

SEPT.

25¢

SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES



The
DRAGON
of **KAO TSU**
by
Sam Walser



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

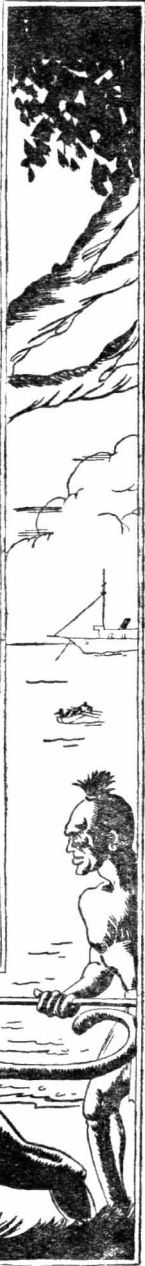
September, 1936

Vol. 4, No. 6

CONTENTS

THE DRAGON OF KAO TSU.....	4
Sam Walser	
BLOOD AND FIRE.....	16
Alan Anderson	
PYGMY MAGIC.....	28
Clint Morgan	
DEATH TRAIL.....	40
Clive Trent	
DIANA DAW.....	52
Clayton Maxwell	
CARBOY OF DEATH.....	54
Robert Leslie Bellem	
VALLEY OF BLOOD.....	66
Lew Merrill	
BLOOD HAS STICKY FINGERS.....	78
John Bard	
QUEEN OF THE FLAMING ARROWS..	86
Frank E. Marks	
POPPY DUST.....	94
Willis Vachel Keith	

SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES is published by the Culture Publications, Inc., 900 Market St., Wilmington, Del. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.



The DRAGON

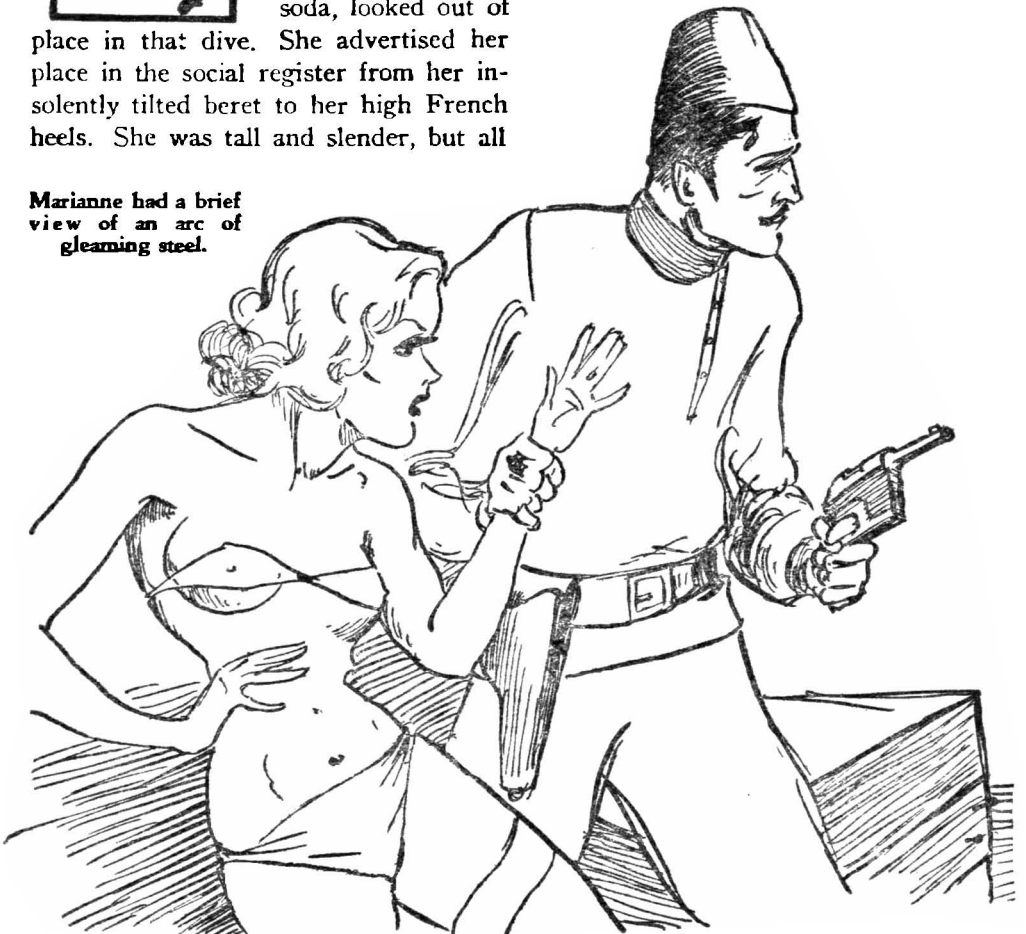
She came from high society and she should have known she had no business associating with a gorilla like Wild Bill Clanton. However, the job she wanted done was plain burglary, and her code of honor wouldn't let her turn thief!



HE girl who stormed the back room of the Purple Dragon Bar where Wild Bill Clanton sat sipping a whiskey-and-soda, looked out of place in that dive. She advertised her place in the social register from her insolently tilted beret to her high French heels. She was tall and slender, but all

her lines were supple and rounded, with melting curves that would make any man's blood run faster. Just now her purplish eyes flashed and her pertly-tilted breasts swelled stormily.

Marianne had a brief view of an arc of gleaming steel.



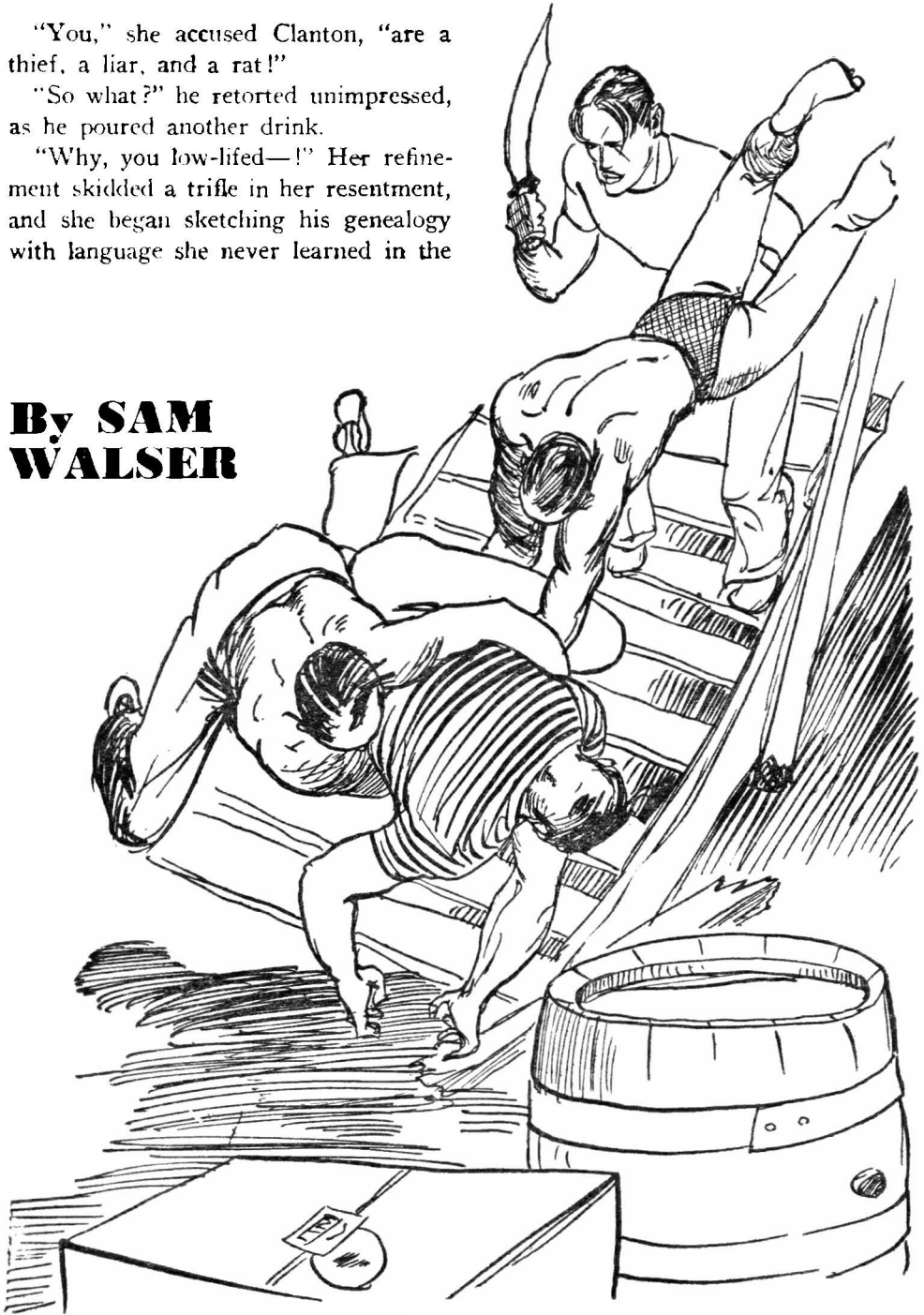
of KAO TSU

"You," she accused Clanton, "are a thief, a liar, and a rat!"

"So what?" he retorted unimpressed, as he poured another drink.

"Why, you low-lifed—!" Her refinement skidded a trifle in her resentment, and she began sketching his genealogy with language she never learned in the

**By SAM
WALSER**



Junior League. He interrupted her peremptorily.

"Now you hold on! Some things nobody can call me, not even a lady! Sit down and cool off before somethin' unpleasant happens to you!"

She wilted at the threat and drooped into the chair opposite him.

"This," she said bitterly, "is what I get for associating with a gorilla like you. Why I do it, I don't know."

"I know," he retorted. "Because you wanted Shareef Ahmed's ivory dragon and I was the only man who could get it for you."

"Yes, you were!" There was rancor in her tone, and her basilisk glare made him uneasy. You never could tell about these society dames! If she yanked a knife out of her garter, he meant to smack her down.

But she had no knife in her garter, as he could tell when she crossed her silk-clad legs with the regal indifference of a true aristocrat. She twitched down her skirt an inch or so, but not before he had a glimpse of white skin that made the blood boil to his head. Her indifference to his emotions was maddening.

Probably it had never occurred to Old Man Allison's pampered daughter Marianne that a man on Clanton's social plane would even think of making a pass at her, but he had to clench his hands to keep them off of her.

"What's eatin' you?" he demanded.

FOR answer she produced something from her handbag and smacked it down accusingly before him. It was a small, pot-bellied ivory dragon, exquisitely carved and yellowed with age.

"It's a fake!" she declared.

"It's the one Ram Lal stole from Shareef Ahmed," he asserted.

"It's a fake," she contended moodily. "Either you've gyped me, or that babu you hired to do the job has, or Ahmed's fooled us all."

"Well, what of it?" he asked. "All you want it for is to show to your society friends back in the United States and brag about it bein' a rare antique. They won't know the difference."

"Some of them will," she answered, lighting a cigarette with an injured air. "The collection of Oriental antiques is a great hobby in my set. It's been a game to see who could get the rarest relic by fair means or foul. Betty Elston got hold of a priceless Ming vase in Canton, and she's gloated over the rest of us until I've wanted to kick her little—well, anyway, I heard about the Kao Tsu dragon in San Francisco, and I came all the way to Singapore to get it. It dates from the Early Han Dynasty, and it's the only one of its kind in the world. I knew Ahmed wouldn't sell it, so I hired you to have it stolen for me."

Clanton picked up the yellowed figure and turned it about.

"I dunno," he mused. "Ram Lal got into Ahmed's house and swiped this. He's the slickest thief on the Peninsula. But if it's the wrong one, he might be afraid to risk another try. Ahmed's bad business."

"But he's been paid, and it isn't the right dragon!" she snapped. "What kind of a man would he be to take money under false pretences?"

"Hire a thief and then squawk if he gyps you!" he mocked her. "But keep your shirt on. I'm a man of my word, anyway. I've taken your dough, and I aim to deliver the goods. Ram Lal's so scared of Ahmed he's hidin' in an old warehouse down on the waterfront. Maybe he just got the wrong dragon by mistake. Or he may be holdin' out on

us for more dough. You leave this thing with me, and tonight I'll go down there and talk to him. If he's on the level, maybe he'll try again. If he's tryin' to put somethin' over, well, we'll see."

"I'm going with you," she decided. "I don't trust either of you."

"It's no place for a white woman," he warned her.

She tilted a scornful nose.

"I can take care of myself, *Mister* Clanton—otherwise I'd never have dared to have any dealings with you! I'll pick you up near the mosque on Muscat Street. And I don't want to have to drag you out from under some table, or away from some brown-skinned wench, either."

"I'll be there, sober and respectable," he assured her. "But how about a little drink before you go?"

"No, thanks!" she declined. "I prefer to keep our relationship on a strictly business basis; and whiskey gives men ideas. I'll see you at dusk."

And she swung out of the room with a long-legged, hip-swaying gait that made Clanton moan with despair and grab the whiskey bottle. She had him buffaloed. If she'd been anybody else, he'd have made a pass at her, regardless. But there was a limit even to his audacity, and he didn't dare try any rough stuff on the daughter of Old Man Allison, millionaire and woolly wolf of finance that the old devil was.

He turned the ivory dragon about in his hands and frowned.

"Antique collectin', eh? Hokum!"

RISING, he bellowed to a half-caste waiter, plunked a coin on the table and barged out of a side door. A few moments later he was seated in a silk shop kept by one Yakub, an old Jew who had a finger in many enterprises be-

sides the one advertised by the sign over his door, and whose ear was always close to the mysterious pulse of the East. Clanton set the ivory dragon before him and demanded: "What's that?"

Yakub donned square, steel-rimmed spectacles, and regarded it.

"That's the Kao Tsu dragon," he said. "But I wouldn't handle it for you. You must have stolen it from Shareef Ahmed. I love life too much to handle anything stolen from that devil."

"It's a fake," asserted Clanton.

"If it's a fake, I'm a Gentile," answered old Yakub, lovingly fondling its smooth surface. "Tchk, tchk! Such a pity! I'd buy it myself if I weren't afraid of Ahmed. He'll slit your throat for this, sure."

"You'll swear it's genuine?" Clanton demanded.

"My head on it!" The old man's sincerity was convincing.

"Hmmm!" Clanton's scowl deepened. "I wonder what that hussy's tryin' to put over?"

Then he asked Yakub a strange question, and received a stranger answer.

IF MARIANNE Allison had known of that conversation, her poise might have been a trifle less confident when her big coupe purred up to the curb where Clanton stood, just as the street lights were coming on. He climbed in beside her and she turned off down a side-street according to his directions.

"Did you bring any money, in case Ram Lal wants more?" he asked.

"I should say not!" she retorted. "He's been paid enough. He owes me any future service it takes to get the right dragon."

"You're an arrogant wench," he observed, his eyes glued on a rounded knee. Through accident or design her dress

had worked up again, baring an inch of white skin above the stocking-top.

"When you get through inspecting my legs," she suggested, "you might tell me which way to turn at this next intersection."

She smiled cruelly as he reluctantly turned his attention to the street. Feeling perfectly safe from him, she took a feminine delight in tantalizing him. She was aware of her effect on him, and she enjoyed seeing the veins in his forehead swell with frustrated emotion.

"Pull up here," he directed presently, and they rolled to a halt in a shabby side-street in the native quarter. "Have to leave the boat here. They may steal the wheels off of it before we get back, but it won't navigate the alley we've got to follow. Here, this is it."

It was dark in the alley. They groped their way along and presently came out into an open space, lined on one side by rotten, deserted wharves.

"That's the warehouse." Clanton indicated a building looming darkly before them. "He's got a camp cot and some canned grub in one of the lower rooms, and he aims to hide there till I let him know what move Ahmed's makin' about that theft."

NO LIGHT showed behind the shutters of the barred windows. Clanton knocked and softly called: "Ram Lal!" No answer. He tried the door and found it to be unlocked. He pushed it open and Marianne pressed close on his heels as he entered. She jumped and grabbed his arm as they stood in the darkness.

"The door! Somebody pushed it to behind us!"

"Wind must have blown it shut," he grunted. "But where the hell's Ram Lal?"

"Listen!" She clutched him convul-

sively. Somewhere in the darkness sounded a steady *drip-drip* as if somebody had left a faucet partly open. But Clanton's hair began to rise, because he knew there wasn't any faucet in that room. He struck a match in a hurry and held it up. Marianne clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle a shriek. Clanton swore. In the wavering light they saw Ram Lal. The fat, swarthy babu slumped drunkenly in a chair near a table. His head lolled on his breast and his eyes were glassy. And, from a throat slashed from ear to ear, blood still oozed sluggishly to fall drop by drop in a widening crimson puddle on the floor.

"God almighty!" muttered Clanton. "We've got to get out of here—*ow!*"

Something that glinted swished at him out of the shadows. Marianne had a brief glimpse of an arc of gleaming steel and a dark contorted face behind it. Then the match went out, clipped from Clanton's hand by that slashing blade, and the dark filled with hair-raising sounds. Marianne dropped to the floor and scurried on all-fours in the direction she hoped the door was. She'd lost touch with Clanton, but he couldn't be dead, because no corpse could put up the fight he was putting up.

Lurid Anglo-Saxon oaths mingled with Asiatic yowls, and she almost pitied his adversaries as she heard what sounded like bees being knocked in the head with a maul, but which she knew to be the impact of his massive fists on human skulls. Howls of pain and rage filled the room, the table overturned crashingly, and then somebody stumbled over her in the dark.

IT WAS a Malay. She could tell by the smell, even in the dark. She heard him floundering on the floor near her, and her blood froze at the *wheep-wheep*

The babu's head lolled on his breast and his eyes were glassy.



Sokol

of a keen blade being whirled at random. It was close behind her, and the flesh of her hips contracted as she scuttled away on her all-fours. Her groping hands found a door and pulled it open, but no light came in, and she felt steps leading upward. But any avenue of escape from that blind blade flailing the blackness was welcome.

She shut the door behind her and went up the stair as fast as she could and eventually emerged into an equally dark space that felt big and empty and smelled musty. There she crouched, shivering, while the noise of battle went on below, until it culminated in an amazing crash that sounded as though somebody had been knocked bodily through a closed door. Then the sounds died away and silence reigned. She believed that Clanton had broken away from his attackers and fled, pursued by them.

She was right. At that moment Clanton was racing down a winding alley, hearing the pad of swift feet close behind him, and momentarily expecting a knife thrust in the back. They were too many for even him to fight with his bare hands, and they were gaining on him. With a straining burst of effort he reached an empty, dim-lit side-street ahead of them, and before he vanished into an entrance on the other side, he cast something on the paving in the light of the dim street-lamp.

Startled yelps escaped his pursuers, and abandoning the chase, they pounced on the yellowed ivory dragon Clanton had discarded.

Back in the loft of the deserted warehouse Marianne crept down the stairs. For some time she had heard no sound below. Then just as she reached the stair-door, she checked, her heart in her throat. Somebody had entered the room beyond. But this man wore the boots of

a white man; she could tell by his foot-falls. Then she heard a smothered, English oath.

Clanton must have eluded his pursuers and returned. She heard a match struck, and light stole through the crack under the door. She pushed the door ajar. A brawny figure, wearing a seaman's cap, with his back to the door, was bending over the corpse slumped in the chair.

"Clanton!" she exclaimed, stepping into the room—then checked in her tracks as a perfect stranger whirled around with an oath. He was as big as Clanton and much uglier. His blood-shot eyes glared, his black beard bristled, and he levelled a snub-nosed revolver at her quivering tummy.

"Don't shoot!" she gasped. "I—I won't hurt you!"

The stranger's reply was unprintable. Evidently her sudden appearance had given him a bad shock.

"Who the blinkin' hell are you and what're you doin' here?" he concluded. "Well, talk before I start sweepin' the floor with you!" He flourished a fist the size of a breakfast ham under her shrinking nose.

She shuddered and spoke hastily: "I lost my way and wandered in here by mistake—I've got to go now—glad to have met you—"

"Stow it!" bellowed the irate intruder. "You can't pull the wool over Bull Davies' eyes like that!" The aforesaid eyes narrowed wickedly in the light of the candle on a wall-shelf. "Oh, I get it!" he muttered. "Of course! You're after the dragon yourself! You killed Ram Lal to get it! Well, hand it over and you won't get hurt—maybe!"

"I haven't got it," she answered. "And I didn't kill Ram Lal. Shareef Ahmed's men did that. They were waiting in the

dark when I and my companion came in here. I don't know where they went, or what happened to the man with me."

"Likely yarn," grumbled Mr. Davies. "Ram Lal knew my boss wanted the dragon. He sent me word to come here tonight and make him an offer. He'd stole it from Shareef Ahmed. I just now got here, and found him dead and the dragon gone. It ain't on him—it must be on you!" He pointed a hairy and accusing finger at Marianne.

"I tell you I haven't got it!" she exclaimed, paling. "I want it, yes! If you'll help me find it, I'll pay you—"

"I've already been paid," he growled. "And my boss would cut my throat if I sold him out. You've got that dragon on you somewheres! You dames are smart about hidin' things on you! Off with them clothes!"

"No!" She jumped back, but he grabbed her wrist and twisted it until she fell to her knees with a yelp of pain.

"Are you goin' to shed 'em yourself, or do I have to tear 'em off?" he rumbled. "If I have to, it'll be the worse for you, blast you!"

"Let me up," she begged. "I know when I'm licked. I'll do it."

AND under his piglike eyes she shed garment after garment until she stood before him clad only in a scanty brassiere and ridiculously brief pink panties. As she discarded each garment, he snatched it and ransacked it, snarling his anger at finding his quest fruitless. Now he glared at her, silent and wrathful, and she squirmed and made protecting motions with her hands. Red fires that were not of rage began to glimmer murkily in his blood-shot eyes.

"Isn't this enough?" she begged. "You could see if I had anything on me the size of that dragon."

"Well, maybe," he admitted grudgingly, laying a heavy hand on her naked shoulder and turning her about to inspect her from every angle.

"Baby, you've got what it takes!" he muttered thickly, clapping a hot, sweaty hand down on her smooth back. "No, it's easy to see you ain't got that dragon hid on you." He grinned wickedly as one hand started to move lower. She shrieked and slapped him resoundingly, and instantly regretted her indiscretion. He grabbed her in a bear-like embrace and his ardor wasn't lessened a bit by the glassy stare of the dead man in the chair.

He was carrying her, squirming and fighting, toward the camp-cot in the corner when he stiffened.

Outside the door sounded a faint babble of approaching voices. He blew out the candle and turned through an inner door, clapping a big paw over Marianne's mouth when she tried to scream, and hissing: "Shut up, you little fool! Do you want your throat cut? That's Ahmed's men!"

He seemed to know his way about the warehouse, even in the dark. He stooped, fumbled at the floor, raised a trap-door, whispered: "If I hear one peep out of you, I'll come down there and twist your head off! I'll get you out later—if you're a good girl!"—and dropped her.

SHE was too scared to yell, even if she'd had breath for it. She did not fall far till she hit on her feet on a slimy floor. She heard the trap-door settle back in place, and then the creak of the stairs. Evidently Davies was taking refuge in the loft. She thought she heard an outer door open, and a mumble of voices, but forgot it the next instant at the sight of small red eyes winking fiercely at her from the gloom. Rats!

She had all a woman's natural fear of rodents, and she had heard horrifying tales about the ghoulish wharf-rats. But they made no move to attack her and she began to explore her prison, shivering in her near nudity. The stone floor stood in several inches of water, and she found no opening in the slimy walls. She had been dumped into a cellar and the only way out was up through that trap-door above her head.

She squealed as a rat ran across her foot, and jumped back against the wall, bruising her hip and tearing her panties on a broken plank.

"This is what I get for associating with people like Bill Clanton," she told herself bitterly, and then the rats started fighting in a corner. Their hideous racket snapped her taut nerves. She screamed. She yelled. She was too panicky to care for Davies' threat. Having her head twisted off seemed preferable to being devoured by rats in that black well. She didn't care who heard her, just so somebody did, and got her out of that damnable cellar. She didn't care much what they did to her afterward.

And almost instantly her shrieks were answered by sounds overhead. The trap was lifted and she blinked in the glare of a lantern. But it was not Davies' bearded face which was framed in the opening. It was a dark, saturnine, handsome face—the face of Shareef Ahmed!

"Well, our little guest didn't run away, after all!" he commented satirically. "Help her up, Jum Chin."

A TALL, gaunt Chinese reached his long arms down, caught her lifted wrists and swung her up lightly and easily. The trap-door fell again and she found herself standing before Ahmed, whose dark eyes devoured her from head



to foot. Four Malays with *kris*es in their belts together with the Chinaman feasted their hot eyes on her semi-nudity. They were marked generously from Clanton's fists, from that fight in the dark room.

"A curious interlude!" smiled Ahmed dangerously. "You enter the building fully clothed, with that dog Clanton. Apparently you escape in the melee. But less than an hour later we find you imprisoned in the cellar, half-naked! His eyes went to the white hip exposed by the accident. She flinched, but did not reply nor resent the indignity. She was scared as only a girl can be who knows herself to be in the power of men absolutely merciless and cynical in their attitude toward women.

"Where is the Kao Tsu dragon?" Ahmed demanded peremptorily.

"I haven't it!" Her wits were working like lightning on a scheme.

Ahmed's eyes were poisonous.

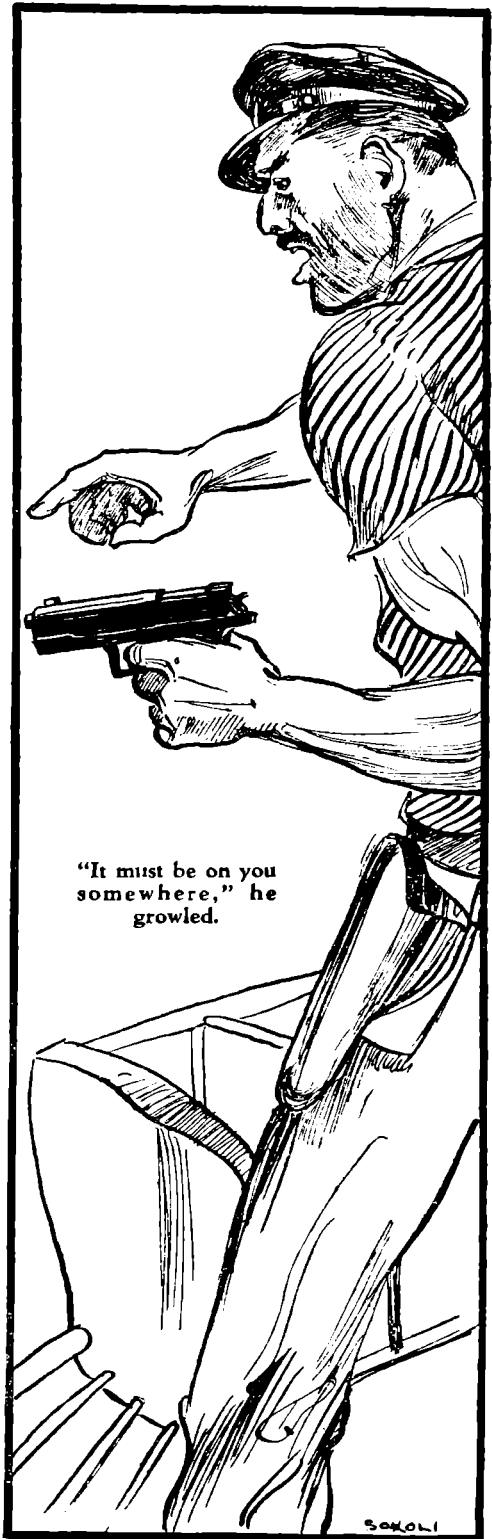
"You must have it! Ram Lal stole two dragons out of my house. Clanton dropped one in his flight." He displayed it. "But it is not the right one. You must have it. Ram Lal must have stolen them for you, otherwise Clanton, who came here with you, would not have had this one. You have the other, or know where it is. Must you be *persuaded* to talk?"

"I had it," she said hurriedly, as the Malays moved toward her, grinning evilly. "But Bull Davies came while you were chasing Clanton—"

"Davies?" It was a snarl from Ahmed. "Has that dog of General Kai's been here?"

"He is here—hiding upstairs. He took the dragon from me."

"Search the upper floor," snapped Ahmed, and his men made for the stair, soft-footed as weasels, with naked blades glimmering in their hands. Marianne



breathed in momentary relief. At least she'd saved herself from torture for the moment. Ahmed was watching the stair, and she essayed a sneaking step toward the other door. But he wheeled and caught her wrist.

"Where are *you* going?"

"Nowhere, apparently." She flinched at his sarcasm. "Please, you're hurting my wrist. Why, the body's gone!"

"We threw it in the river after we returned from pursuing Clanton," said Ahmed absently, gazing at her half-exposed breasts. "I meant to take Ram Lal alive and make him talk. But he attacked my faithful servant, Jum Chin, who traced him here, and Jum Chin was forced to kill him. I arrived with the rest of my men just after he had killed Ram Lal. We had just completed a fruitless search of the body when we heard you and Clanton approaching. Why did you come here when you already had the dragon?"

"I came to pay Ram Lal," she lied, afraid to admit the truth, now that she had already professed to have had possession of the dragon.

"Forget the dragon for a space," he muttered; his eyes were like flames licking her sleek body. "My men will capture Davies and get it for me. Meanwhile—you and I . . ."

REARIZING his intentions she sprang for the nearest door, but he was too quick for her. He was slender but his thews were like steel. She yelped as he reached for her—squealed despairingly as she realized how helpless she was. She clenched a small fist and struck him in the face, and in return got a slap that filled her eyes with stars and tears. He picked her up, fighting and kicking, and started toward the other room with her, when upstairs a shot banged, blows

thudded, men yelled and heavy boots stamped down the stair.

Ahmed dropped Marianne sprawling on the floor and turned to the stair door, drawing a pistol. An instant later Bull Davies, plunging through the stair-door, brought up short at the threat of that black muzzle. In an instant the five Orientals who were tumbling down the stair after him had fallen on him from behind, borne him to the floor, and had him bound hand and foot. Swift hands ransacked his garments, and then Jum Chin looked at Ahmed and shook his head. Ahmed turned on Marianne, who rose from the floor, rubbing her hip.

"You slut! You said he had it!" Ahmed grabbed a pink-white shoulder and squeezed viciously.

"Wait!" she begged, assuming a Venus de'Medici pose as he started to go even further in his third-degree methods. "He must have hidden it!"

This was going to be just too bad for Davies, she knew, but it was his hide or hers. Maybe she'd get a chance to slip away while they were giving him the works.

At a word from Ahmed, Jum Chin ripped Davies' shirt off. A Malay applied a lighted match to his hairy breast. A faint smell of singed hair arose and Davies bellowed like a bull.

"I tell you I ain't got it! She's lyin'! I dunno where it is!"

"If he's lying, we'll soon know," rasped Ahmed. "We'll try a test that will unlock the jaws of the stubbornest. If he still persists, we must conclude that he's telling the truth, and the girl's lying."

Jum Chin stripped off the prisoner's socks, and Davies broke into a sweat of fear. Intent on the coming torture, Ahmed relaxed his grip on Marianne's

wrist—or maybe it was a trick to trap her into a false move.

As his fingers relaxed, she jerked loose and darted into the outer room. He was after her in an instant, and just as she reached the door that opened into the alley, his fingers locked in her hair. But that door burst suddenly inward.

A BIG form loomed in the door and an arm shot out. There was a crack that sounded as if Ahmed had run his face into a brick wall. But it was a massive fist he had run into, and the impact stretched him groaning on the floor. His conqueror swooped on the pistol that flew from his victim's hand, and Ahmed's henchmen, rushing from the inner room, checked at the menace of the leveled Luger, their hands shooting ceilingward.

"Clanton!" panted Marianne. He refused to look at her. With six desperate men before him, he couldn't risk being demoralized by the spectacle of loveliness her unclad figure presented.

"Put on some clothes!" he snapped. "And you, Ahmed, get up!"

Ahmed staggered up, a ghastly sight, minus three teeth and with his nose a gory ruin. Clanton grinned pridefully at the sight of his handiwork; few men could have done so much damage with only one clout. He profanely silenced Ahmed's impassioned ravings, and backed all his prisoners into the inner room, whither Marianne followed, having salvaged the table cloth which she wrapped rather sketchily, sarong-fashion, about her.

Briefly she explained the situation to Clanton, and he ordered the men to lie on their bellies and put their hands behind them, while she tied their wrists and ankles with their belts and turbans. He watched her in ecstatic silence while

she was thus employed. The improvised sarong was something more than revealing, as she moved about, allowing glimpses of sweet contours that sent the blood to his head.

WHEN she had finished the job, he inspected each man, grunting his approval of her technique, and searching them for weapons. He lingered longer over Jum Chin, and when he rose, she was amazed to see a grey pallor tinging the Chinaman's face. Yet Clanton had done nothing to hurt him.

Clanton then untied Davies, and growled: "I ought to bust your snoot for pullin' off Miss Allison's clothes and throwin' her in that cellar, but I'm lettin' you off, considerin' what Ahmed did to you. Get out!"

"I'll get even with somebody, I bet!" sniveled Mr. Davies, and departed hastily, aided in his exit by the toe of the Clanton boot. When his lamentations had faded in the night, Clanton addressed his glowering prisoners.

"We're leaving. I'll send back a coolie to untie you. Ahmed, you better forget what's happened tonight. The dragon's gone. Only Ram Lal knew what became of it, and he's dead. And if the British find out you killed him, they'll hang you, sure as hell! You let us alone, and keep your mouth shut, and we'll keep ours shut."

Fear gleamed in Ahmed's one good eye at the mention of hanging. He was sullenly silent as Clanton followed the girl into the outer room and closed the door behind them.

"Do you think he'll drop the matter?" she asked nervously. "I can't afford to have this story get in the papers."

"No, you can't," he agreed. "Theft, murder, torture, bribin' a thief like Ram

(Continued on page 123)

The Dragon of Kao Tsu

[Continued from page 15]

Lal and a pirate like me—it would ruin any debutante. Best thing you can do is to get out of Singapore as quick as you can. Ahmed won't forget this. He'll work under cover to get us, if he can. I ain't afraid of him, but you better take the first ship back to the U.S.A."

"But I've *got* to have that dragon!" She was almost frantic.

Then her eyes dilated as he took something from his pocket—an ivory dragon, not so yellow nor so exquisite as the other she had seen.

"The Kao Tsu dragon!" She snatched at it, but he withheld it.

"You wait a minute!" He fumbled with the pot-belly for a moment, and then a section of it swung open. He drew out a strip of parchment, which had been rolled in the interior. One end remained fastened in the belly. The parchment was covered with tiny Chinese characters.

"Then you knew!" She was considerably agitated.

"I knew you wasn't any art collector, and I found out that the dragon Ram Lal gave me for you was the genuine Kao Tsu. So I did some sleuthin' and found out plenty. You wanted this for your old man, and he sent you after it because you're smarter than anybody workin' for him.

"That writin' is an agreement signed by the Chinese war-lord they call General Kai, givin' your old man an option on an important oil concession. He gave it to your old man a few years ago, in a moment of generosity, and like a Chinaman, rigged the agreement up in the belly of this dragon, which is a clever copy of the original Kao Tsu. Your old man thought all the time it *was* the Kao Tsu, and that's what you come after.

"BECAUSE a few months ago your old man decided to develop that concession so's to recoup his stock market losses, but General Kai had changed his mind. He wanted to give that concession to another firm. But if he refused, in the teeth of his own signed agreement, he'd lose face. So he had it stolen from your old man, meanin' to destroy the agreement and then claim he never made it, but Shareef Ahmed, who

don't overlook many bets, had it stolen from Kai's agent. He already had the original Kao Tsu.

"Then Ahmed offered it to the highest bidder. Your old man had lost so much money in the stock market crash he was afraid General Kai would outbid him, so he sent you to steal it. General Kai also had his agents after it, Bull Davies bein' one of 'em. Ram Lal stole both dragons. He gave you the real Kao Tsu, but he kept the one with the contract in it, and was goin' to sell it to General Kai's agent. You know the rest."

"But the dragon—" she exclaimed bewilderedly. "That one, I mean!"

"Easy!" he grinned. "Jum Chin had it all the time. He killed Ram Lal and must have found the dragon on him before Ahmed got there. Ahmed trusts Jum Chin so it didn't occur to him to suspect him. An Arab's no match for a Chinaman in wits. I found it on Jum Chin when I searched him. He won't dare tell Ahmed we've got it because that'd betray his own treachery. I sneaked back when they quit chasin' me and was waitin' outside for a break. Well, I got it."

"Give the dragon to me!" she exclaimed. "It's mine! I paid you!"

"You paid me for the genuine Kao Tsu," he said, his eyes devouring a sleek thigh the sarong left bare. "You got it. This comes extra."

"How much?" she demanded sulkily.

"Money ain't everything," he suggested.

Suddenly she smiled meltingly and came up to him, laying a slender hand on his arm. Her nearness made him dizzy, and she did not resist as he passed an arm about her waist.

"I understand," she breathed. "You

win. Give me the dragon first, though."

Trustingly he placed it in her hand—and quick as a cat she plucked the pistol from his belt and smashed him over the head with the barrel. The next instant she was streaking for the door. But she underestimated the strength of his skull. To her dismay he did not fall. He staggered with a gasping curse, then righted himself and leaped after her. He caught her as she grasped the knob, slapped the pistol out of her hand and spun her back into the room, crushing her wrists in one hand as she tried to claw his eyes out.

"You little cheat!" he snarled. "You've never kept a bargain yet! Well, you're goin' to keep this one! You've got what you want, and I'm goin' to get what I want! And you can't squawk, because you can't have the world knowin' about this night's work!"

Knowledge that this was true pepped up her struggles, but to her dismay she found them useless against the strength of her irate captor. All her kicking and squirming accomplished was to disarrange the sarong, and he caught his breath at the sight of all the pink and white curves displayed.

"You don't dare!" she gasped, as he drew her roughly to him. "You don't dare—"

Bill Clanton didn't even bother to reply to her ridiculous assertion . . .

IT WAS some time later when he grinned at her philosophically. He stooped and kissed her pouting mouth. "Maybe that'll teach you not to associate with people like me," he said.

Her reply was unprintable, but the look in her eyes contradicted her words as she took his arm and together they went out to the street.