



The Carpet from CarP Bagdad

by HAROLD MAC GRATH
Author of HEARTS AND MASKS,
The MAN ON THE BOX etc.
Illustrations by M.G. KETTNER
COPYRIGHT 1911 by BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY



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

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, acid 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 frelight. 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 gabelle. I told you it was odd, that fire. Live-ly, 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 newcomers 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?"

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 Yliordes 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 Chedsaye."

"Next?"

"Jones."

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

"Ryanne and Jones are familiar enough, but Chedsaye 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. Shanghai'd 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 Yliordes! 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.



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

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 Yliordes rug which he admits having stolen from a pasha at Bagdad. Jones meets Major Callahan and later is introduced to Fortune Chedsaye by a woman to whom he had loaned \$200 pounds at Monte Carlo some months previously, and who turns out to be Fortune's mother. Jones takes Mrs. Chedsaye and Fortune to a polo game. Fortune returns to Jones the money borrowed by her mother. Mrs. Chedsaye appears to be engaged in some mysterious enterprise unknown to the daughter. Ryanne interests Jones in the United Romance and Adventure company, a concern of the rug. Fortune arranges any kind of an adventure to order. Mrs. Chedsaye, 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. Chedsaye his intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Chedsaye 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 accuses Ryanne and demands the Yliordes 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 asking 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 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. Chedsaye and her brother have sailed for New York. Fortune spurs offered freedom which does not include her two companions. The caravan continues the journey toward Bagdad. Ryanne tells Jones that Mrs. Chedsaye is the most adroit smuggler of the age, and is overheard by Fortune.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

Ryanne foiled 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?"

"Yes, and still do."

"Why, 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. Nonchalance had been beaten out of him; the mercurial humor which had once been so pleasant to excite, which had once given him a foothold in such moments, was gone. He had only one feeling, a keen, biting, bitter shame. At length he stopped in front of George, who smiled and looked up expectantly.

"Jones, when you stick 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 coconut. 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 lars 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

"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 looked 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 cozily. 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 coconut! 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-headed devil get away with that nine hundred pounds!"

The two began to pack. That is to say, Celeste began; Mrs. Chedsaye 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 sold 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.)

No Monument to Eve. The proposal to erect a statue in honor of Eve may be dismissed without inquiry as to the worth of the woman. It simply wouldn't do. The garb of the first woman of the land does not lend itself both to the stately scheme and the growing sensitiveness of the public as to the amount of drapery necessary to make a marble person an affair.—Los Angeles Tribune

CHAPTER XVII.

Mrs. Chedsaye Has Doubts.

Mrs. Chedsaye 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 returned; and by re-