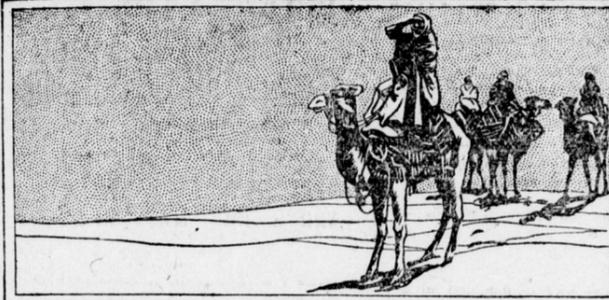




The Pet from Carpet Bagdad

by HAROLD MAC GRATH
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The MAN ON THE BOX etc.
Illustrations by M. G. KETTNER
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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.

CHAPTER II.

An Affable Rogue.

The carriage containing the gentleman with the reversible cuffs drew up at the side entrance. Instantly the Arab guides surged and eddied round him; but their clamor broke against a composure as effective as granite. The roar was almost directly succeeded by a low gurgle, as of little waves receding. The proposed victim had not spoken a word; to the Arabs it was not necessary, in some manner, subtle and indescribable, they recognized a brother. He carried a long, cylindrical bundle wrapped in heavy paper variously secured by windings of thick twine. His regard for this bundle was one of tender solicitude, for he tucked it under his arm, cumbersome though it was, and waved aside the carriage-porter, who was, however, permitted to carry in the kit-bag.

The manager appeared. When comes he not upon the scene? His quick, calculating eye was not wholly assured. The stranger's homespun was travel-worn and time-worn, and of a cut popular to the season gone the year before. No fat letter of credit here, was the not unreasonable conclusion reached by the manager. Still, with that caution acquired by years of experience, which had culminated in what is known as Swiss diplomacy, he brought into being the accustomed salutatory smile and inquired if the gentleman had written ahead for reservation, otherwise it would not be possible to accommodate him.

"I telegraphed," crisply.
"The name, if you please?"
"Ryenne," spelled R-y-a double-n e. Have you ever been in County Clare?"
"No, sir." The manager added a question with the uplift of his eyebrows.

"Well," was the enlightening answer, "you pronounce it as they do there."
The manager scanned the little slip of paper in his hand. "Ah, yes; we have reserved a room for you, sir. The French style rather confused me." This was not offered in irony, or sarcasm, or satire; mining in a Swiss vein for the saving grace of humor as about as remunerative as the extraction of gold from sea-water. Nevertheless, the Swiss has the talent of swiftly subtracting from a confusion of ideas one point of illumination; here was a quality to the stranger's one that decided him favorably. It was the voice of a man in the habit of being obeyed; and in these days it was the power of money alone that obtained obedience to any man. Beyond this, the same nebulous cogitation that had subdued the Arabs outside acted likewise upon him. Here was a brother.

"Mail?"
"I will see, sir." The manager summoned a porter. "Room 208."
The porter caught up the somewhat collapsed kit-bag, which had in all evidence received some rough usage in a time, and reached toward the roller. Ryenne interposed.
"I will see to that, my man," tersely.
"Yes, sir."

"Where is your guest-list?" demanded Mr. Ryenne of the manager.
"The head-porter's bureau, sir. I will see if you have any mail." The manager passed into his own bureau. It was rather difficult to tell whether this man was an American or an Englishman. His accent was western, but his manner was decidedly British. At any rate, that tone and carriage must be bastioned by good English sovereigns, or for once his judgment was at fault.

The porter dashed up-stairs. Mr. Ryenne, his bundle still snug under his arm, sauntered over to the head-porter's bureau and ran his glance up and down the columns of visiting-cards. Once he nodded with approval, and again he smiled, having discovered that which sent a ripple across his sleeping sense of amusement. Major Callahan, room 206; Fortune Chedsoye, 205; George P. A. Jones, 210.

"Hm! the Major smells of County Antrim and the finest whisky in all the isle. Fortune Chedsoye; that is a leasing name; tinkling brooks, the saving green grasses in the meadows, the kine in the water, the feeting shadows under the oaks; a pastoral, a bucolic name. To claim Fortune for mine own; a happy thought."

As he uttered these poetic expressions aloud, in a voice low and not unmeaning, for all that it was bantering, the head-porter stared at him with tingling doubt and alarm; and as if pronounce these emotions mutely to the benefit of the other, he permitted his eyes to open their widest. "Tut, tut; that's all right, porter. I'm cursed with the habit of speaking in inmost thoughts. Some persons are afflicted with insomnia; some fall deep in church; I think orally. Beastly habit, eh?"

The porter then understood that he was dealing not with a species of mild lunacy, but with that kind of light-hearted cynicism upon which the world (as porters know it) had set its approving seal. In brief, he smiled faintly; and if he had any pleasantry to pass in turn the approach of the manager, few clothed metaphorically in deferentialism, relegated it to the limbo of things thought but left unsaid.

"Here is a letter for you, Mr. Ryenne. Have you any more luggage?"
"No." Mr. Ryenne smiled. "Shall I pay for my room in advance?"

"Oh, no, sir!" Ten years ago the manager would have blushed at having been so misunderstood. "Your room is 208."

"Will you have a boy show me the way?"
"I shall myself attend to that. If the room is not what you wish it may be exchanged."

"The room is the one I telegraphed for. I am superstitious to a degree. On three boats I have had fine staterooms numbered 208. Twice the number of my hotel room has been the same. On the last voyage there were 208 passengers, and the captain had made 208 voyages on the Mediterranean."

"Quite a coincident."
"Ah, if roulette could be played with such a certainty!"

Mr. Ryenne sighed, hitched up his bundle, which, being heavy, was beginning to wear upon his arm, and signified to the manager to lead the way.

As they vanished round the corner to the lift, the head-porter studied the guest-list. He had looked over it a dozen times that day, but this was the first instance of his being really interested in it. As his chin was freshly shaven he had no stubble to stroke to excite his mental processes; so he fell back, as we say, upon the consulting ends of his abundant mustache. Curious; but all these persons were occupying or about to occupy adjacent rooms. There was truly nothing mysterious about it, save that the stranger had picked out these very names as a target for his banter. Fortune Chedsoye; it was rather an unusual name; but as she had arrived only an hour or so before, he could not distinctly recall her features. And then, there was that word bucolic. He mentally turned it over and over as physically he was wont to do with post-cards left in his care to mail. He could make nothing of the word, except that it smacked of the East Indian plague.

Here he was saved from further cerebral agony by a timely interruption. A man, who was not of bucolic persuasion either in dress or speech, urban from the tips of his bleached fingers to the bulb of his bibulous nose, leaned across the counter and asked if Mr. Horace Ryenne had yet arrived. Yes, he had just arrived; he

paring minutes from time-tables. For a man in his business it was a clever expedient, deceiving all but those who knew him. He hesitated at the door, however, as if he had changed his mind in the twenty-odd paces it took to reach it. He stared for a long period at the elderly gentleman who was watching the feluccas on the river through the window. The white mustache and imperial stood out in crisp relief against the ruddy sunburn on his face. If he was aware of this scrutiny on the part of the puffy gentleman, he gave not the least sign. The revolving door spun round, sending a puff of outdoor air into the lounging-room. The elderly gentleman then smiled, and applied his thumb and forefinger to the waxen point of his imperial.

In the intervening time Mr. Ryenne entered his room, threw the bundle on the bed, sat down beside it, and read his letter. Shadows and lights moved across his face; frowns that hardened it, smiles that mellowed it. Women hold the trick of writing letters. Do they hate, their thoughts flash and burn from line to line. Do they love, 'tis lettered music. Do they conspire, the breadth of their imagination is without horizon. At best, man can indite only a polite business letter, his love-letters were adjudged long since a maudlin collection of loose sentences. In this letter Mr. Ryenne found the three parts of life.

"She's a good general; but hang these brimstone efforts of hers. She talks too much of heart. For my part, I prefer to regard it as a mere physical function, a pump, a motor, a power that gives action to the legs, either in coming or in going, more especially in going." He laughed. "Well, hers is the inspiration and hers is the law. And to think that she could plan all this on the spur of the moment, down to the minutest detail! It's a science."

He put the letter away, slid out his legs and glared at the dusty tips of his shoes. "The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd., of New York, London, and Paris. She has the greatest gift of all, the sense of humor."

He rose and opened his kit-bag doubtfully. He rummaged about in the depths and at last straightened up with a mild oath.

"Not a pair of cuffs in the whole outfit, not a shirt, not a collar. Oh, well, when a man has to leave Bagdad the way I did, over the back fence, so to speak, linen doesn't count."

He drew down his cuffs, detached and reversed them, he turned his folding collar wrong-side out, and used the under side of the foot-rug as a

shoe-polisher. It was the ingenious procedure of a man who was used to being out late nights, who made all things answer all purposes. This rapid and singularly careless toilet completed, he centered his concern upon the more vital matter of finances. He was close to the nadir: four sovereigns, a florin, and a collection of battered coppers that would have tickled the pulse of an amateur numismatist.

"No vintage to-night, my boy; no long, fat Havana, either. A bottle of stout and a few rags of plug-cut; that's the pace we'll travel this eve."

He bustled off toward the door. He was puffy, well-fed, and decently dressed, the sort of a man who, when he moved in any direction, created the impression that he had an important engagement somewhere else or was

ning. The United Romance and Adventure Company is not listed at present. If it was, I'd sell a few shares on my own hook. The kind Lord knows that I've stock enough and to spare." He laughed again, but without the leaven of humor. "When the fool-killer snatches up the last fool, let rogues look to themselves; and fools are getting scarcer every day."
"Percival Algernon! O age of poets! I wonder, does he wear high collars and spats, or has she plumed him accurately? She is generally right. But a man changes some in seven years. I'm an authority when it comes to that. Look what's happened to me in seven years! First, Horace, we shall dine, then we'll smoke our pipe in the billiard-room, then we'll softly approach Percival Algernon and introduce him to Sinbad. This independent excursion to Bagdad was a stroke on my part; it will work into the general plan as smoothly as if it had been grooved for the part. Sinbad, I might just as well have assumed that name; Horace Sinbad, sounds well and looks well." He rubbed in silence, his hand gently rubbing his chin; for he did possess the trick of talking aloud, in a low monotone, a habit acquired during periods of loneliness, when the sound of his own voice had succeeded in steadying his tottering mind.

What a woman, what a wife, she would have been to the right man! Odd thing, a man can do almost anything but direct his affections; they must be drawn. She was not for him; nay, not even on a desert isle. Doubtless he was a fool. In time she would have made him a rich man. Alack! It was always the one we pursued that we loved and never the one that pursued us.

"I'm afraid of her; and there you

arm, the glint of a polished shoulder; his was the essence of life he coveted. He smiled at the thought and the sure knowledge that he was not the only wolf in the fold. Ay, and who among these dainty Red Riding Hoods might be fooled by a vulpine grandmother? Truth, when a fellow winnowed it all down to a handful, there were only fools and rogues. If one was a fool, the rogue got you, and he in turn devoured himself.

He held his glass toward the table-lamp, moved it slowly to and fro under his nose, epicureanly; then he sipped the wine. Something like! It ran across his tongue and down his throat in tingling fire, nectarious; and he went half way to Olympus, to the feet of the gods. For weeks he had lived in the vilest haunts, in desperate straits, his life in his open hands; and now once more he had crawled from the depths to the outer crust of the world. It did not matter that he was destined to go down into the depths again; so long as the spark burned he was going to crawl back each time. Damnable luck! He could have lived like a prince. Twenty-four hundred, and all in two nights, a steady stream of gold into the pockets of men whom he could have cheated with consummate ease, and didn't. A fine wolf, whose predatory instincts were still riveted to that obsolete thing called conscience!

"Conscience? Rot! Let us for once be frank and write it down as caution, as fear of publicity, anything but the white guardian-angel of the immortality of the soul. Heap up the gold, Apollyon; heap it up, higher and higher, till not a squeak of that still small voice that once awoke the chap in the Old Testament can ever again be heard. Now, no more retrospection, Horace; no more analysis; the vital question simmers down to this: If Percival Algernon balks; how far will four sovereigns go?"

CHAPTER III.

The Holy Whordes.

George drank his burgundy perfur torily. Had it been asstringent as the native wine of Corsica, he would not have noticed it. The little nerve that ran from his tongue to his brain had temporarily lost the power of communication. And all because of the girl across the way. He couldn't keep his eyes from wandering in her direction. She faced him diagonally. She ate but little, and when the elderly gentleman poured out for her a glass of sauterne, she motioned it aside, rested her chin upon her folded hands, and stared not at but through her vis-a-vis.

It was a lovely head, topped with coils of lustrous, light brown hair; an oval face, of white and rose and ivory tones; scarlet lips, a small, regular nose, and a chin the soft roundness of which hid the resolute lift to it. To these attributes of loveliness was added a perfect form, the long, flowing curves of youth, not the abrupt contours of maturity. George couldn't recollect when he had been so impressed by a face. From the moment she had stepped down from the carriage, his interest had been drawn, and had grown to such dimensions that when he entered the dining-room his glance immediately searched for her table. What luck in finding her across the way! He questioned if he had ever seen her before. There was something familiar; the delicate profile stirred some sleeping memory but did not wake it.

How to meet her, and when he did meet her, how to interest her? If she would only drop her handkerchief, her purse, something to give him an excuse, an opening. Ah, he was certain that this time the hydra-headed one should not overcome him. To gain her attention and to hold it, he would have faced a lion, a tiger, a wild elephant. To diagnose these symptoms might not be fair to George. "Love at first sight" reads well and sounds well, but we hoary-headed philosophers know that the phrase is only poetical license.

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Uncle Pennywise Says:

Some of us can laugh when the joke is on us; but none of us believe in carrying that kind of a joke too far.



Ran His Glance Up and Down the Columns of Visiting Cards.



Everything Worth While Seemed to Have Slipped Through His Fingers.

are. There isn't a man living who has gone back of that Mona Lisa smile of hers. If she was the last woman and I was the last man, I don't say." He hunted for a cigarette, but failed to find one. "Almost at the bottom, boy; the winter of our discontent, and no sun of York to make it glorious. Twenty-four hundred at cards, and to lose it like a tyro! Wallace has taught me all he knows, but I'm a booby. Twenty-four hundred, firm's money. It's a falling of mine, the firm's money. But, damn it all, I can't cheat a man at cards; I'd rather cut his throat."

He found his pipe, and a careful search of the corners of his coat-pockets revealed a meager pipeful of tobacco. He picked out the little balls of wool, the ground-coffee, the cloves, and pushed the charge home into the crusted bowl of his briar.

"To the devil with economy! A pint of burgundy and a perfecto if they hale us to jail for it. I'm dead tired. I've seen three corners in hell in the past two months. I'm going as far as four sovereigns will take me.

Fortune Chedsoye." His blue eyes became less hard and his mouth less defiant. "I repeat, the heart should be nothing but a pump. Otherwise it gets in the way, becomes an obstruction, a bottomless pit. Will-power, that's the ticket. I can face a lion without an extra beat, I can face the various countenances of death without an additional flutter; and yet, here's a girl who, when I see her or think of her, sends the pulse soaring from seventy-seven up to eighty-four. Bad business; besides, it's so infernally unfashionable. It's hard work for a man to keep his balance 'twixt the devil and the deep, blue sea; Gioconda on one side and Fortune on the other. Gioconda throws open windows and doors at my approach; but Fortune locks and bars hers, nor knocks at mine. That's the way it always goes.

"If a man could only go back ten years and take a new start. Ass!" bailing his fist at the reflection in the mirror. "Snivel and whine over the bed of your own making. You had your opportunity, but you listened to the popping of champagne-corks, the mutter of cards, the inane drivel of chorus-ladies. You had a decent college record, too. Bah! What a guileless fool you were! You ran on, didn't you, till you found your neck in the loop at the end of the rope? And perhaps that soft-footed, estimable brother of yours didn't yank it taut as a hangman's? You heard the codicil; into one ear and out the other. Even then you had your chance; patience for two short years, and a million. No, a thousand times no. You knew what you were about, empty-headed fool! And today, two pennies for a dead man's eyes."

He dropped his fist dejectedly. Where had the first step begun? And where would be the last? In some drab corner, possibly; drink, morphine, or starvation; he'd never have the courage to finish it with a bullet. He was terribly bitter. Everything worth while seemed to have slipped

through his fingers, his pleasure-loving fingers.

"Come, come, Horace; buck up. Still the ruby kindles in the vine. No turning back now. We'll go on till we come bang! against the wall. There may be some good bouts between here and there. I wonder what Gioconda would say if she knew why I was so eager for this game?"

He went down to dinner, and they gave him a table in an obscure corner, as a subtle reminder that his style was passe. He didn't care; he was hungry and thirsty. He could see nearly every one, even if only a few could see him. This was somewhat to his vantage. He endeavored to pick out Percival Algernon; but there were too many high collars, too many monocles. So he contented himself with a mild philosophical observation of the scene. The murmur of voices, rising as the wail of the violins sank, sinking as the wail rose; the tinkle of glass and china, the silver and linen, the pretty women in their rustling gowns, the delicate perfumes, the flash of an

arm, the glint of a polished shoulder; his was the essence of life he coveted. He smiled at the thought and the sure knowledge that he was not the only wolf in the fold. Ay, and who among these dainty Red Riding Hoods might be fooled by a vulpine grandmother? Truth, when a fellow winnowed it all down to a handful, there were only fools and rogues. If one was a fool, the rogue got you, and he in turn devoured himself.

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