

YU'AN HEE SEE LAUGHS

By SAX ROHMER

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CHAPTER V—Continued

She slipped a hand into a pocket of her jumper and produced a half sheet of thin paper. "When I saw this," she continued, and her voice grew very serious, "I thought you ought to know at once."

Halg removed "Mr. Smith's" glasses and took the torn sheet from Eileen's hand. Scribbled in pencil upon the paper were the following words:

"Halg, chief inspector Scotland Yard, on board. Identify and advise."

Alone once more, Dawson Halg bent over his notes. Eileen had slipped in unnoticed. Saeer luck, and her keen wit, had come to his aid.

Doctor Oestler's penciled scrawl was obviously a translation of the message:

"Ibjh head keeper searchlight near home stop know tell."

Its deadly simplicity betrayed genius. The IBJH was elementary, the letters being merely those next in the alphabet to HAIG, but the fact that "Head Keeper Searchlight" meant Chief Inspector Scotland Yard, was one which no cryptographer could ever be expected to discover. "Near home" evidently corresponded to On board; "Known" to identify; "Tell" to advise.

It was a system of analogies, and he proceeded to apply it to the other messages, with the result that by lunch time he was satisfied that at least the gist of these was in his possession.

He leaned back in his chair and whistled softly. Five members of this mysterious organization, professedly strangers to one another, were traveling in the Wallaroo, and Doctor Oestler was evidently the chief. Three were booked to Port Said (since Len Chow had arranged to cancel his further passage); two to Australia.

What did their presence in the ship mean? And what was the connection with the Limehouse murder? He was baffled. Perhaps the most alarming feature of the case was the fact that these people seemed to be supplied with deadly accurate information. Durham had been identified, so much was evident. Now they knew that he, Halg, was on board! Since he could not recall having ever seen one of the suspects in his life—Franz Hartog excepted—he inclined to the idea that Durham, as well as himself, had been notified to Doctor Oestler from some well-informed source.

He bent over the messages which he had decoded. Those sent by the woman obviously related to the chief engineer, one of them reading:

"Organ grinder sure stop big boy and next of kin not running signed Val."

This he had translated as follows: "Chief engineer captured. Commander and chief officer no good. Val."

That this meant that Corcoran had been bought over and become a party to some crooked deal, Halg did not believe for a moment. He read it to mean that the infatuated engineer was playing into the woman's hands. He was to be used, in some way, without his knowledge.

But—Halg stared up at the porthole and asked the question aloud: "In what way?"

Doctor Oestler's radio correspondence frankly defeated him. He could find no parallel, among the ship's company, to the strange names employed. And he had come to the conclusion that it related to something taking place elsewhere. Evidently, Doctor Oestler was a sort of chief of staff; his out-going messages took the form of inquiries as to the whereabouts of certain persons, and the replies presumably

contained the desired information, which, however, conveyed nothing at all to Dawson Halg.

These messages were sent to a telegraphic address in Paris which he had no means of tracing.

It was all very maddening, because one fact emerged from all this mystification. This complicated conspiracy had nothing to do with drug running. That enterprise had been merely a side line, abandoned at the first hint of danger.

What, then, did it mean? Dawson Halg sat, his head resting upon one upraised hand—for five minutes—for ten minutes . . . thinking hard—very hard.

How had Jo Lung, or the man of whom Jo Lung was merely a creature, learned of the instructions sent Sydney? They had been sent from the Yard in code to the chief customs officer.

Halg suddenly stood up. "By heavens!" he whispered. "They can't have known—they can't have known! It was a definite change of plan on the part of the gang. They removed their precious consignment because . . . ?"

Because of what?

CHAPTER VI

THE night train from Cairo to Asuan pulled into the station at Keneh. Only two first-class passengers alighted there, a man and a woman, a small, very slender woman.

The woman shivered as they entered a saloon car which awaited them in charge of a Nubian chauffeur and groom.

"You shiver, little one," said Yu'an Hee See.

The woman leaned against him. "I am so cold, Yu'an," she explained.

"In two days you will be in your own apartments—amongst your scents and jewels and those other toys you love, with service and warmth, and those treasures amid which I delight to see you playing."

He stroked her slender knee with a plump, tapering hand, and his words came as a high croon.

Where a large mosque grotesquely affected the continuity of the houses, they swung into a narrow side turning. The driver skirted one high wall of the mosque, came into the very shadow of the minaret, and turned left again. Twenty yards along, they pulled up.

Yu'an Hee See and the woman passed across a roughly paved courtyard.

Light shone out from rooms on the ground floor, and there was an outer staircase leading up to a balcony illuminated by two fine lattice windows.

Yu'an Hee See and his companion entered a lighted room. On the threshold they were met by Aswami Pasha. He bowed low over the extended hand of Orange Blossom, deeply saluting Yu'an Hee See.

"We have done our best, my lord," he said. "I trust you will be happy here for one night."

He clasped his hands, and an old Arab woman appeared.

"My lady," he bowed to Yu'an Hee See's companion, "your apartment is prepared; Magreba will attend you." Orange Blossom followed the aged attendant from the apartment.

"All are here?" Yu'an asked, upon a very high note, which betokened anxiety.

"All. I have the list showing where each man is tonight."

Yu'an Hee See waved a plump hand. "I do not wish to see it."

"The detective from Scotland Yard, who is on the Wallaroo, has been identified. . . . He is in touch with the American girl whom your

excellency has taken under your protection!"

Yu'an Hee See began very softly to hiss. "It is almost certain then, that this man had read the notes in my book before. . . . ?"

"I fear so, Excellency."

Yu'an Hee See, his eyes apparently quite closed, nodded, slowly.

"He has had time to inform others. But he cannot know all. Yet this man it was who followed me to Singapore a year ago . . . and has escaped me since. . . . The Hangman is on board?" he whispered.

"He is."

A pause, then: "Instruct Doctor Oestler," said Yu'an Hee See.

Aswami Pasha nodded comprehendingly; whereupon Yu'an Hee See began to laugh, his red lips seeming to swell, but his teeth never showing; the oblique slits of his eyes turned in the Egyptian's direction.

Dawson Halg sat in the room of Jack Rattray, the chief officer, or rather, he sat at intervals, pacing up and down like a wild animal.

"It's a most unholy business," said Rattray, in his slow fashion. "I've been looking on, and I've seen things. First thing: you're spotted! . . ."

"I know!—and I can't read Oestler's messages! They're in a perfectly undecipherable code."

"Second thing," Rattray went on: "Two members of this silly gang are watching Eileen; meaning Doctor O. and Mr. Chow. What for? She's not in their way, is she?"

Dawson turned, just inside the cabin door, and stared at the speaker. Then:

"You're right, Jack," he said. "I've seen them myself. I don't like it, and I don't understand it."

"But what's it all about?" Rattray asked helplessly. "What are all these birds doing on board? They're a pretty unsavory crew, in my reckoning, anyway. Oestler's plausible enough, but there's a nasty brute hidden under that amiable smile. As for the 'snake charmer,' she'd drown her own twins. Then there are the two Chinks on D deck. The learned one, with the glasses—the little bloke, I mean, Len Chow—doesn't seem in the Number One list to me. But his long pal with the strangled face ought to be put overboard, if I'm any judge. Then there's the big German, Hartog—he seems harmless enough and not in the same gallery at all. I don't know what to make of it."

"And I," said Dawson Halg, continuing his restless pacing, "don't know what to make of my report to the chief. I'm acting on information, Rattray, that this scheme, whatever it is, comes to a head before we reach Aden. And as I don't know what the scheme may be, I can't reasonably expect Scotland Yard to go on granting me leave of absence and paying my expenses indefinitely. You see, I'm supposed to be in charge of the Limehouse murder case!"

"I know," said Rattray, and produced his slow smile. "It's never been clear to me what the passenger list of the Wallaroo had to do with it."

"It isn't clear to me," Halg confessed. "But I know there is a connection. And I know I have my hand on the solution of the mystery if only I can grasp it."

He paced up and down awhile longer; then:

"Do you remember, Jack," he

jerked suddenly, "the loss of a big German freighter somewhere off Suakim about two years ago?"

Jack Rattray shook his head.

"I wasn't on this run two years ago. Why?"

"Well, there's no point in telling you why, if you don't remember the case," Halg replied. "But do you recall the wreck of the American steam yacht, Miss Minnesota?"

"Clearly! We were only forty miles off at the time! An aunt of Eileen's—Lady Dakenham—was lost in her. What's the chief idea grilling in your brain pan?"

"There are several ideas. But I admit they're a trifle hazy. Did you get an S O S from her?"

"Not a thing."

"Wasn't it funny they didn't send out a call for help?" Dawson Halg asked.

Rattray stared at him. "No," he replied. "In my opinion they hit some small heavily laden craft, and the pair of 'em sank almost at once."

Followed a short silence, then Halg asked, "Is there much drug smuggling down that way?"

"Lots! Hashish for Egypt, mostly. Also, the good old slave trade flourishes exceedingly."

"But where can the markets be, Jack?"

"There's Mecca. That's still a closed city. Fez, up in Africa. And I'm told there's a small, sort of exclusive market somewhere on the Nile in Egypt."

A rap on the door.

"Come in!" Rattray called. The door opened, and Eileen entered, closing it carefully behind her.

"I've caught them!" she declared, her eyes sparkling with excitement—"at last!"

"What?" Dawson Halg demanded. "I saw the snake charmer slip a note into the hand of Mr. Len Chow as they passed on the promenade deck, three minutes ago!"

There was a dance after dinner that night.

Dawson Halg, desperately worried, went up onto the boat deck, quite deserted at the moment, and leaned over the starboard rail.

The problem was one demanding the exercise of all his powers. And, set like a jewel in this dark affair, was Eileen—a distracting figure (he could not be blind to the truth), and one upon which all too often he found his thoughts focused. That Eileen had twice proved of incalculable service did not alter the plain fact that many times when he should have been concentrating upon the mystery, he found himself concentrating upon Eileen.

From a professional point of view he was faced either with something very like ruin, or, alternately, with a triumph which must prove a stepping stone in his far-flung ambitions.

Granted this success—now doubly to be prayed for—he might dare to think about Eileen as he longed to think about her; not as the charming sister of an old friend, nor even a capable little helper, but as . . . Eileen.

Where did the clew lie to these mysterious activities? What should be his next move? It was maddening to watch, to know some incomprehensible plot stretching from Limehouse to Paris, Paris to Marseilles, and thence to Port Said—further, perhaps—was fermenting under his very eyes, coming to maturity, and yet—to do nothing!

THE STORY FROM THE BEGINNING

Matt Kearney, young American living in London, says good-by to his sister Eileen, on board the Wallaroo. The ship is conveying £2,000,000 in gold to Australia. On his way home Kearney meets Inspector Dawson Halg, of Scotland Yard, very much in love with Eileen. Halg is on the trail of opium, which he is convinced is concealed in Jo Lung's warehouse. Called to other duty, Halg delegates Kearney, with Detective Norwich to visit the place and find out what he can. While in the warehouse Kearney picks up and carries away a notebook, which he turns over to Halg. Yu'an Hee See, leader of a band of international thieves, is at Jo Lung's. He sends two of his followers after Norwich and Kearney, one of whom he realizes must have picked up the notebook. Halg is puzzled over cryptic notes in the book, referring to the Wallaroo. Soon after leaving Kearney Norwich is murdered, but Kearney is not overtaken. While Halg is poring over the book, a monstrous creature enters, seizes it, and escapes. At Cairo Yu'an confers with his lieutenant, Aswami Pasha, over a mysterious coup they are planning. Halg boards the Wallaroo at Marseilles disguised. From radio messages he decodes, he realizes that members of Yu'an's gang are on board, and that they have recognized him.

At which point in his reflections, he was seized from behind in a steely grasp and lifted lightly, as a nurse might lift an infant! He was in the grip of that creature of Yu'an Hee See's called "the Hangman." But of this fact he was ignorant.

Swung back over the shoulder of his unseen, but incredibly powerful assailant, he recognized, with a cold chill of dread, that he was about to be hurled into the sea!

Automatically to his mind sprang those instructions which every police officer receives, in Ju-jitsu. His fists were useless, flung high, impotent, above his head. But the cunning grip which told him that he was dealing with an expert, held him so poised that only at one moment—for which, dangerously, Halg must wait—could he counter.

That moment came—as the seemingly irresistible forward swing commenced which was to hurl him into the sea. He checked a cry in



Orange Blossom Followed the Aged Attendant From the Apartment.

his throat. He was icy cool. And, following the curve of that mighty throw, instead of endeavoring to check it as an ill-informed victim would have done, he swung forward, drew up his knees, and kicked backward with all his strength!

It was sheer guesswork, but one heel registered dully upon the head of the athlete who held him aloft.

That death swing was never completed. Halg dropped with a crash upon the rail, hung perilously for a moment—and felt a vise-like grip upon his ankles. . . .

He was tipped forward, forward irresistibly—until he saw the lights of portholes beneath, the lower ones reflecting the sea. He clawed at the rail. That silent horror was behind him, hanging above him!

Clutching grimly, he kicked—kicked again . . . got a hold with his left hand higher up, and realized that the man was craning right over was reaching down to relax that detaining grip. In desperation, resting his head against the lower rail he managed at last to free his ankles, to draw his legs down.

Then, with all his remaining strength, he shot both feet upward. There was an impact—a stifled cry. His jacket, held in clutching fingers swept down over his head, but he clung on—clung on dizzily.

A wrench—a bulky shape streaked past him . . . a dull splash. The Hangman had failed!

Disheveled, panting, Halg dragged himself back to the deck. He leaned dizzily against a boat, striving to adjust his disorder. Already the plan was forming which later he carried out. No one knew that the thug was overboard. No one should ever know, but the sharks, until his absence was discovered!

(TO BE CONTINUED)