

PAGE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS



The Princess of the Purple Palace.

A Story of the Pekin Siege. By William Murray Graydon.

(Copyright, 1901, by the Author) CHAPTER XIV.

The answer to the above important question was speedily forthcoming. Down through the flowering shrubbery, among pagodas, temples and quaint little Summer houses with brilliant-tiled roofs, Captain Fang led his companions. At the horizon was a raised wall clustered with turrets and towers, and a wide marble step dropped to a spacious landing place nearly level with the water. Here were moored a dozen boats of various description—some junk-shaped, with tiny cabins and gay awnings; some with crimson and purple sails, and some fashioned like Venetian gondolas. One of the number—a small, round-bottomed craft, fitted with a pair of oars—Captain Fang detached from his retinue.

"This will serve your purpose," he said to the lads, "and it will not be missed, since I alone know how many boats are kept here. He gave a revolver each to Dan and Alec, and then produced from under the folds of his clothing two tightly rolled parcels. "These contain your bodies," he directed. "They contain caps and loose hip-boots such as are ordinarily worn; you will not require them yet, if, indeed, you have use for them at all. The weapons are loaded, but you are on no account to discharge them while you are within the limits of the Forbidden City; such are the Emperor's orders."

The dragon-soldier, an alert figure of watchfulness, had stopped half-way down the terrace, and the Captain's eyes were raised to him for a moment, and then he turned and pointed across the lake. "You perceive yonder speck of yellow light?" he went on. "It shines from one of the high towers that stand on either side of the main western gate of the Forbidden City. Pull over to the far side of the moat, slide the craft up the bank, and seek at the base of the wall 100 yards to the right of the tower, where the light shines. You will find a knotted rope dangling down, and by the aid of that you must climb singly to the summit of the wall and lower yourselves on the outer side. At the bottom is a moat to be crossed, and then you will be within the Imperial City."

A low, clear whistle came floating down the path, and the next instant, from the other side of the hill, a swelling clamor of voices was heard. Captain Fang's eyes were searching for you in this direction," exclaimed Captain Fang. "Quick, he off!" "Things are getting unpleasantly hot," said Alec, as he jumped into the boat and picked up the oars. "Come along, old chap."

"We're all right now, unless they follow us by water or cut around," remarked Dan, when the little craft was receding from the landing stairs. "But what worries me the most is that wall. I confess I don't like the look of it."

The boat, driven by quick, noiseless strokes of the oars, glided on and on over the calm, deep surface of the lake. They were soon in among the islands—exquisite beautiful spots, embowered in foliage, and each containing a temple, a pagoda or a quaint little villa. The wake of rippling water danced farther and farther behind, and presently the fugitives, looking back from a considerable distance, saw lights moving at the landing stage which had recently left. It was not long now until the boat touched the opposite side of the lake, and having dragged to a ready hiding-place where it was not likely to be discovered, the lads went on for a short distance.

Except for the dull rattle of guns they could hear nothing. The western gate, with its lofty towers, was directly in front of them, and by steering a diagonal course to the right they emerged from the gardens at the base of the wall. They had calculated well, and it was a great relief to their minds when, after a brief search, they found the knotted rope dangling within reach out of the darkness overhead. Dan was the first to grasp Captain Fang's doing, though how he had managed it could only be surmised.

"I was sure I would tumble, I'll have my breath directly. Li Sheng and the others are below. They must have been lurking there on the quiet without lights, and they saw me when I was half-way up the wall."

Alec scarcely heard the breathless, articulate words, nor did he, for the moment, pay any heed to the noise that was ringing from the direction of the nearest watch tower. The rope—the precious rope—was all he thought of. He seized hold of it, and felt a resistance; the air above him, too late! His heart sank. But no; a desperate jerk, and the man below lost his grip. Up came the knotted coils, yard by yard, tumbling like a snake over the coping. A pistol flashed and roared down at the base of the wall, and a bullet sang viciously by Alec's head. "I'll bet the Tiger did that," muttered Dan. He glanced to one side and cried out in hoarse alarm. "Look! look! We're in for it now."

Dan's frightened exclamation had been prompted by the discovery that two men, who had started well in advance of the others, were running along the top of the wall. They were already half way between the towers and the spot where the fugitives stood.

Alec hesitated a second; at once his mind grasped the single slim chance of escape that the situation offered. "The rope," he cried, as he slipped the noosed end and tossed it to his companions. "Hasten on the other side and lower yourself. Don't wait for me. I must stop these two chaps, or it will be all up with both of us."

The two Chinese soldiers who had discovered the lads and were shouting eagerly to those behind, drew rapidly near, their rifles as yet carried in loose grip. They came within 20 yards—10—8—6—4—3—2—1—Alec's big revolver barked like an angry cur, and the foremost soldier was down in a writhing heap, with a bullet imbedded in some vital part of his anatomy. The other man spun round, dropped his rifle, and clapped his left arm to his right. Then he turned and bolted with a yell of dismay.

The lads jammed the smoking pistol into his belt and ran to the parapet where the rope was swinging from the knob of stone. Dan, who had been waiting for his friend, immediately began to descend. "Don't stop," he urged. "The rope is strong enough to bear both of us."

"It will have to be," Alec replied, "for I'm coming now. Look sharp."

He swung himself in the gulf and vanished beneath the coping. Down the plucky lads went with scarcely the space of a yard between them, heedless or rough bumping and stinging hands—down the precipitous face of the wall, knot by knot, twisting and spinning dizzily, and catching what foothold they could on the rough brickwork. Above the edge of the parapet grew dimmer against the starry sky, the flooded ditch lay calm and glassy.

On and on. Half of the distance covered—two-thirds. Excited cries rent the air from head and the savage clatter of soldiery crowded to the rim of the wall. Firearms were thrust downward. Crack!—crack, crack!—crack! The bullets whistled and hummed.

and twisted beams, and found a hollow space where they could stretch themselves full length. Rest was delicious after their fatiguing adventures, and an overpowering drowsiness began to steal upon them.

The day was well advanced when the lads woke from slumber—woke suddenly, as if from a bad dream, with a chilling sense of evil that as quickly materialized into a very real and imminent peril, for a man in Boxer garb was kneeling at the edge of the ruin and peering with a furtive grin into the network of fallen timbers.

"How Chang!" Alec said, hoarsely. "And he sees us!" gasped Dan. "It was indeed Mow Chang, the Tiger's crafty lieutenant. Hearing the startled voices, and knowing that his eavesdropping was discovered, the ruffian sprang to his feet, and made off, shouting loudly as he ran."

"He'll be back directly with a lot more—perhaps with Li Sheng," exclaimed Dan. "What are we going to do? Is there a way out behind?"

"None; there is no use to try it," Alec answered despairingly, as he looked back at the closely wedged beams and tiles. The debris was impenetrable to right and left; the only exit was that in front. For a moment or two the lads listened. The surrounding city was humming and buzzing like an angry beehive, echoing to wild clamor and the blare of trumpets, and the brazen beating of gongs. The cannon of the allies thundered and crashed, and it was almost possible to distinguish the cheering of the plucky little Japanese soldiers who were victoriously storming the great gate.

Pekin's long-postponed hour of retribution was at hand. "The relief force must be within the walls," declared Alec. "I believe the siege is raised. If we stop here in this death trap we'll be slaughtered like rats. What do you say, Dan? You better make a dash for life, before it is too late."

"I'm with you," Dan assented. "Come along, and we'll try to—"

The sentence froze on his lips. It was already too late for flight. Outside of the ruined mission building appeared all at once a half-score of Boxers, armed with swords and lances. They danced about like inhuman fiends, and gazed with hungry wolfish eyes into the debris, where they could vaguely perceive their intended victims.

"Kill the foreign devils!" they yelled. "Off with their heads! Shal sharp!" With some of the foreign devils, who was one of the party, uttered the clamor. "Leave this to me," he said in a peremptory tone to his companions; and with that he called loudly to the lads: "Come out and surrender yourselves, and you shall not be harmed; by my ancestors I swear it! The fighting is ended, and we will lead you to your friends."

posed himself for a brief second. It was long enough for a ball from Alec's revolver to lodge in his left shoulder, and with a yell and an oath he reeled out of sight.

"I wish I had killed him," muttered the lad. "By Jove, Dan, do you know there's really a chance for us, after all! The advantage is on our side, and if we can keep these devils at bay a little longer, help may reach us from the legations or from the relief force."

"Then we must spare our ammunition," said Dan. "How many shots have you left?"

"Only one," Alec replied. "And I have two. It's little enough between us. He put an arm out and secured a couple of the lances. "These will serve us," he said, "when our revolvers are empty."

But the cheering ray of hope was of brief duration; it vanished almost as soon as it was kindled. The Boxers, now strangely silent, were not inactive. They were moving about briskly, as was shown by wavering shadows on the sunlit surface of the street, and of a sudden hoarse and triumphant shouts arose. Then the hissing crackle of flames was heard, and little red flashes leapt into view amid the tangled beams to right and left of the mouth of the burrow.

"They have fired the place!" gasped Alec. "God help us!"

"The devils!" cried Dan. "Can they be cruel enough to roast us to death?"

The horror of the fate that threatened them—that seemed inevitable—held the lads spellbound and speechless. A minute passed, the flames ate deeper into the dry timbers, constantly darting forth their angry tongues in fresh places. Thick, yellowish smoke poured along the passage, hiding the Boxers, who were yelling with delight and triumph.

"So am I," Alec cried. "I can't stand this; give me the sword for preference. Come on, Dan; we'll rush out and tackle them. There's a ghost of a chance of our getting through—"

them. Mr. Thomas Cat saw a long body stretch up toward the top of the water, and a great black jaw sette one of the fish.

"My, what a corking big fish!" he said, and dived in the water at it. It was not a fish, but Mr. Blacksnake, who was also fishing.

He was about six feet long and almost as thick as Mr. Thomas Cat, so when Mr. Cat caught him, there was a pretty lively time. Mr. Blacksnake thrashed around in the water and finally wound himself around Mr. Cat and almost squeezed him to death, but Mr. Cat bit and scratched so hard that Mr. Blacksnake unwound himself and tried to get away.

Mr. Cat was glad enough to let him go, for he was completely exhausted with the struggle under the water, and almost smothered for lack of air. He crawled out on the bank and felt of his ribs very carefully to see if any had been broken by the squeezing he had received. He appeared to be all right, and so he picked up his string of fish and started down stream toward another good place.

"That was a powerful fish," he said. "I wish I had killed him," muttered the lad. "By Jove, Dan, do you know there's really a chance for us, after all! The advantage is on our side, and if we can keep these devils at bay a little longer, help may reach us from the legations or from the relief force."

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THE BOAT GLIDED OVER THE LAKE.



Why Cats Dislike Water. The Surprising Piscatorial Adventure of Mr. Thomas Cat.



the fish are better behaved." Mr. Cat was very determined and brave, but if it had not been for his curiosity and his pride as a fisherman, he would have given up and gone home.

Mr. Mink. He went down stream with his string of fish and soon found another good place. Here he threw in his bait, and, as before, the fish came to the top at once. "Ah, tchro is a beauty," said Mr. Cat, as he saw a great fat form gliding along beneath the surface. "I'll bet that fellow in a minute," and in he dived. He caught this time not a fish, but Mr. Mink, who was also fishing.

Now Mr. Mink was as large as Mr. Cat and a great fighter, but as Mr. Cat could not tell the difference, as soon as he felt Mr. Cat clawing his back, Mr. Mink lost his temper, and turning around, he did what the water looked as if were boiling, but Mr. Cat was desperate at this time, and he nearly killed Mr. Mink. They clawed and bit, and turning around, he did the only thing that saved Mr. Mink's life was that he could hold his breath under the water much longer than Mr. Cat could, and so Mr. Cat finally had to stop fighting and swim to the bank to keep from being drowned.

When he crawled out of the water he was a sight. His bathing suit was torn to ribbons, and he was so sitted and clawed that he looked as if he had been through a sausage machine.

"There, that settles it," he said, as soon as he could get his breath. "When I begin to act as they did today, it is time for me to keep out of the water. It was bad enough to have one of the knots around me and another to try to pull my tail out by the roots, but when they turned on me and tried to eat me alive, it is entirely too risky."

Mr. Cat had to borrow a flour sack to wear from Mr. Hog before he dared to go home. He was so sitted and clawed that he had to borrow a handkerchief. After all, his cousins—Miss Pussy, Miss Maria and Miss Tabby Cat—were just as well pleased with the fish dinner as Mr. Thomas Cat had caught a whole, but when he told them of the dreadful time he had had with the three last fishes, who tried to catch him, they thought he was a little over-keen. Some of the water again, and they have never done so. Ever since, cats dislike the water, and they even hate to get their feet wet.

HOME-MADE GYMNASIUM. Every Boy Can Have One, if He Have Attire or Shoe. A gymnasium is supposed by most boys to be a room fitted with a large number of appliances for exercising in various ways, and those appliances cost a great deal when you buy them, and, therefore, are out of reach of most of our readers. Still, any one of you can have a gymnasium, if you have an attic or shed which hangs over your jacket, or, if you have a better still, you can make the exercises yourself, and they will not cost you anything.

Get two straight hickory saplings, just long enough to reach from the floor of your attic to the ceiling, and from three to four inches thick. Peel the bark off carefully and shave off all of the little knobs and ridges that grow on the poles and stand dry thoroughly for a week.

Get four blocks of wood, each about two feet square and six inches thick. Cut holes in the center of these blocks just large enough to hold the ends of the hickory poles. Put one of these blocks on each end of both poles and nail them to the floor, or the attic or shed, and to a beam overhead, so that the poles are perfectly upright and about two feet apart. Then your gymnasium is complete.

Ants in Fatal Strife.

"Reds" Wage Most Merciless Warfare on Black Opponents.

A battle between black and red ants, in which the red ants captured the city of the black ants and carried away thousands of their eggs, was watched with much interest recently by J. H. Coonradt and his family, of Decatur, Ill. Mr. Coonradt teaches chemistry and zoology in the Decatur High School, and has made a special study of ants.

It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when he noticed a long line of red ants crossing his front walk. The ants were in a path about six inches wide, which stretched straight across the walk, and all were coming from one direction. Mr. Coonradt followed the line back and found that thousands of ants, all red, were marching from a nest hidden in the grass of the parking, just outside his fence.

Following the line across the walk and toward the back of the yard, a distance of 70 feet, he found the head of the long line of red ants already in a desperate battle with an army of black ants which were just a little larger than the red ants. They had made a big nest under a great oleander bush. Though larger than the red ants, they were not a match for them, and had already begun to get the worst of it, when Mr. Coonradt found them.

Thousands of red ants were swarming about the nest of the black insects, and attacking them viciously. A red ant would pounce on a black one, seize him by the back of the neck and not let go until the black ant was either crushed or driven to the edge of the nest. Some of the black ants were trying to escape with the white egg that ants are often seen carrying about, and these were always seized and crushed by the red ants. The black ants would drop their eggs and try to resist the furious attack made on them, but they seldom got away with their lives. Occasionally two or three black ants would attack a red ant, and in that way kill one. So many ants were engaged that a great many were killed of both kinds.

Gradually it appeared, however, that the red ants were gaining the victory. They began to swarm down under the ground into the nest of the black ants and to come out with eggs. Hundreds of red ants were carrying away eggs, while others were fighting the black owners. Occasionally a black ant would attack a red ant with an egg, and then the red ant would drop the egg, and the black ant would pick it up and carry it away. In a few seconds, then, he would pick up the egg and make off up the line toward the red ant nest.

The red ants were gaining the narrow line by which they came. In a little while the line was made up of reds going in both directions, some to the nest with black ant eggs, and some coming back to the black ant city to deposit their own eggs. There were thousands of red ants in that narrow line.

Mr. Coonradt watched the battle from about 10 o'clock until dark, then went to the house and left the battle raging. Next morning not an ant was to be seen. The passage-ways had been filled up as before. Next day no red ants came. They appeared to have cleared away the black ant city of its entire treasures.

Those people who have studied ants and their ways say that stolen black ant eggs are hatched out by red ants, and the young become the slaves of the red ants, and are made to nurse the young red ants, dig the nests of the red ants, store up provisions, and perform other services.

Coming and Going. Every time I come to grandma's Grandma calls me a little dear, and kisses me, and says she's very, very glad that I am here; Gives me pie, and crispy cookies— Wishes I would stay a year.

When I go home in the Autumn You'd most think grandma'd be sad, 'Membering the pleasant Summer She and I and grandpa'd had. But my heart she breaks so smiling, You'd imagine she was glad.

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