

The Special Correspondent

CHAPTER X.

At one o'clock in the afternoon the train stopped at Merv station, over five hundred miles from Uzun Ada. We have seven hours to stop at Merv, and in company with Major Noltitz I "do" the town. On our return to the station Popof runs up to me, saying: "I know the name."
"And it is?"
"Yen Lou, the great mandarin Yen Lou of Pekin."
"Thank you, Popof."
I rush to the telegraph office, and from there I send a telegram to the Twentieth Century.

"Merr, 16th May, 7 p. m."
"Train, Grand Transasiatic, just leaving Merv. Took from Douchak the body of the great mandarin Yen Lou coming from Persia to Pekin."

It cost a good deal, did this telegram, but you will admit it was well worth its price. The name of Yen Lou was immediately communicated to our fellow travelers, and it seemed to me that my lord Faruskiar smiled when he heard it.

We left the station at eight o'clock precisely. Forty minutes afterward we passed near old Merv, and the night being dark, I could see nothing of it.

Our train is running northeast. The stations are twenty or thirty miles apart. We cross the desert, the real desert, without a thread of water, where artesian wells have to be sunk to supply the reservoirs along the line. Gradually my companions go to sleep, and our carriage is transformed into a sleeping car.

The train enters Tshardjoul Station to the minute. Our stop here ought to last a quarter of an hour. A few travelers alight, for they have booked to this town, which contains about thirty thousand inhabitants. Others get in to proceed to Bokhara and Samarkand, but these are only second-class passengers. This produces a certain amount of bustle on the platform.

I also get out and take a walk up and down by the side of the front van, and I notice the door silently open and shut. A man creeps out on to the platform and slips away through the station, which is dimly lighted by a few petroleum lamps.

It is my Roumanian. It can be no one else. He has not been seen, and there he is, lost among the other travelers. Why this escape? Is it to renew his provisions at the refreshment bar? On the contrary, is it not his intention, as I am afraid it is, to get away from us?

Shall I stop him? I will make myself known to him; promise to help him. Behold me then following him without appearing to do so. Amid all this hurrying to and fro he is in little danger of being noticed. Neither Popof nor any of the company's servants would suspect him to be a swindler. Is he going toward the gate to escape me?

No! He only wants to stretch his legs better than he can do in the van. After an imprisonment which has lasted since he left Baku—that is to say, about sixty hours—he has earned ten minutes of freedom.

He is a man of middle height, lithe in his movements, and with a gliding kind of walk. He could roll himself up like a cat and find quite room enough in his case. He wears an old vest, his trousers are held up by a belt and his cap is a fur one—all of dark color.

I am at ease regarding his intentions. He returns toward the van, mounts the platform and shuts the door gently behind him. As soon as the train is on the move I will knock at the panel, and this time—

More of the unexpected. Instead of waiting at Tshardjoul one quarter of an hour, we have to wait three. A slight injury to one of the brakes of the engine has had to be repaired, and notwithstanding the German baron's remonstrances, we do not leave the station before half past three, as the day is beginning to dawn.

At 5 o'clock in the morning the train stops at the capital of the Khanate of Bokhara, 1,107 miles from Uzun Ada. Bokhara, the capital of Khanate, is the Rome of Islam, the Noble City, the City of Temples, the revered center of the Mohammedan religion.

Major Noltitz advised me to visit the town in which he had lived several times. He could not accompany me, having several visits to pay. We were to start again at 11 o'clock in the morning. Five hours only to wait, and the town some distance from the railway station. In four hours I have seen most of the notable things in Bokhara, and at 10:30 I alighted at the railway station. I see at a glance that all my numbers are on the platform, including my German baron. In the rear of the train the Persians are keeping faithful guard around the mandarin Yen Lou. It seems that three of our traveling companions are observing them with persistent curiosity; these are the suspicious looking Mongols we picked up at Douchak. As I pass near them I fancy that Faruskiar makes a signal to them, which I do not understand. Does he know them? Anyhow, this circumstance rather puzzles me.

The train is no sooner off than the passengers go to the dining car. The places next to mine and the major's, which had been occupied since the start, are now vacant, and the young Chinaman, followed by Dr. Tio-King, take advantage of it to come near us. Pan-Chao knows I am on the staff of the Twentieth Century, and he is apparently as desirous of talking to me as I am of talking to him.

I am not mistaken. He is a true Parisian of the Boulevard. In the clothes of a Celestial. He has spent three years in the world where people amuse themselves, and also in the world where they learn. The only son of a rich merchant in Pekin, he has traveled under the wing of this Tio-King, a doctor of some sort, who is really the most stupid of baboons, and of whom his pupil makes a good deal of fun.

The breakfast continued pleasantly. Conversation turned on the work of the Russians in Asia. Pan-Chao seemed to me well posted up in their progress. I need not say that during this talk the Baron Weissenschneider forer was fully occupied in clearing dish after dish, to

the extreme amazement of Doctor Tio-King.

For the same reason, I suppose, neither Faruskiar nor Ghangir took part in it, for they only exchanged a few words in Chinese.

But I noticed rather a strange circumstance which did not escape the major. We were talking about the safety of the Grand Transasiatic across Central Asia, and Pan Chao had said that the road was not so safe as it might be beyond the Turkestan frontier, as, in fact, Major Noltitz had told me. I was then led to ask if he had ever heard of the famous Ki-Tsang before his departure from Europe.

"Often," he said, "for Ki-Tsang was then in the Yunnan provinces. I hope we shall not meet him on our road."
When he uttered the name of Ki-Tsang Faruskiar knit his brows and his eyes flashed. Then, with a look at his companion, he resumed his habitual indifference to all that was being said around him.

CHAPTER XI.

The train is running at high speed. In the ordinary service, when it stops at the eleven stations between Bokhara and Samarkand, it takes a whole day over the distance. This time it took but three hours to cover the two hundred kilometers which separate the two towns, and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon it entered the illustrious city of Tamerlane.

Samarkand is situated in the rich oasis watered by the Zarafschane in the valley of Sogd. A small pamphlet I bought at the railway station informs me that this great city is one of the four sites in which geographers "agree" to place the terrestrial paradise. I leave this discussion to the exegetists of the profession. After a stop of six hours our train started off again at 8 o'clock.

During dinner I noticed that Major Noltitz continued to keep his eye on his lordship Faruskiar. Had he begun to suspect him? Was it of any importance in his opinion that this Mongol seemed to know, without appearing to do so, the three second-class travelers, who were also Mongols? Was his imagination working with the same activity as mine? And was he taking seriously what was only a joke on my part?

As for me, I had soon forgotten all about the Mongol for the man in the case. If I get a chance to visit him to-night I will.

It was about half past eleven when I decided to open the door of the van, which I shut behind me.

I knew that the young Roumanian was not always shut up in his box, and the fancy might just have taken him to stretch his limbs by walking from one end to the other of the van. The darkness is complete. No jet of light filters through the holes of the case. That seems all the better for me. It is as well that my No. 11 should not be surprised by too sudden an apparition. He is doubtless asleep. I will give two little knocks on the panel; I will awake him, and we will explain matters before he can move.

I feel as I go. My hand touches the case; I place my ear against the panel and I listen. There is a stir, not a breath! Is my man no, here? Has he got away? Has he slipped out at one of the stations without my seeing him?

I am just going to knock, when the locomotive's whistle emits its strident crow as we pass through a station. But the train is not going to stop, I know, and I wait until the whistling has ceased.

I then give a gentle knock on the panel. There is no reply. I knock more loudly.

This time it is followed by an involuntary movement of surprise and fright. "Open, open!" I say in Russian. "It is a friend who speaks. You have nothing to fear!"

If the panel is not lowered as I had hoped, there is the crack of a match being lighted and a feeble light appears in the case.

I look at the prisoner through the holes in the side. There is a look of alarm on his face; his eyes are haggard. He does not know whether he is asleep or awake.

"Open, my friend, I say; open and have confidence. I have discovered your secret. I shall say nothing about it. On the other hand, I may be of use to you. You are a Roumanian, I think, and I am a Frenchman."

"Frenchman? You are a Frenchman?" And this reply was given in my own language, with a foreign accent. One more bond between us. The panel slips along its groove, and by the light of a little lamp I can examine my No. 11.

"No one can see us nor hear us?" he asked in a half-stifled voice.

"No one."
"The guard?"
"Asleep."

My new friend takes my hands; he clasps them. I feel that he seeks a support. He understands he can depend on me, and he murmurs:
"Do not betray me—do not betray me."

"Betray you, my boy? Can you believe that I, a journalist—"
"You are a journalist?"
"Claudius Bombarnac, special correspondent of the Twentieth Century."
"And you are going to Pekin?"
"Through to Pekin."
"Ah! Monsieur Bombarnac, Providence has sent you on to my road."
"Anything I can do for you I will. What is your name?"
"Kinko."
"You are a Roumanian, are you not?"
"Roumanian, of Bucharest."
"But you have lived in France?"
"Four years in Paris, where I was apprentice to an upholsterer in the Faubourg Saint Antoine."
"And you went back to Bucharest?"
"Yes, to work at my trade there until the day came when it was impossible for me to resist the desire to leave—"
"To leave? Why?"
"To marry."
"To marry Mademoiselle Zinea Klork, Avenue Cha-Coua, Pekin, China."
"You know?"
"Certainly. The address is on the box."
"She is a young Roumanian. I knew her in Paris, where she was learning

the trade of a milliner. Oh! charming—"

"I am sure of it. You need not dwell on that."
"She also returned to Bucharest, until she was invited to take the management of a dressmaker's at Pekin. We loved, monsieur; she went—and we were separated for a year. Three weeks ago she wrote to me. She was getting on over there. If I could go out to her I would do well. She should get married without delay. She had saved something. I would soon earn as much as she had. And here I am on the road, in my turn, for China."

"In this box?"
"What would you have, Monsieur Bombarnac?" asked Kinko, reddening. "I had only money enough to buy a packing case, a few provisions, and get myself sent off by an obliging friend. It costs a thousand francs to go from Tiflis to Pekin. But as soon as I have gained them, the company will be repaid, I assure you."

"You may rest assured I will neglect nothing which will enable you to arrive dry and in one piece at Mademoiselle Zinea Klork's—in short, in a perfect state of preservation."

"I thank you," said Kinko, pressing his hands. "Believe me, you will not find me ungrateful."
"Ah, friend Kinko, I shall be paid, and more than paid."

"Anyhow?"
"By relating, as soon as I can do so without danger to you, the particulars of your journey from Tiflis to Pekin. Think now—what a heading for a column:

"A LOVER IN A BOX!
ZINEA AND KINKO!!
1,500 LEAGUES THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA IN A LUGGAGE VAN!!!"

The young Roumanian could not help smiling.

Then I went to the door of the van to see that we were in no danger of a surprise, and then the conversation was resumed. Naturally, Kinko asked me how I had discovered his secret. I told him all that had passed on the steamer during his voyage across the Caspian.

"But," said he to me, lowering his voice, "two nights ago I thought all was lost. The van was closed. I had just lighted my little lamp, and had begun my supper, when a knock came against the panel—"

"I did that, Kinko, I did that. And that night we should have become acquainted if the train had not run into a dromedary!"

"It was you! I breathe again!" said Kinko. "In what dreams I have lived! It was known that some one was hidden in this box. I saw myself discovered, handed over to the police, taken to prison at Merv or Bokhara, and my little Zinea waiting for me in vain; and never should I see her again, unless I resumed the journey on foot. Well, I would have resumed—yes, I would."

"Brave Kinko!" I answered. "I am awfully sorry to have caused you such apprehensions. Now you are at ease again, and I fancy your chances have improved now we have made friends."

I then asked Kinko to show me how he managed in his box. Nothing could be simpler or better arranged. At the bottom was a seat on which he sat, with the necessary space for him to stretch his legs when he placed them obliquely; under the seat, shut in by a lid, were a few provisions, and table utensils, reduced to a simple pocket knife and metal mug; an overcoat and a rug hung from a nail, and the little lamp he used at night time was hooked on to one of the walls.

The sliding panel allowed the prisoner to leave his prison occasionally. But if the case had been placed among other packages, if the porters had not deposited it with the precautions due to its fragility, he would not have been able to work the panel, and would have had to make a friend somehow before the end of the journey. Fortunately, there is a special Providence for lovers. He told me that every night he had taken a walk, either in the van or else on the station platform where the train had stopped.

"I do not believe I am in danger of being discovered," he said, "unless at the Chinese frontier—or rather at Kachgar."

"And why?"
"The custom house is very keen on goods going into China. I am afraid they will come round the packages."
"I shall be there, and I will do all I can to prevent anything unpleasant happening."

"Ah, Monsieur Bombarnac!" exclaimed Kinko, in a burst of gratitude, "how can I repay you?"
"Ask me to your marriage with the lovely Zinea."
"I will. And Zinea will embrace you."
"She will be only doing her duty, friend Kinko, and I shall be only doing mine in returning two kisses for one."

We exchanged a last grip of the hand; and, really, I think there were tears in the good fellow's eyes when I left him. He put out his lamp, he pushed back the panel, then through the case I heard one more "thanks" and an "au revoir."

I came out of the van, I shut the door, assured myself that Popof was still asleep. In a few minutes, after a breath or two of the night air, I go in to my place near Major Noltitz.
(To be continued.)

Jersey Fossil.
"This tusk," said the Jersey commuter, "I dug up in my garden. It's all of four feet long. Remarkable, isn't it?"
"Yes. It's very probably the bill of a prehistoric mosquito."—Philadelphia Public Ledger.

Appropriate.
Rudrick—Now they are thinking about bringing out the life of Rainsull. Van Albert—Well, it would be rather expensive.
Rudrick—How so?
Van Albert—It would have to be bound in Morocco.

Sorry He Spoke.
Reggy—Bah Jove, there are a lot of people who sing songs these days and don't even mean what they sing.
Miss Rose—You are right, Reggy. Last night you sang "Good-by, My Lady Love" at 10 o'clock, and didn't leave until 12.

Industrious wisdom often prevents what lazy folly thinks inevitable.—Stimmons.

QUEER STORIES

A black bear with pink eyes has recently been killed in Pennsylvania by a party of hunters. It is not known whether the bear is a freak or an example of some new species.

The middle and lower class Russians chew sunflower seeds instead of tobacco or gum. The Czarina sent a vast quantity of these seeds to the Manchurian army recently as a present.

A novel sight was seen in St. Margaret's church, Lowestoft, England, recently, when a thanksgiving service was held for the good harvest of the sea. The walls were draped with fishermen's nets, life buoys were placed in the pulpit and chancel, and even cured herrings appeared among the "decorations."

Serpent worship still survives in India, and a snake shrine is said to be as much an attraction in a house on the Malabar coast as a garden in the case of a country home in the United States. Serpents are, however, most unobtrusive, and unless one walks noiselessly and barefooted in the dark, as Hindoos do, snakebite is an improbable contingency.

There is a hospital for diseased fishes at Vienna university, where the pathology of fish is studied. Here are some of the "cases": A carp is being treated for an inflammation resembling appendicitis, ten others are suffering from smallpox, a porpoise from the Adriatic with inflammation of the lungs, a trout with cataract in both eyes, and another with dropsy.

No less than fourteen electric mountain railways are now under construction in Switzerland, according to the Indianapolis News. Within the course of a few years all the leading Alpine heights can be reached by mountain railways. Switzerland is spending many millions on these enterprises, and it is hoped that, with these increasing facilities, the number of tourists will become greater every year. The Jungfrau and Chamounix railways will be completed and open for passenger traffic by the summer of 1906.

Some interesting experiments have been made to ascertain which wood lasts the longest. It was found, according to the Indianapolis News, that birch and aspen decayed in three years, willow and chestnut in four years, maple and red beech in five years and elm and ash in seven years. Oak, Scotch pine and Weymouth pine decayed to the depth of half an inch in seven years; larch and juniper were unharmed at the end of seven years. In situations so free from moisture that they may be practically called dry, the durability of timber is unlimited. The roof of Westminster Hall, London, is more than 400 years old.

The worst thing that can happen to a man in Siam is to get into debt, from which there is never any escape, owing to the exorbitant interest charged. Once in debt there is no appeal, the debtor being stripped of his clothes and compelled to work in fetters, generally for the rest of his life, to pay the interest. Drunkards are not permitted to give evidence in the law courts of Siam. The Buddhist priests, clad in yellow robes, are to be seen everywhere in Bangkok and it is quite common for young men to enter the priesthood, which affords them an easy and luxurious existence, owing to the liberality of the populace toward any one sanctioned to the service of Buddha.

In Russian cities, according to an English traveler, the taking of a cab is a matter of bargaining, for though there is a printed tariff somewhere, the cabman cannot read it. If you know the distance you walk along the cab rank calling out your destination and your price—about a quarter of what you would pay in London and a tenth of the New York demand. When you have passed the last cab you will bear a clatter behind, and a driver will implore you to step in. If you do not know the distance you ask the fare; divide the answer by four and walk on. Curses! Invocation of saintly drivers raise their arms to heaven in horror. Walk calmly on, and there is a race to pick you up. Nor is there ever a dispute at the end.

Wallows Still There.
A curiosity of the plains is the buffalo wallows. There has not been a buffalo in them for 30 years, but they are the same to-day as they were generations, or even centuries, ago. They are no longer frequented by cattle, of course, and therefore not freshly worn, but they remain to this day barren and black amid the vast plain of living green. In the spring they stand full of water until the advancing summer sun evaporates it, and then they are barren and black again. They are perfect circles, some large as a circus ring, and their basins are packed firm and hard by the tread and roll of many generations of the bison. Another recollection here of this extinct race is the buffalo birds, which abound in great numbers. Their function now, as in the time of the bison, is to pick insects from the backs of the cattle which feed on the plains. Sometimes twenty or more feed on a steer's back, while the steer calmly and with evident pleasure munches buffalo grass.

Hospital Erected in One Hour.
In Austria a few years ago a complete hospital was built and was made ready to receive patients within an hour, a feat which seems almost impossible even when we know that all the component parts of the building were at hand.

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