

in very poor pidgin English until we got well out of camp. Then I asked the timid-looking man why the devil he had brought a female white child into that hell's cauldron of whirling sand.

"They were pretty well startled. Then the girl answered. "Because I choose to come. He is my father. And, indeed, why should I stay at home? I ride as well as you do, and shoot I dare say a trifle better. I love the life we lead. What dweller in civilization will see such a sight as that?"

"The sun, a great red globe, was dropping behind the snow-capped peak of the Black Alashans. Over the great dunes the light fell like a mantle of molten gold, and toward us, in long ghost figures, crept the purple shadows of evening. The wind was whispering, and out of the west, dancing along the higher ridges, came swirling sand wraiths through which the red rays of the declining sun shone as through powdered pearl.

"It seemed to me that I understood. It explained why I was standing there myself, with a pig-tail glued to my shaven head and a fiber arch in my mouth, that I might talk like the clacking Tartar devils among whom I moved and practiced stealth and deception. It was the lure of the Far Horizon, the most subtle poison that ever entered human veins. She would go on as I had, perhaps, year after year, unless—

"They rode away again into the quick darkness of a desert night, and I hoped that benign luck might some day lure her back to her own.

"When a man is elderly and ugly sena stains can't make him much worse, and his whereabouts are of no particular consequence. But when a girl with eyes like hers, and red lips and supple slenderness, rides away on a white mule into a night of unknown terrors and soul-fraying distances, daylight doesn't dispel the wonder of it all, as it dispels superstitious fear of Phantom Sedan chairs."

"I've never seen the timid-looking little man since. But I've learned that he was a globe trotter, spy and archaeologist of steel nerves and callous conscience. When McRae mentioned them I was as curious for other details as he was for those I had to impart. His name he said—and I remembered it as the one he had given—was Hamilton McAllister. Hers was Edith. They had met for one brief month at a Maine summer resort.

"I was a young cub out of Yale," he said. "She was a fearless, imperious little thing who could outswim me and out-guess me in the subtle game of love. But it concluded with my giving her the ring. She promised that she would accompany her father on only one more mission. I've waited and waited. Got letters from Suez and Sangora and Liang-Si. And then she left the last mail route. She was to be back in a year. It's six since she left. The longing for her has grown on me.

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DELBRIDGE, a classmate who missionaried, told me last year he had heard of such a strange pair on the Kashgar River, and that his informant said they were both butchered somewhere in the Dalun Yun country for an alleged attempt to steal the monastery's hoard of sacred rubies. It seemed unbelievable, of course. But I had heard of the quick, terrible Oriental suspicions, and thought I would go insane from the suspense. So I came on, at last. I want to know definitely. If she's alive I want to take her back. If she isn't I want at least to stand over her grave. It's the uncertainty of it all that wears!

"Then because he was white and owned to having white nerves and emotions I told him of the Phantom Sedan episode. He was a tall, slender, scholarly-looking chap with red hair and pale freckles. I pictured him as one of an ancient New England family—correct, precise and frozenly conventional. I thought his Yale viewpoint would prompt him to sneer at the yarn. But instead his eyes brightened, and although he



"For a woman looked out at me—"

didn't say much I guessed that he believed the girl of the pearl turban and ruby corselet was the one he sought.

"I couldn't patch up any theory of resemblance. It was a case of eyes and lips in the moonlight, and if a man can certify to a pair of eyes he has seen but once while his horse cringes on the edge of eternity and coolies moan and moonlight shimmers on silk and pearls and rubies, he possesses qualities of astuteness to which I can lay no claim.

"But it seemed good to have a white man and an American to talk with over the campfire that burned in the chilly winds above the snowline. He told me of the outside, and I told him such tales of the dim trails as I thought would not undermine his courage. We traded tales of football victories and opium smuggling expeditions, of home politics and lama-engineered gold raids, of Manhattan cafes and the Ming Tombs.

"The gloomy gorges and snow-choked passes did away with conversation during the day. The ratty ponies and agile mules made hard enough going of it, and the rest of us were hard pressed to keep from freezing. It was a relief to descend again into the cedars of Dalun Yun.

"We were well off the beaten paths because my opium went to the monastery at Sing D'Hai, and the quest for the Phantom Sedan took us still farther up into the lonely purple tableland of the Dzun Mo Dun ranges. The straggling mud and stone villages were left behind us. A single Chinese patrol passed us and pawed over our calico and crockery for contraband. Then the silence that is broken only by the wailing of the winds

from Gobi descended about us and stayed day after day until McRae's face took on the nervous drawn look that the weirdness of it all paints on the features of newcomers.

"When we went through the deeper, darker gorges, with only a straggling blue ribbon of sky overhead, he got to turning around and peering over his shoulder. It made me nervous. There is something about the menace of the place sufficient if kept static, but when you jump or start suddenly, then the silence and gloom become almost unbearable. I told him to ease off, and made Fu Chang ride in front and McRae between us.

"We were in the Gdong-mar-gyi-yul country now, or the 'Place of Red Faces,' as it would be translated. It was the least known part of Thibet. In fact it still is. Russia and England have done a lot of diplomatic fencing with China over the Thibetan gold country—it's the greatest free gold territory on earth, not even excepting Alaska or Australia, and will lead the world in the production of the yellow metal some day centuries hence. The Chinese exact nominal tribute and maintain forts and toll patrols, but I've never seen any of them in the Gdong-mar-gyi-yul country.

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FU CHANG'S yellow countenance was a sort of pasty gray when we turned off the last known trail and trended east. It was worse after the Shu-Kans began to shriek. The screeching of these silence-crazed hermits, sharp and shrill and abrupt, from the shadows of the cliffs overhead is one of the most startling things that can obtrude upon a man's

senses. The strange gaunt figures, their long white hair and beards, scrambling on all fours in and out of the moonlight patches remind me of the giant lemurs of the Indian hills. They start out respectably enough, with oil lamps and robes for a decade's contemplation of Nirvana. But the silence and hardships of their snowline caves get in their work. Soon they get to creeping like the animals—the only creatures they see—and scramble around in tatters, lifting their shriveled arms to the skies and shrieking in mad frenzy to break the murmuring silence!

"McRae had heard strange tales of these fleeting figures, of men who wrapped up in the trail at night and would not waken in the morning, of rocks hurtling from the cliffs in the moonlight, and of spears that flashed white against the black granite before quivering in the bodies of their victims. He told it to me at night in awed whispers, staring with his pale eyes into mine. And such is the effect of association that I, who had not known a white man's style of 'nerves' for years, crouched back into the shadows in what was pretty near a flat blue funk. I didn't want to tell him to stop. It might have communicated greater knowledge of my own state of mind. But I rather envied Chu Fang, who knew no word of English and stared moodily out into the starlight void beyond the edge of the trail.

"The path grew steeper and the trail narrower. At sunset I called out to Chu Fang that we would camp. He didn't stop his mouse-colored mule or answer, but plodded on around a bend in the trail,