

PLACE FOR THE PRINCESS

The Princess of the Purple Palace.

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

CHAPTER XV.

Above the clamor swelled a lusty sound of cheering. A rifle cracked—another and another. A rattling fusillade followed, and when the lads had scrambled frantically through the flame and smoke, and had staggered with singed hair and smarting eyes into the street, they realized at a glance the thrilling fact that they were saved. The Boxers were in flight, and pressing them closely with fixed bayonets was a force of Legionnaires, numbering more than a score. The rifle fire had claimed half a dozen victims, and among the dead that strewn the ground before the blazing building lay Mow Chang, flat on his back, with a bullet hole between his temples.

Having given several of the fleeing enemy a taste of cold steel, the rescuers abandoned the pursuit and turned back. They were a motley lot, comprising half a dozen different nationalities, and the first of them to rush up to the delighted lads was Kin Soon. The faithful fellow, who had embraced Alec, and it seemed difficult for him to comprehend that his young master was really alive. William Cocket and Nick Killemoff were also of the party, and their voices shook with emotion as they heartily congratulated the lads and plied them with questions.

"It's too long a story to tell you now," protested Alec, "but here we both are, safe and sound."

"Yes, as right as ninepence," added Dan. "Is the siege raised? What are you going out into the Legation quarter?"

"When the Chinese began to bolt, we followed them up in the north and occupied their positions, and then the line some excitement was caused by the rapid approach of a native lad. He drew near, running fast and holding up both hands to show that he was unarmed, and as he reached the spot Dan took him by the wrist and surprised and overjoyed to recognize their old friend, Ping Tang. He was panting for breath, almost spent with exhaustion. "The Emperor Dowager and her escort are leaving the palace, flying from Pekin," he cried eagerly. And it is reported that they are taking the Emperor away against his will. I saw yonder gate opened for them; they must already be passing out of the Imperial City."

The effect produced by this startling piece of news may be imagined. The chance of capturing the Son of Heaven and his wicked aunt roused enthusiasm in every heart. Unanimously the men clamored to be led to the attempt, and Dan and Alec were as keen as the rest.

A brief hesitation and then the lieutenant decided to accept the responsibility. "It's a reckless thing to do," he exclaimed, "for we may be cut off or run into a strong force. But it's worth the risk. Fall in! Forward; quick trot!"

Turning their backs to the Legation quarter, the party swung off at a rapid pace. Ping Tang in advance, he had previously found an opportunity of telling the lads, in a few words, that his mother was safe in the old hiding place, and that he had but recently left her, in order to ascertain how the relief force was meeting with.

The besiegers must have fled to the west when they abandoned their positions, for, as the platoon moved on, they saw no Chinese, who lost no time in disappearing, this part of Pekin was clear of the enemy. Making rapid progress through a maze of lonely streets, the flying column soon came within sight of the Imperial City, from the nearest gate in the eastern wall of the Imperial City. The first glance revealed the disappointing fact that the greater portion of the Imperial City had already been captured, and that it was too far ahead to be overtaken, as well as too strongly guarded to fall an easy prey.

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The discovery was mutual. At once, as the officer's word of command rang loudly, the marines dashed forward with eager cheers. They let drive a scattering volley at the enemy, who were making a desperate attempt to escape, and among those who fell were two of the pole-bearers. As they pitched to the ground the palanquin was turned over on its side, and the rest of the bearers and the foot soldiers, drawing their swords, prepared to offer resistance. At the same moment the mounted banner-men wheeled their steeds and galloped back, but well-wielded fusillade emptied three or four saddles, and the survivors lost heart and spurred on to overtake the head of the cortege.

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But the little mounds of earth that were scattered under the parched and bullet-riddled trees, the roll of the valiant dead, could not be wholly forgotten, even at such a time. For some of the extraneous joy was tempered with sorrow, and it was only natural that the contrast, the happiness around her, should break down Mrs. Killigrew's fortitude and remind her

of the terrible loss she had sustained. Leaning on her husband's arm, and weeping quietly, she moved over the lawn until she was clear of the noisy crowd. And then it was that Dan, as he was hurrying to the Legation, caught sight of his parents, who were as quick to perceive him. And if ever a woman's deepest grief had been relieved, Mrs. Killigrew's did at that moment.

"My boy! my boy! Heaven has been very merciful!"

It was all Eustace Killigrew could say, as he watched mother and son in each other's embrace, and waited for his own turn. Several minutes later Dan called his attention to Alec and Loo-Lao, who were standing nearby. They were staring at him, with half-incoherent words that they failed to understand, and then he rushed away and disappeared in the throng. He was back in a moment, with him were two others—an elderly, dignified Chinaman, and a tall, bronzed Englishman in native dress. The latter, with an incredulous cry, took Alec into his arms, and the Chinaman, who was Loo-Lao's father, kissed his daughter as ardently as any European parent could have done.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Captain Drury; "I never expected to see you again, my boy."

He turned to greet the faithful Kin Soon, and then, with a look that was too far ahead to be overtaken, as well as too strongly guarded to fall an easy prey.

But the tail of the procession was still within reach—palanquin with hangings of yellow silk, borne by eight pole-bearers. It was preceded by a small detachment of mounted banner soldiers, and a dozen foot soldiers brought up the rear.

The discovery was mutual. At once, as the officer's word of command rang loudly, the marines dashed forward with eager cheers. They let drive a scattering volley at the enemy, who were making a desperate attempt to escape, and among those who fell were two of the pole-bearers. As they pitched to the ground the palanquin was turned over on its side, and the rest of the bearers and the foot soldiers, drawing their swords, prepared to offer resistance. At the same moment the mounted banner-men wheeled their steeds and galloped back, but well-wielded fusillade emptied three or four saddles, and the survivors lost heart and spurred on to overtake the head of the cortege.

were drawn apart and forth stepped—the Princess Loo-Lao. With a glad cry she ran to the lads, who shared her pleasure in the reunion.

Mutual explanations had to be postponed for the present; it was enough to know that the girl had been rescued from those who would have carried her far away from the capital and held her as a hostage. The Lieutenant quickly reformed his men, and, in close array, they marched back as they had come, listening the while with suppressed excitement to the sound of English cheers in the distance and the rattle of small arms at the Great East gate. They encountered none of the enemy, and when they were near Canal street they learned the good tidings of relief. Soon they were tramping over the Water Gate, and not until they had entered the Legation area was the absence of Cocket and Killemoff discovered. Why the two marines had lurked behind was not difficult to conjecture.

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