

WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

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JUNGLE BEASTS

A Complete Novelette

By WILLIAM P. BARRON

LOOK!" said the nurse to the young interne on the second floor of Dr. Winslow's sanatorium. "See what I found in the table drawers of 112—the patient who was discharged last evening. Do you suppose this horrible story can be true?"

The interne took the manuscript with a blasé air. He had read so many of these ravings on paper!

"This one is really unusual," said the nurse, noticing his manner. "Please read it."

Mildly interested, the interne began to read:

THE STORY OF A VAMPIRE

WHY AM I here in this place of madness, this house of diseased minds? Because of a cat!

And it is a cat that takes me away from this place—to go to my death!

And maybe this cat will follow on to haunt me in some other world, as it has in this. Who knows!

This doom had its beginning, as far as this life is concerned, when I was a boy, a lonely boy in my grandmother's house. My grandmother had a great yellow Tartar cat that she loved as only a lonely old woman can love a cat.

Perhaps it was because I was jealous of the love and attention my grandmother lavished on Toi Wah—a boy's natural antipathy for anything that



usurps the place he thinks is his by right. Or perhaps it was the same in-born cruelty, the same impish impulse to inflict suffering on a helpless dumb creature, which I have observed in other boys.

Anyway, with or without reason, I hated this self-complacent, supercilious animal that looked at me out of topaz eyes, with a look that seemed to see through and beyond me, as if I did not exist.

I hated her with a hatred that could be satisfied only with her death, and I thought and brooded for hours, that should have been devoted to my studies, of ways and means to bring this death about.

I must be fair to myself. Toi Wah hated me too. I could sense it as I sat by my grandmother's chair before the fire and looked across at Toi Wah, who lay in a chair on the opposite side. At such times I would always catch her watching me out of half-closed eyes, stealthily, furtively, never off her guard.

If she lay in my grandmother's lap and I leaned over to stroke her beautiful yellow fur, I could feel her actually shrink from my hand, and she would never purr, as she always did when my grandmother stroked her.

Sometimes I would hold her on my lap and pretend that I loved her. But as I stroked her, my hands would itch and twitch with the desire to clinch my hand in her satiny skin, and with the other hand choke her until she died.

My desire to kill would become so over-powering that my breath would become hurried, my heart would beat almost to suffocation and my face would flush.

Usually my grandmother, noticing my reddened face would glance up over her spectacles, from the book she was reading and say, "What ail you, Robert? You look flushed and feverish. Perhaps the room is too warm for you. Put Toi Wah down and run out in the air for a while."

I would take Toi Wah then, and, holding her as tightly as I dared, and with my teeth clenched to restrain myself, I would put her on her cushion and go out.

My grandfather had brought Toi Wah, a little yellow, fluffy, amber-eyed kitten, home with him in his ship from that mysterious land washed by the Yellow Sea.

And with Toi Wah had come a strange tale of her taking, stolen from an old Buddhist Monastery garden nestling among age-old pines beside the Grand Canal of China.

About her neck was a beautifully-wrought collar of flexible gold, with a

dragon engraved along its length, together with many Chinese characters and set with stones of Topaz and Jade. The collar was made so as to allow for expansion as the need arose, so that Toi Wah was never without her collar from her kittenhood to adult age. In fact, the collar could not be loosened without injury to the metal.

One day I descended into the kitchen with the cat in my arms and showed Charlie, our Chinese cook, who had sailed the Seven Seas with my grandfather, the collar about her neck.

The old Chinaman stared until his eyes started from his head, all the time making queer little noises in his throat. He rubbed his eyes and put on his great horn spectacles and stared again, muttering to himself.

"What is it, Charlie?" I asked, surprised at the old man, who was usually so stoically calm.

"These velly gleet words," he said at last, shaking his head cryptically. "Words no good flo you. Words good for velly gleet cat; Gland Lama cat."

But what do the words say?" I urged.

He mooned over the inscription for a long time, fingering the collar lovingly, while Toi Wah lay passively in my arms and looked at him.

"He say what I no can say good in English," he explained at last. "He say, 'Death no can do, no can die.' See? When Gland Lama cat wear this colla', no can die. No can be kill him—just change flom cat to some other thing; monkey—tiger—hoss—maybe man—next time," he concluded vaguely.

"He say, 'Love me, I love you, hate me, I hate you.' No can say good in English what Chinese say. See?"

And with this I had to be content for the time. Now I know the characters engraved on Toi Wah's collar referred to a quotation from the seventh book of Buddha, which, freely translated, reads as follows:

"That which is alive hath known death, and that which lives can never die. Death is not; there is only a changing from shape to shape, from life to life.

"Mayhap the despised animal, walking in the dust of the road, was one time King of Ind, or the consort of Ghengis Khan.

"Do me no harm. Protect me, O Man, and I will protect thee. Feed me, O Man, and I will feed thee. Love me, O Man, and I will love thee. Hate me, and I will hate thee. Slay me, and I will slay thee.

"We be brothers, O Man, thou and I, from life to life, from death to death, until Nirvana be won."

If I had only known then, and stayed my hand, I would not now be haunted by this yellow terror that peers out at me from the dark; that follows after me with softly padding feet; never nearer, never receding, until. . . .

Toi Wah was mated with another Tartar cat of high degree, and became the mother of a kitten.

And such a mother! Only the hard heart made cruel by fear would remain unsoftened by the great cat's untiring devotion to her kitten.

Everywhere she went she carried it in her mouth; never leaving it alone for a moment, seeming to sense its danger from me; an abnormal, hated cat!

However, she seemed to relent even toward me if I happened to pass her chair when she was nursing the little creature.

At such times she would lay stretching out her legs, opening and shutting her great paws in a sort of ecstasy, purring her utter content. She would look up at me, maternal pride and joy glowing in her yellow eyes, soft and lustrous now, the hate and suspicion of me crowded out by mother love.

"Look!" she seemed to say. "Look at this wonderful thing I have created out of my body! Do you not love it?"

I did not love it. No! On the contrary, it intensified my hate by adding another object to it.

My grandmother added fuel to the fire by sending me out to the shops to buy delicacies for Toi Wah and her kitten; liverwurst and catnip for the mother, milk and cream for the kitten.

"Robert, my son," she would say to me, all unaware of my hatred, "Do you know we have quite a royal family with us! These wonderful cats are descended in an unbroken line from the cats of the Royal Household of Ghengis Khan. The records were kept in the Buddhist Monastery from which Toi Wah came."

"How did Grandfather get her?" I asked.

"Do not ask me, child," the old lady smiled. "He told me only that he stole her in a spirit of bravado from the garden of this ancient Buddhist Monastery when egged on to do so by his friends. They were spending an idle week exploring the ancient towns along the Grand Canal of China, and were attracted by the beautiful Tartar cats in this garden. It seemed the Buddhist Monks reared these cats as a sort of religious duty.

Your grandfather always believed that a Buddish curse of some sort went with Toi Wah after a Chinese merchant translated the Chinese characters on her collar for him. And he often said he wished that he had not whisked her into the pocket of his big sou'wester jacket, when the priests were not looking.

"Myself, I do not believe in these superstitious curses and omens, so I would not let him take the collar off. In fact, he could not do it; it was so cunningly riveted.

"He always feared some evil would come from the cat, but I have found her a great comfort and a thing to love."

And she would hold out her hands to Toi Wah, and the great cat would leap in her lap and rub her head lovingly against my grandmother's neck.

After that I feared Toi Wah more than ever. This fear was an intangible, elusive thing. I could not understand it or analyze it; but it was very real. If I wandered about the dim old passages of my grandmother's ancient house, or explored the dusty cobwebby rooms, there seemed always to follow after me the soft padding sound of Toi Wah's paws. Following, always following after me, but never coming nearer; always just beyond where I could see.

It was maddening! Always to have following after me the stealthy, soft, almost inaudible sound of padded feet. I could never win free from it within the house.

In my bedroom, sitting alone before the fire with the door locked and bolted, every corner of the room previously explored, the bed looked under, I would always feel that she was sitting there behind me, watching me out of vigilant yellow eyes. Eyes that were full of suspicion and hate. Waiting, watching—for what? I did not know. I only feared.

Out of this fear grew many unreal terrors. I came to believe that Toi Wah was waiting a favorable chance to spring on me from behind, or when I was asleep, and to dig her great curved claws into my throat, tearing and rending it in her hate.

I became so possessed by this fear that I fashioned a leather collar for myself that fitted well up under my ears and around my neck. I wore this always when I was alone in my room and when I slept, gaining some sense of security thereby. But in the night time! No one can know what I, a lonely boy, suffered then!

My eyes would no sooner close in drowsy weariness when the stealthy padding of Toi Wah's footsteps would begin. I could hear them coming softly

up the stairs, stealing along the dark passageway to my room, at the end. They stopped there because the door was locked and bolted, with the heavy chiffonier jammed against it as an extra precaution. I would listen intently, and I fancied I could hear a faint scratching sound at the door.

Then there would rush over me all the terrors of the dark. Suppose I had failed to close the transom securely? If the transom was open Toi Wah could, with one great leap, win through and on to my bed. And then—

The cold sweat of fear would exude from every pore, as my imagination visualized Toi Wah leaping through, and, with a snarl, pouncing upon my throat with tooth and claw. I would shudder and tremblingly feel about my neck to make sure my leather collar was securely fastened.

At last, unable to stand the uncertainty any longer, I would leap out of bed, turn on the light, rush to the door, frantically drag the heavy chiffonier to one side, and throw open the door. Nothing!

Then I would creep along the passageway to the head of the stairs, and peer down into the dimly-lighted hall. Nothing!

Looking fearfully over my shoulder as I went, I would go back to my room, shut the door, lock and bolt it, push the chiffonier against it, assure myself that the transom was closed, and jump into bed, burying my head beneath the covers.

Then I could sleep. Sleep only to dream that Toi Wah had crept softly into the room and was sucking the breath out of my body. This was a popular superstition in the country years ago, and no doubt my dream was aided by my being half suffocated beneath the bedclothes. But the dream was none the less terrifying and real.

Night after night I lived this life of cowering terror; of listening for the haunting sound of stealthy, softly-padding footsteps always following, never advancing, never receding.

But the day of my revenge came at last. How sweet it was then! How frightful it seems now!

II

TOI WAH'S kitten, now half grown, wandered away from his mother below stairs and up to my room. Returning home from school, I found him there, lying on the rug playing with one of my tennis balls.

Joy filled my heart at the sight of him. I had just seen his mother sleeping placidly on my grandmother's lap, who was also sleeping.

I softly closed and locked the door. At last I would be rid of one of the pests that made my life a hell! I put on my leather collar and the heavy gloves I used for working in the garden. I took these precautions because even of this small kitten I was afraid!

Unaware of its danger, the kitten romped about the rug. I drew a long breath, stooped and picked him up. He looked at me, sensed his danger, spat, and tried to squirm out of my hands.

"Too late, you devil!" I exulted, holding him firmly.

A buzzing came to my ears, a fullness of the head, a dryness of the mouth, as I choked him—choked him until his glazing yellow eyes started from their sockets and his tongue hung out. Choked him joyously, relentlessly, deriving more pleasure from the death agony of this little creature, whose mother I hated and feared, than I had ever known.

After a long time I opened my hands and looked at him closely for any signs of life. But he was quite dead. Of one of them at least, I was forever rid, I thought jubilantly as I gazed at the lifeless body. And then—

There came a scratching at the door; and a loving, agonized *meow!*

It did not seem possible that any animal was capable of putting into the only sound with which it could express itself, the anxious, yearning love that sound conveyed.

The old fear clutched at my heart. It seems incredible that I, almost a full-grown man, a football champion and all-round athlete, could be afraid of a cat in broad daylight.

But I was! Cold sweat poured down my back, and my hands trembled so that the dead kitten fell with a soft *thump* on the rug.

This sound aroused me from my semi-stupor of fear. Hastily, I threw up the window-sash and tossed the inert little body out into the yard.

I closed the window, and, with a studied nonchalance, walked whistling to the door and opened it.

"Come in, kittie," I said innocently. "Poor kittie!"

Toi Wah ran in and frantically circled the room, *meowing* piteously. She paid no attention to me, but ran here and there, under the bed, under the chiffonier, seeking in every corner of the large old-fashioned room.

She came at last to the rug before the fire, lowered her head and sniffed at the spot where, but a moment before, her darling had lain.

She looked up at me, then, with great mournful eyes. Eyes with no hate in them now, only unutterable sorrow. I

have never seen in the eyes of any creature the sorrow I saw there.

That look brough a queer lump in my throat. I was sorry now for what I had done. If I could have recalled my act, I would have done so. But it was too late. The dead kitten lay out in the yard.

For a moment Toi Wah looked at me, and then the sorrow in her eyes gave way to the old look of suspicion and hate. And then, with a yowl like a wolf, she sprang out of the room.

As night came on, my fear increased. I dared not go to bed. I was uneasy, too, craven that I was, for fear my grandmother would suspect me. But, fortunately for me, she though the kitten had been stolen and never dreamed I had killed it.

I lingered until the last moment before starting upstairs to bed. I studiously avoided looking at Toi Wah as I passed her on my way to the stairs.

I raced up the stairs and down the long passage to my bedroom. Hastily undressing, throwing my clothes here and there, I plunged into the very center of the bed and buried my head beneath the covers.

There I waited in shivering terror for the sound of padding footsteps. They never came. And then, because I was tired out by the lateness of the hour, and perhaps also stupefied by the lack of fresh air in my room, I slept.

Far in the night I heard the chimes from the church across the street, and opened my eyes. The moonlight was shining in from the window and I saw two fiery eyes glaring at me from a corner.

Was I in the clutches of a nightmare, engendered by my fears? Or had I, in my haste to get to bed, neglected to shut and lock my door? I do not know, but suddenly there was a jar to the bed as something leaped upon it from the floor.

I sat up, shivering with terror, and Toi Wah looked into my eyes and held them. In her mouth she held the bedraggled body of her kitten. She laid it softly down on the coverlet, never taking her eyes from mine.

Suddenly a soft glow, a sort of halo, shone around her, and then, as I am a living and an honorable man, *Toi Wah spoke to me!*

III.

SHE SAID—I could see her mouth move—“*He that hath slain shall slay again. Then he that slayeth shall himself be slain.*”

“*Yea, seventy times seven shall thy days be after my cycle is broken. Then,*

at this hour, shall I return that the thing may be accomplished after Lord Buddha's law.”

Then the voice ceased, the halo faded. I felt the bed rebound as she jumped to the floor, and there I heard the soft padding of her feet down the passage-way.

I awoke with a shriek. My forehead was damp with sweat. My teeth were chattering. I looked and saw that my door was wide open. I leaped out of bed and turned on the light. Was it a hideous dream, a fearful nightmare?

I do not know. But, lying there on the coverlet, was the wet muddy body of Toi Wah's kitten.

A live and famished man-eating tiger in the room could not have inspired me with greater terror. I dared not touch the cold dead thing. I dared not remain in the room with it.

I fled down the stairs, stumbling over furniture in the lower hall, until I reached the houseman's room. Here I knocked and begged, with chattering teeth, to be allowed to remain on a couch in his room until morning, telling him I had been frightened by a dreadful dream.

Early the next morning I secretly took the dead kitten out in the garden and buried it deep, putting a pile of stones over the grave; watching carefully for any glimpse of Toi Wah.

As I returned to the house, I met the old housekeeper, who stood with an anxious face at the kitchen door.

“Master Robert, no wonder that you could not sleep the morn! Your poor grandmother passed away in the night. It must have been after midnight, for I did not leave her until the stroke of eleven.”

My heart leaped. Not for surprise or grief at my grandmother's death. That was a thing to be expected, and the cold aristocratic old lady had not loved me over much.

Nor was it for joy that she had left me rich, the last of an old race whose forbears went down to the sea in ships, bringing home the wealth of the world.

No! I thought only that Toi Wah and I were on equal ground at last! And that as soon as possible I would rid myself of the dread of her by day and my terror of her by night.

My inheritance would be a thing of little worth if I must spend anxious days and fear-haunted nights. Toi Wah must die, in order that I might know joyful days and sleep at night in peace.

The joyous blood throbbed in my head and hissed in my ears as I raced up to my room, got my leather collar and

gloves and seized the great iron poker beside the fire-place.

I carried these up to the attic, a small, close room, dimly lighted by a skylight. There were no openings here from which a cat could escape.

Then I descended to my grandmother's room. Already the corpse candles had been lighted. I gave only a glance at the quiet, gaunt, aristocratic old face, dignified even in death.

I looked about in the flickering shadows thrown by the candles for Toi Wah. I did not see her. Could it be that she, sensing her danger, had fled?

My heart sank. I drew my breath sharply.

“The cat—Toi Wah?” I asked the housekeeper, who watched beside the dead. “Where is she?”

“Under the bed,” she answered. “The poor creature is that distracted she would not eat, and had to be driven from your grandmother's side in order that we might compose the body. She would not leave the room, but darted under the bed there, snarling and spitting. It's afraid of her I am.”

I got down on my hands and knees and peered under the bed. Crouched in the farthest corner was Toi Wah, and her great yellow eyes glared at me in terror and defiance.

“It's afraid of her, I am, Master Robert,” the housekeeper repeated. “Please take her away.”

I was afraid of Toi Wah, too. So afraid of her that I could know no peace, nor happiness, if she lived. I was sure of that.

It is the coward who is dangerous. Fear kills always if it can. It never temporizes, nor is it ever merciful. Beware of him who fears you.

I crawled under the bed and seized her. She made no resistance, much to my surprise, but I could feel her body trembling through my gloves. As my hand closed over her, she made a little sound like a gasp—that was all.

I crawled out, and in the presence of the housekeeper, and the dead, I held her lovingly in my arms, calling her “poor kittie” and stroking her long yellow fur, while she lay passive, tremblingly passive, in my arms.

I deceived the housekeeper, who thought I was venting my grief for my grandmother's death by loving and caressing the object of the old lady's affection. I did not deceive Toi Wah. She lay quietly in my arms, but it was the paralysis of terror; the nonresistant stupor of great fear. Her body never ceased trembling, and her eyes were lifeless and dull. She seemed to know her fate and had accepted the inevitable.

I carried her upstairs, threw her upon the floor and locked the door. I seized the poker beside the door and turned to slay her. Toi Wah lay where I had thrown her, crouched as if to spring, but she did not move. She only looked at me.

I did not fear her now. On my hands were heavy gauntlets, and about my throat was the heavy leather guard I had made, bradded and studded with steel and brass.

Toi Wah did not move. She only looked, but such a look! It appealed to the merciless devil in my heart. It burned into my soul.

"Kill me!" her great amber eyes seemed to say. "Kill me quickly and mercifully as you killed the darling of my heart. What sayeth the Master: 'Be merciful, and thy heart shall know peace.' Today is yours, tomorrow—Who can say?"

As if in a dream, I stood and looked into her eyes. Looked until those amber eyes converged into a dirty yellow pool around the edge of which grew giant ferns and reeds taller than our forest trees. And a misty haze hung over the scene.

Into the pool floated a canoe, a hollowed-out tree trunk. In the canoe was a man, a woman, and a child, all naked except for skins about their shoulders.

The man pushed toward the shore with a pole, and as he made a landing he leaped into the water and pulled the boat upon the bank.

As he pulled at the boat, the reeds quivered to the right of him, and a great yellow-colored tiger leaped from the cover of the ferns and seized the child.

For a moment it stood there, the man and woman paralyzed by fear and horror. Then, blood dripping from its jaws, it leaped back among the reeds and was gone.

The face of the man in the boat was mine! And it was Toi Wah who held my child in her dripping jaws! A great Toi Wah, with sabre teeth and dirty yellow hide, but still Toi Wah.

The pool faded and I stood there, looking into the eyes of my grandmother's Tartar cat.

But I knew! *At last I knew!*

IV.

EXPLAIN it how you will, I knew that somewhere far back in that pre-historic time, Toi Wah had snatched away my first-born before my tortured eyes and that his tender flesh had filled a sabre-toothed tiger's maw.

Now had come the day of my revenge! I clutched the poker more firmly in my

hands. I stood and seized her by the collar that none of us had been able to unfasten. It came off in my hand!

Wonderingly, I looked at it, then cast it aside, to think no more of the curious antique until. . . .

I was in haste to rid myself of this thing of hate and dread. My heart leaped. I ground my teeth in an ecstasy of joy; my cheeks burned. A feeling of well-being and power made my whole body glow. . . .

I left her there, at last, on the blood-stained floor, a broken dead thing, and went out and locked the door after me.

I was free at last! Free from the fear of claws and teeth in my quivering throat. Free from the sound of softly-padding feet. I was a new man, indeed, for there sloughed from me all the old timidity and lack of aggressiveness that this fear of Toi Wah had engendered in me. I went from my grandmother's house to college, a man among men. . . .

I did not return again to the house of my inheritance until I brought my bride—a shy, soft, fluffy little thing a lovely contrast to the aggressive type of modern woman.

She was an old-world Eastern type, the daughter of a returned Chinese missionary, educated in the Orient, and she had the manners and had absorbed the ideals of the soft-voiced, secluded, home-loving Chinese women among whom she had been reared.

Her light brown eyes and yellow hair, her slow, undulating graceful walk, and her quaint old-fashioned ways attracted me; and after a short, impetuous wooing we were wed.

I was very happy. Only twenty-four, wealthy, and married to a loving and beautiful girl whom I adored!

I looked forward to a long life of peace and happiness, but it was not to be. From the very day of my return to the accursed house of my grandmother there was a change. What was it? I do not know, but I could feel it. I could sense it, the very first day. A subtle something, a pall of gloom, intangible, elusive and baffling, began slowly to settle over me, stifling and suffocating the happiness that was mine before the evil day of my return home.

I had returned from the village with some trifle of household necessity. The servants had not yet arrived, and the housekeeper, old and infirm now, was busy putting the place in order.

Returning, I sought my wife, and found her in my grandmother's room, standing before the life-size portrait of Toi Wah, done in oil for my grandmother by a great artist, who also loved cats as she had loved them.

Until that day Toi Wah had remained only a dim memory of a fear-driven boy's cruel revenge. Purposely, I had put all thought of her out of my mind. But now it all returned, a horde of hateful memories, as I stood there in the open door and saw my wife standing and gazing up at the likeness of the great cat.

And as she turned, startled at my entrance, what did I see?

I saw, or thought I saw, a likeness, a great likeness, between the two! Eyes, hair, the general expression—Why had I not noticed it before!

And what else? In my wife's eyes was the old fear, the ancient hate, I used to see in Toi Wah's eyes when I came suddenly into my grandmother's room—this room! The look flashed out for an instant and was gone.

"How you frightened me, Robert!" she laughed. "And the look in your face! What has happened?"

"Nothing," I answered. "Nothing at all."

"But why did you look at me so?" she insisted. "Surely something has gone amiss. Aren't the servants coming? If they are not, I am not entirely useless; I can even cook," and she laughed again, an embarrassed laugh I thought.

She had the manner of having been surprised by my entrance, of being detected in something, secret or hidden, which she was now trying to cover up and conceal.

"Why," I stammered confusedly, for this remarkable resemblance had thrown me quite off my feet, "nothing is wrong. Only I was suddenly struck, as you stood there by the portrait of my grandmother's cat, by the remarkable resemblance; your hair, your eyes—the same color. That was all."

"Why, Robert!" she laughed, holding up an admonishing finger.

This time I was sure of the note of confusion in her laugh, which seemed forced. My wife was not given to laughter, being a quiet, self-contained sort of person.

"Imagine! I, like a cat!"

"Well," I said lightly, gathering her in my arms—for I, too, was dissembling, now that I had regained my self-possession and saw that I was betraying my secret fear—"Toi Wah was a very beautiful and high-bred cat. Her ancestry dated back to Ghengis Khan. So to resemble her would not be so bad, would it?" And I kissed her.

Did she shrink from the caress? Did her body tremble in my arms? Or was it imagination, the stirring of old memories of Toi Wah, who shrank from my lightest touch?

I did not know. I do know, however, that my strange experience on that day was the beginning of the end; the end that is not yet, but is swiftly on the way—for me!

V.

AS THE day wore on, I grew restless and uneasy; ill at ease and dissatisfied.

So after dinner I went for a long walk along the country roads. When I returned my wife was asleep. I lay down softly beside her, and, tired out by my long walk, was soon asleep myself.

Asleep, I dreamed. Dreamed of Toi Wah and Toi Wah's kitten. And I heard again, in my sleep, the plaintive cry of the cat mother as she called anxiously and lovingly for her kitten that would never return.

So vivid and so real was the dream that I awoke with a cry of the cat in my ears. And as I awoke, I seemed to hear it again—plaintive, subdued, a half-cat, half-human cry, as if a woman had cried aloud and then quickly suppressed the cry.

And my wife was gone!

I sprang up hastily. The moonlight was streaming through the window. It was almost as light as day. She was nowhere in the room.

I went swiftly down the hall and descended the stairs, making no noise with my bare feet. The door of my grandmother's room was open. I looked in. Two luminous eyes, with a greenish tinge, glowed out at me from the semi-darkness of the far corner.

For an instant my heart stood still, and then raced palpitatingly on. I took a deep breath and went toward the unknown thing with glowing eyes that crouched in that corner.

As I reached the pool of moonlight in the center of the room, I heard a gasp of fear, a sudden movement, and my wife fled past me, out of the room and up the stairs.

I heard the bedroom door slam behind her, heard the key turn in the lock.

As she rushed past me and up the stairs, the patter of her feet fell on my ears like the soft padding of Toi Wah's footsteps that had filled my youthful years with fear. My blood chilled at this old, until now, forgotten sound.

What craven fear was this? I tried to pull myself together, to reason rationally. Fear of a cat long dead, whose mouldering bones were upstairs on the attic floor! What was there to fear? Was I going mad?

The slamming of the bedroom door, the turning of the key in the lock, in-

stantly changed my thought and roused in me an overwhelming fury. Was I to be locked out of my own bedroom—our bedroom?

I rushed up the stairs. I knocked on the door, I rattled the knob. I pounded with my fists on the panels. I shouted, "Open! Open the door!"

In the midst of my furious onslaught, the door suddenly opened and a sleepy-eyed little figure stood aside to allow me to enter.

"Why, Robert!" she exclaimed, as I stood there, bewildered and ashamed, a furious conflict of doubt, fear and uncertainty raging in my mind. "What's the matter? Where have you been? I was sound asleep, and you frightened me, shouting and pounding at the door."

Was I deceived? Partly. But in her eyes! Ah! In her eyes was that sly, inscrutable catlike look that I had never seen there until that day. And now that look never leaves them, it is there always!

"What were you doing below stairs—alone—in my grandmother's room?" I stammered.

She arched her brows incredulously.

"I?—below stairs? Why, Robert, what is wrong with you? I just this moment awoke from a sound sleep to let you in. How could I be below stairs?"

"But the bedroom door was locked!" I exclaimed.

"You must have gone below yourself," she explained, "and shut the door after you. It has a spring lock. You surely must have had some hideous dream. Dear, come to bed now." And she went back to bed.

Again I dissembled as I had that day when I found her standing before Toi Wah's portrait. I knew, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she was lying. I knew I had been fully awake and in my right senses when I had gone down stairs and found her there. Evidently she desired to deceive me, and until I could fathom her motive I would pretend to believe her. So, muttering something to the effect that she must be right, I got into bed also.

But not to sleep. There came trooping into my harried mind all the old youthful terrors of the dark, and I lived over all those terror-haunted days when I dwelt in fear of Toi Wah or of a shadowy something, I knew not what.

Lying there in the dark, I resolved that morning would find me leaving that seemingly ghost-ridden place forever. My peace of mind, my happiness, to be free from fear—these things were worth all the fine old country places in the world. And with this resolution, I slept.

I slept far into the day, awaking at noon to find my wife had gone out with some of our neighbors for a game of tennis and afternoon tea. So, clearly, I could not arrange to leave until the next day. I must await my wife's return, and in the meantime formulate some sort of reasonable excuse to explain to her my precipitate return to town, after planning a year's sojourn in the country.

And then, too, it was daylight now, sober matter-of-fact daylight, and, as was always the case with me, the terrors of the night then seemed unreal, half-forgotten nightmares. So I dismissed the subject from my mind for the time being, and set out for a long walk across the fields.

It was near dinner time when I returned. As I opened the door of the dining-room, my wife turned from where she stood by the fire-place to greet me, and I was again struck by her resemblance to Toi Wah. The arrangement of her hair heightened this effect. And when she smiled!—I cannot describe it! Such a sly, secret, feline smile!

"Robert," she said, as she came to me and put up her lips to be kissed. "Do you know what day this is?"

I shook my head.

"Why, it's my birthday, you forgetful boy! My twenty-first birthday, and I have a surprise for you.

"The old Buddhist priest, who taught me when I was a child gave me a flagon of rare old Chinese Lotus wine, when he parted from me, which I was to keep inviolate until my twenty-first birthday. I would be married then, he said, and on that day I was to unseal the old flagon and drink the wine with my husband in memory of my old teacher who would then be in the bosom of Nirvana.

"Look!" and she turned to the serving-table on which sat a small, squat wicker-covered flagon, and handed it to me.

I looked at it curiously. It was sealed with a small brass seal, which was stamped all over with dim Chinese characters.

"What are these characters?" I asked, handing her the flagon.

She looked closely at the seal.

"Oh! One of those wise old Buddhist sayings, which the Chinese stick on everything." She smiled. "Shall I translate it? I can, you know."

I nodded.

"*Wine maketh the heart glad or sad, good or evil. Drink Oh! Man to thy choice!*" she read.

Then she pulled off the seal and poured out the wine; a thick amber liquid, so heavy that it poured like thick

men. Its bouquet filled the room with faint, far-off odor of lotus flowers.

"Shall we drink now, Robert, or shall we wait until dinner is served?"

"Let us drink now," I said, curious to taste this Eastern wine, with which I was not familiar.

"Amen!" said my wife, softly.

Then she spoke, rapidly and softly under her breath, a few Chinese words, so I judged them to be, and we drank the wine. There was not a great deal in the flagon, and we drank it all before dinner was served.

As I sat at dinner a strange comfortable feeling gradually came over me. Distrust, fear, and apprehension died out of my mind, and my heart was light. My wife and I laughed and talked together as we had done in the days of our courtship. I was a different man.

After dinner we went into the music-room and she sang for me. Sang in a sweet low voice strange weird old songs of ancient China. Of the dragon banner floating in the sun, and the watch fires on the hills. Of old Tartar loves and hates. Of wrongs that never die, but pass on from age to age, from life to life, from death to death—unhasting, unending until the debt be paid.

I sat listening, dozing in a hazy mental languor, with the feeling foreign to me of late, that all was well with the world. I was peacefully happy, and my wife's sweet voice crooned on. Bedtime, the going up to our bedroom, and what followed after is only a blurred memory.

I awoke, or seemed to awake (now that I am in this madhouse I do not really know) far into the night.

I awoke with a feeling of suffocation, a sensation of impending dissolution. I could not move, I could not speak. I had a sense of something indescribably evil, loathsome, blood-curdling, that was hanging over me, threatening my very life.

I tried to open my eyes. The lids seemed to be weighted down. All the force of my will could only slightly open them. Through this slight opening, I saw my wife bending over me, and the eyes that looked at me *were the inscrutable eyes of Toi Wah!*

VI.

SLOWLY she bent down—I could sense the delicate fragrance of her hair—and applied her sweet, soft lips to mine. Again I felt that I was suffocating, that the very breath of my life was being drawn from me.

I concentrated all my will in the effort to struggle, and with tremendous effort I was able feebly to move an arm. My

wife hastily took her lips from mine and looked at me closely, with the cruel amber eyes of the great Tartar cat, whose bones lay in my garret.

Once more she leaned over and applied her lips to mine. I lay there in helpless lethargy, unable to move, but with an active mind that leaped back into the past, bringing to my memory all the old nursery tales of childhood of cats sucking the breath of sleeping children, of the folklore tales that I had heard of helpless invalids done to death by cruel cats who stole their breath from them.

I began to be aroused at last. Was my breath to be sucked from me by this half-human, half-cat that was bending over me? With a final despairing effort of my wine-sodden will, I raised my arms and pushed this soft sweet vampire from my breast and from the bed.

And then, as the cold sweat of fear poured from my trembling body, I shouted for help. At last my servant came running up the stairs and pounded on the door.

"What is it?" he called. "What is wrong, sir? Shall I go for the police?"

"Nothing is wrong," answered my wife calmly. She had risen from where I had thrown her and was arranging her disheveled hair. "Your master has had a terrible dream, that is all."

"It is a lie!" I shouted. "Do not leave me alone with this vampire!"

I sprang from bed, and, heedless of my wife's semi-nude condition, I flung open the door. She shrank back, but I seized her by the wrist, beside myself with nervous terror.

And then—there on her wrist—I saw! I looked closely to be sure. Then instantly all was clear to me. I was in doubt no longer. I *knew!*

"Look!" I shrieked. "Here on her wrist! Toi Wah's collar!" I do not know why I said it, or scarcely what I did say, but I knew it to be true!

"Toi Wah's collar!" I repeated. "She can't take it off! *She is changing into a cat!* Look at her eyes! Look at her hair! Soon she will be Toi Wah again with the collar about her neck, and then—"

And then I saw my wife disconcerted for the first time. I felt the arm I had seized, tremble in my frenzied grip.

"Why, Robert!" she stammered. "I—I found this on the attic floor yesterday. And—and—thinking it a curious old Chinese relic, I put it on my wrist. It's a bracelet, not a collar!"

"Take it off then!" I shouted. "Take it off! You can't! You can't, until you become Toi Wah again, and then it will

be about your neck. Read what it says! It is in your accursed tongue!"

"But you shall never live to madden me again with fear, to make my life a hell of peering eyes and padding feet, and then to suck my breath at last! I killed you once, I can do it again! And again and yet again in any shape the devils in hell may send you to prey upon honest men!"

And I seized her by her beautiful throat. I meant to choke her until those cruel yellow eyes started from their sockets, and then laugh as I saw her gasping in the last agony of death.

But I was cheated. The servants overpowered me, and I was brought here to this mad-house.

I said I was perfectly sane then. I say it now. And learned alienists, sitting in council, have agreed with me. Tomorrow I am to be discharged into the custody of my sweet cooing-voiced wife, who comes daily to see me. She kisses me with soft lying lips that long to suck my breath, or perhaps even rend the flesh of my throat with the little white teeth back of the cruel lips.

So tomorrow I will go forth—to die. To be murdered! I go to death just as surely as if the hangman waited to haul me to the gallows, or if the warden stood outside to escort me to the electric chair.

I *know* it! I have told the learned psychologists and doctors that I know it. But they laugh.

"All a delusion!" they exclaim. "Why, your little wife loves you with all her loyal heart. Even with your finger-prints a bluish bruise about her tender throat, she loved you. That night when you awoke, frightened, to find her bending over you, she was only kissing you, in an effort to soothe your troubled sleep."

But I *know!* Therefore, I am setting all this down so that when I am found dead the learned doctors may know that I was right and they were wrong. And so that Justice may be done.

And yet—perhaps nothing can be done. I have ceased to struggle. I have given up. Like the Oriental, I say, "*Who can escape his fate?*"

For I shall die by Chinese justice, a Buddhist revenge for killing the Tartar cat, Toi Wah. Toi Wah that I hated and feared, and have hated and feared through all the lives that the two of us have lived, far, far back to that time when the yellow sabre-toothed tiger seized my first-born and fled with him among the reeds and ferns of the Pale-

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the strange silence of the place. Not a servant answered their ring. And after a time, since the door stood open, they entered and began to ascend the stairs.

A strange, weird, lonesome sound floated down to them—the yowl of a cat.

They stopped for an instant and looked at each other, and then, reassured by the sunlight, and both being matter-of-fact professional people, they pressed on. At the head of the stairs they faced a long passage at the end of which was an open door.

“Look! That is the bedroom he wrote about,” whispered the nurse, grasping the interne’s arm.

They walked softly down the passage to the door and looked in. On the bed lay the man they sought, glassy-eyed, with fallen jaw and livid face—*dead!*

On his breast stood a great yellow amber-eyed cat, who faced them with an arched back and menacing snarl. Involuntarily, they drew back. The cat sprang past them and down the passageway to the stairs, uttering the same weird cry.

“My God!” gasped the nurse, with pallid lips. “Did you see? About that cat’s neck—and it was a Tartar cat; I know the breed—about that cat’s neck was—was the Topaz and Jade collar—that—that he wrote about!”

JUNGLE BEASTS

(Continued from page 29)

ozoic marshes, a dainty morsel for her kitten.

And so—farewell!

“**S**UCH a weird tale!” the nurse shuddered, as the interne finished the manuscript. “Let us drive over to Cheshire Manor and—”

“Do you believe this story?” interrupted the interne, tapping the manuscript with his fingers, and skeptically lifting his eyebrows and smiling.

“No, of course not!” exclaimed the nurse, “but—the drive won’t do us any harm, and—I would like to make sure.”

As they stopped their car before the somber old mansion they were struck by