutly the desire to shake him by the shoulder. Perhaps she would have done so but for the serenity of his pose and the infantile smile that lingered for a while round his lips. Fate, as with most of us, has her sentimental lapses.

The man next door, having no conscience to speak of (indeed, he had defrauded her while passing his twentieth meridian) was up betimes. He had turned in at four; at six he was strolling about the deserted lounging-room, watching the entrances. It is inconceivable how easily mail may be purloined in a large hotel. There are as many ways as points to the wind. Ryanne chose the simplest. He waited for the mail-bag to be emptied upon the head-porter's counter. Nonchalantly, but deftly, while the porter looked on, the adventurer ran through the bulk. He found three letters and a cable, the latter having been received by George's bankers the day before and mailed directly to the hotel. The porter had no suspicion that a bold theft was being committed under his very eyes. Moreover, circumstances prevented his ever learning of it. Ryanne stuffed the spoils into a pocket.

"If any one asks for me," he said, "say that I shall be at my banker's, the Anglo-Egyptian bank, at 10 o'clock."  
 "Yes, sir," replied the porter, as he began to sort the rest of the mail, not forgetting to peruse the postals.

Ryanne went out into the street, walking rapidly into town. Mahomed-El-Gebel shook the folds of his cloak and followed. The adventurer did not slacken his gait till he reached Sheppard's hotel. Upon the steps he paused. Some English troops were marching past, on the way to the railway station; the usual number of natives were patrolling the sidewalks, dangling strings of imitation scarabs; a caravan of pack-camels, laden with cotton, shuffled by laughily; a blind beggar sat on the curb in front, munching a piece of sugar cane. Ryanne, assured that no one he knew was about, proceeded into the writing-room, wholly deserted at this early hour.

He sat down at a desk and opened the cable. It contained exactly what he expected. It was a call for advice in regard to the rental of Mr. George P. A. Jones' mansion in New York and the temporary disposing of the loose valuables. Ryanne read it over a dozen times, with puckered brow, and finally bulled it fiercely in his fist. Fool! He could not, at that moment, remember the most essential point in the game, the name and office of the agent to whom he must this very morning send reply. Hurdled he fished out the letters; one chance in a thousand. He swore, but in relief. In the corner of one of the letters he saw that for some unknown reason the gods were still with him. Reynolds and Reynolds, estates, Broad street; he remembered. He wrote out a reply on a piece of hotel paper, intending to copy it off at the cable-office. This reply covered the ground convincingly. "Renting for two months. Old friends. Leave things as they are. P. A." The initials were a little stroka. From some source Ryanne has picked up the fact that Jones' business correspondence was conducted over those two initials. He tore up the cable into small illegible squares and dropped some into one basket and some into another. Next, he readdressed George's mail to Leipzig; another stroke, meaning a delay of two or three months; from the head office of his banker's there to Paris, Paris to Naples, Naples to New York. That Ryanne did not open these letters was in no wise due to moral suasion; whatever they contained could be of no vital importance to him.

bed of ease." Let him sleep. Many days were to pass ere he would again know the comfort of linen sheets, the luxury of down under his ear.

What to do? mused the rogue. On



The Porter Had No Suspicion That a Bold Theft Was Being Committed.

the morrow Mr. Jones would leave for Port Said. Ryanne shook his head and with his cane beat a light tattoo against the side of his shin. Abduction was rather out of his sphere of action. And yet, the suppression of Percival was by all odds the most important move to be made. He had volunteered this service and accomplish it he must, in face of all obstacles, or poof! went the whole droll fabric. For to him it was droll, and never it rose in his mind that he did not chuckle saturninely. It was a kind of nightmare where one hung in mid-air, one's toes just beyond the flaming dragon's jaws. The rewards would be enormous, but these he would gladly surrender for the supreme satisfaction of turning the poisoned arrow in the heart of that canting hypocrite, that smug church-deacon, the sanctimonious, the sleek, the well-fed first-born. And poor Percival Algegon, for no blame of his own, must be taken by the scruff of his neck and thrust bodily into this tangled web of scheme and under-scheme. It was infinitely humorous.

He had a vague plan regarding Mahomed, guardian of the Holy Yliordes, but it was not possible for him to be in Cairo at this early date. That he would eventually appear Ryanne never doubted. He knew the Oriental mind. Mahomed-El-Gebel would cross every barrier less effective than death. It was a serious matter to the Moslem. If he returned to the palace at Bagdad, minus the rug, it would mean free transportation to the Arabian gulf, bereft of the most important part of his excellent anatomy, his head. Some day, if he lived, Ryanne intended telling the exploit to some clever chap who wrote; it would look rather well in print.

To turn Mahomed against Percival as being the instigator would be an adroit bit of work; and it would rid him of both of them. Gioconda said that she wanted no rough work. How like a woman! Here was a man's game, a desperate one; and Gioconda, not forgetting that it was her inspiration, wanted it handled with gloves! It was bare-hand work, and the sooner she was made to realize this, the better. It was no time for tuning fiddles.

Mahomed out of it, there was a certain English bar in the Quarter Rosetta, a place of dubious repute. Many derelicts drifted there in search of employment still more dubious. Dregs, scum; the bottom and the top of the kettle; outcasts, whose hand and animus were directed against society; black and brown and white men; not soldiers of fortune, like Ryanne, but their camp-followers. In short, it was there (and Ryanne still felt a dull shame of it) that Wallace, carrying the final instructions of the enterprise, had found him, sleeping off the effects of a shabby ruf of the night before. It was there also that he had heard of the history and the worth of the Yliordes rug and the possibility of its theft. He laughed. To have gone upon an adventure like that, with nothing but the fumes of wine in his head!

For a few pieces of gold he might enroll under his shady banner three or four shining lights who would undertake the disposal of Percival. Not that he wished the young man any harm—no; but business was business, and in some way or another he must be made to vanish from the sight and presence of men for at least two months.

As for Major Callahan's unforeseen danger, the devil could look out for that.

Ryanne consulted his watch, a cheap

but trustworthy article, costing a dollar, not to be considered as an available asset. He would give it away later in the day; for he had decided that while he was in funds there would be wisdom in the purchase of a fine gold Longines. A good watch, as every one knows, is always as easily converted into cash as a London bank-note, providing, of course, one is lucky enough to possess either. Many watches had he left behind, in this place or in that; and often he had exchanged the ticket for a small bottle with a green neck. Wherever fortune had gone against him heavily at cards, there he might find his latest watch. Besides getting a new time-piece, he was strongly inclined to leave the bulk of his little fortune in the hotel-safe. One never could tell.

And another good idea, he mused, as he swung the time-piece into his vest-pocket, would be to add the splendor of a small white stone to his modicum of cash. There is only one well-defined precept among the sporting fraternity; when flush, buy jewelry. Not to the cause of vanity, not at all; but precious stones and gold watches constitute a kind of reserve-fund against the evil day. When one has money in the pocket the hand is quick and eager to find it. But jewelry is protected by a certain quality of caution; it is not too readily passed over bars and gaming-tables. While the pawnbroker stands between the passion and the green-baize, there's food for thought.

Having settled these questions to his satisfaction, there remained but one other, how to spend his time. It would be useless to seek the English-Bar before noon. Might as well ramble through the native town and the bazaars. He might pick up some little curio to give to Fortune. So he beckoned to an idle driver, climbed into the carriage, and was driven off as if empires hung upon minutes.

Ryanne never wearied of the bazaars of Cairo. They were to him no less enchanting than the circus-parades of his youth. In certain ways, they were not to be compared with those in Constantinople and Smyrna; but, on the other hand, there was more light, more charm, more color. Perhaps the magic nearness of the desert had something to do with it, the rainless skies, the ever-recurring suggestions of antiquity. His lively observation, his sense of the picturesque and the humorous, always close to the surface, gave him that singular impetus which makes man a prowler. This gift had made possible his success in old Bagdad. Some years before he had prowled through the narrow city streets, had noted the windings, the blind-alleys, and had never forgotten. Faces and localities were written indelibly upon his memory.

One rode to the bazaars, but walked through them or mounted donkeys. Ryanne preferred his own legs. So did Mahomed. Once, so close did he come that he could have put his two brown hands round the infidel's throat. But, patience. Did not the Koran teach patience among the higher laws? Patience. He could not, madly as he had dreamed, throttle the white liar here in the bazaars. That would bring the Holy Yliordes to his hands. He must wait. He must plan to lure the man out at night, then to hurry him into the desert. Out into the desert, where no man might be his master. Oh, the Holy Yliordes should be his again; it was written.

The cries, the shouts, the tower of Babel reclaimed; the intermingling of the races of the world; the Englishman, the American, the German, the Italian, the Frenchman, the Greek, the Levantine, the purple-black Ethiopian, the bronze Nubian; the veiled women, the naked children; all the color-tones known to art, but predominating that marvelous faded tint of blue, the Calreine blue, in the heavens, in the waters, in the dyes.

"Make way, O my mother!" bawled a donkey-boy to the old crone peddling matches.

"Backsheesh! Backsheesh!" in the eight tones of the human voice. From the beggar, his brother, his uncle, his grandfather, his children and his children's children. "Backsheesh, backsheesh!"

"To the right!" was shrilled into Ryanne's ear; and he dodged. A troop of donkeys passed, laden with tourists, unhappy, fretful, self-conscious. A water-carrier brushed against him, and he whiffed the fresh dampness of the bulging goat-skin. A woman, the long, black head-veil streaming out behind in the clutch of the monkey-like hand of a toddling child, carried a terra-cotta water-jar upon her head. The grace with which she moved, the abruptness of the color-changes, caught Ryanne's roving eye and filled it with pleasure.

Dust rose and subsided, eddied and settled; beggars blind and one-eyed squatted in it, children tossed it in play, and beasts of burden shuffled through it.

The roar in front of the shops, the pressing and crowding of customers, the high cries of the merchants; the gurgle of the water-pipes, the pleasant fumes of coffee, the hardy loafers lolling before the khans or caravan-saries; a veiled face at a lattice-window; the violet shadows in a doorway; the sunshine upon the soaring mosques; a true believer, rocking and mumbling over his tattered Koran; gold and silver and jewels; amber and copper and brass; embroideries and rugs and carpets; and the pest of fleas, the plague of flies, the insidious smells.

Rarely one saw the true son of the desert, the Bedouin. He disdained streets and walls, and only necessity brought him here among the polyglot and the polygon.

Ryanne found himself inspecting "the largest emerald in the world,

worth twelve thousand pounds," which looked more like a fine hexagonal of onyx than a gem. It was one of the curiosities of the bazaars, however, and tourists were generally round it in force. To his experienced eye it was no more than a fine specimen of emerald quartz, worth what any fool of a collector was willing to pay for it. From this bazaar he passed on into the next, and there he saw Fortune.

And as Mahomed, always close at hand, saw the hard lines in Ryanne's face soften, the cynical smile become tender, he believed he saw his way to strike.

CHAPTER IX.

The Bitter Fruit.

Fortune had a hearty contempt for persons who ate their breakfast in bed. For her the glory of the day was the fresh fairness of the morning, when every one's step was buoyant, and all life stirred energetically. There was cheer and hope everywhere; men faced their labors with clear eye and feared nothing; women sang at their work. It was only at the close of day that despair and defeat stalked the highways. So she was up with the sun, whether in her own garden or in these odd and mystical cities. Thus she saw the native as he was, not as he later in the day pretended to be, for the benefit of the Feringhi about to be stretched upon the sacrificial stone. She saw, with gladness, the honey-bee thrilling the rose, the plowman's share baring the soil; the morning, the morning, the two or three hours that were all her own. Her mother was always upright and petulant in the morning, and her uncle never developed the gift of speech till after luncheon.

She had the same love of prowling that lured Ryanne from the beaten paths. She was not inquisitive but curious, and that ready disarming smile of hers opened many a portal.

She was balancing upon her gloved palm, thoughtfully, a Soudanese head-trinket, a pendant of twisted gold-wires, flawed emeralds and second pearls, really exquisite and not generally to be found outside the expensive shops in the European quarters, and there infrequently. The merchant wanted twenty pounds for it. Fortune shook her head, regretfully. It was far beyond her means. She sighed. Only once in a great while she saw something for which her whole heart cried out. This pendant was one of these.

"I will give you five pounds for it. That is all I have with me."

"Salaam, madame," said the jeweler, reaching for the pendant.

"If you will send it to the Hotel Semiramis this afternoon . . ." But she faltered at the sight of the merchant's incredulous smile.

"I'll give you ten for it; not a piastre more. I can get one like it in the Sharia Kamel for that amount."

Both Fortune and the merchant turned.

"You, Horace?"

"Yes, my child. And what are you doing here alone, without a dragoon?"

"Oh, I have been through here alone many times. I'm not afraid. Isn't it beautiful? He wants twenty pounds for it, and I cannot afford that."

She had not seen him in many weeks, yet she accepted his sudden appearance without question or surprise. She was used to his turning up at unexpected moments. Of course, she had known that he was in Cairo; where her mother and uncle were this secretive man was generally within calling. There had been a time when she had eagerly plied him with questions, but he had always erected barriers of evasion, and finally she ceased her importunities, for she concluded that her questions were such. No mat-



"Ten Pounds," Repeated Ryanne, a Hand in His Pocket.

ter to whom she turned, there was no one to answer her questions, questions born of doubt and fear.

"Ten pounds," repeated Ryanne, a hand in his pocket.

The merchant laughed. Here were a young man and his sweetheart. His experience had taught him, and not unwisely, that love is an easy victim, too proud to haggle, too generous to bargain sharply. "Twenty," he reiterated.

"Salaam!" said Ryanne. "Good day!" He drew the somewhat resisting hand of Fortune under his arm and made for the door. "Sh!" he whispered. "Leave it to me." They gained the street.

The merchant was dazed. He had misjudged what he now recognized as an old hand. The two were turning up another street when he ran out, shouting to them and waving the pendant. Ryanne laughed.

"Ten pounds. I am a poor man, ef-

fendi, and I need the money. Ten

pounds. I am giving it away." The merchant's eyes filled with tears, a trick left to him from out of the ruins of his youth, that ready service to forestall the merited rod.

Ryanne counted out ten sovereigns and put the pendant in Fortune's hand. And the pleasure in his heart was such as he had not known in many days. The merchant wisely hurried back to his shop.

"But . . ." she began protestingly.

"Tut, tut! I have known you since you wore short dresses and tam-shanters."

"I really cannot accept it as a gift. Let me borrow the ten pounds."

"And why can't you accept a little gift from me?"

She had no ready answer. She gazed steadily at the dull pearls and the flaky emeralds. She could not ask him where he had got those sovereigns. She could not possibly be so cruel. She could not dissemble in words like her mother. That gold she knew to be a part of a dishonest bargain whose forestop had been a theft—more, a sacrilege. Her honesty was like pure gold, unalloyed, unmixed with sophistic subtleties. That the young man who had purchased the rug might be mildly peccable had not yet occurred to her.

"Why not, Fortune?" Ryanne was very earnest, and there was a pinch at his heart.

"Because . . ."

"Don't you like me just a little?"

"Why, I do like you, Horace. But I do not like any man well enough to accept expensive gifts from him. I do not wish to hurt you, but it is impossible. The only concession I'll make is to borrow the money."

"Well, then, let it go at that." He was too wise to press her.

(To be continued.)

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