

THE MAKER OF MOONS.

BY R. W. CHAMBERS.

I.

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk
Of the beginning and the end ;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

CONCERNING Yue-Laou and the Xin I know nothing more than you shall know. I am miserably anxious to clear the matter up. Perhaps what I write may save the United States Government money and lives, perhaps it may arouse the scientific world to action ; at any rate it will put an end to the terrible suspense of two people. Certainty is better than suspense.

If the Government dares to disregard this warning and refuses to send a thoroughly equipped expedition at once, the people of the State may take swift vengeance on the whole region and leave a blackened devastated waste where to-day forest and flowering meadow land border the lake in the Cardinal Woods.

You already know part of the story ; the New York papers have been full of alleged details. This much is true : Barris caught the "Shiner" red-handed, or, rather, yellow-handed, for his pockets and boots and dirty fists were stuffed with lumps of gold. I say gold advisedly. You may call it what you please. You also know how Barris was—but unless I begin at the beginning of my own experiences, you will be none the wiser after all.

On the 3rd of August of this present year I was standing in Tiffany's, chatting with George Godfrey, of the designing department. On the glass counter between us lay a coiled serpent, an exquisite specimen of chiselled gold.

"No," replied Godfrey to my question, "it isn't my work ; I wish it was. Why, man, it's a masterpiece !"

"Whose ?" I asked.

"Now I should be very glad to know also," said Godfrey. "We bought it from an old jay who says he lives in the country somewhere about the Cardinal Woods. That's near Starlit Lake, I believe—"

"Lake of the Stars ?" I suggested.

"Some call it Starlit Lake—it's all the same. Well, my rustic Reuben says that he represents the sculptor of this snake for all practical and business purposes. He got his price, too. We hope he'll bring us something more. We have sold this already to the Metropolitan Museum."

I was leaning idly on the glass case, watching the keen eyes of the artist in precious metals as he stooped over the gold serpent.

"A masterpiece ! " he muttered to himself, fondling the glittering coil. "Look at the texture ! Whew ! " But I was not looking at the serpent. Something was moving—crawling out of Godfrey's coat pocket—the pocket nearest to me—something soft and yellow with crab-like legs, all covered with coarse yellow hair.

"What in Heaven's name," said I, "have you got in your pocket ? It's crawling out—it's trying to creep up your coat, Godfrey ! "

He turned quickly and dragged the creature out with his left hand.

I shrank back as he held the repulsive object dangling before me, and he laughed and placed it on the counter.

"Did you ever see anything like that ?" he demanded.

"No," said I truthfully ; "and I hope I never shall again. What is it ?"

"I don't know. Ask them at the Natural History Museum—they can't tell you. The Smithsonian is all at sea too. It is, I believe, the connecting link between a sea-urchin, a spider, and the devil. It looks venomous, but I can't find either fangs or mouth. Is it blind ? These things may be eyes, but they look as if they were painted. A Japanese sculptor might have produced such an impossible beast, but it is hard to believe that God did. It looks unfinished too. I have a mad idea that this creature is only one of the parts of some larger and more grotesque organism—it looks so lonely, so hopelessly dependent, so cursedly unfinished. I'm going to use it as a model. If I don't out-Japanese the Japs my name isn't Godfrey."

The creature was moving slowly across the glass case towards me. I withdrew.

"Godfrey," I said, "I would execute a man who executed any such work as you propose. What do you want to perpetuate such a reptile for? I can stand the Japanese grotesque, but I can't stand that—spider—"

"It's a crab."

"Crab or spider or blind-worm—ugh! What do you want to do it for? It's a nightmare—it's unclean!"

I hated the thing. It was the first living creature that I had ever hated.

For some time I had noticed a damp acrid odour in the air, and Godfrey said it came from the reptile.

"Then kill it and bury it," I said; "and, by the way, where did it come from?"

"I don't know that either," laughed Godfrey; "I found it clinging to the box that this gold serpent was brought in. I suppose my old Reuben is responsible."

"If the Cardinal Woods are the lurking-places for things like this," said I, "I am sorry that I am going to the Cardinal Woods."

"Are you?" asked Godfrey; "for the shooting?"

"Yes, with Barris and Pierpont. Why don't you kill that creature?"

"Go off on your shooting trip, and let me alone," laughed Godfrey.

I shuddered at the "crab," and bade Godfrey good-bye until December.

That night, Pierpont, Barris, and I sat chatting in the smoking-car of the Quebec Express when the long train pulled out of the Grand Central Dépôt. Old David had gone forward with the dogs: poor things, they hated to ride in the baggage-car, but the Quebec and Northern road provides no sportsman's cars, and David and the three Gordon setters were in for an uncomfortable night.

Except for Pierpont, Barris, and myself, the car was empty. Barris, trim, stout, ruddy, and bronzed, sat drumming on the window-ledge, puffing a short fragrant pipe. His gun-case lay beside him on the floor.

"When I have white hair and years of discretion," said Pierpont languidly, "I'll not flirt with pretty serving-maids; will you, Roy?"

"No," said I, looking at Barris.

"You mean the maid with the cap in the Pullman car?" asked Barris.

"Yes," said Pierpont.

I smiled, for I had seen it also.

Barris twisted his crisp grey moustache, and yawned.

"You children had better be toddling

off to bed," he said. "That lady's-maid is a member of the Secret Service."

"Oh!" said Pierpont, "one of your colleagues?"

"You might present us, you know," I said; "the journey is monotonous."

Barris had drawn a telegram from his pocket, and as he sat turning it over and over between his fingers he smiled. After a moment or two he handed it to Pierpont, who read it with slightly raised eyebrows.

"It's rot—I suppose it's cipher," he said; "I see it's signed by General Drummond—"

"Drummond, Chief of the Government Secret Service," said Barris.

"Something interesting?" I inquired, lighting a cigarette.

"Something so interesting," replied Barris, "that I'm going to look into it myself—"

"And break up our shooting trio—"

"No. Do you want to hear about it? Do you, Billy Pierpont?"

"Yes," replied that immaculate young man.

Barris rubbed the amber mouthpiece of his pipe on his handkerchief, cleared the stem with a bit of wire, puffed once or twice, and leaned back in his chair.

"Pierpont," he said, "do you remember that evening at the United States Club when General Miles, General Drummond, and I were examining that gold nugget that Captain Mahan had? You examined it also, I believe."

"I did," said Pierpont.

"Was it gold?" asked Barris, drumming on the window.

"It was," replied Pierpont.

"I saw it too," said I; "of course it was gold."

"Professor La Grange saw it also," said Barris; "he said it was gold."

"Well?" said Pierpont.

"Well," said Barris, "it was not gold."

After a silence Pierpont asked what tests had been made.

"The usual tests," replied Barris. "The United States Mint is satisfied that it is gold, so is every jeweller who has seen it. But it is not gold—and yet—it is gold."

Pierpont and I exchanged glances.

"Now," said I, "for Barris's usual coup-de-théâtre: what was the nugget?"

"Practically, it was pure gold; but," said Barris, enjoying the situation intensely, "really it was not gold. Pierpont, what is gold?"

"Gold's an element, a metal—"

"Wrong, Billy Pierpont!" said Barris coolly.

"Gold was an element when I went to school," said I,

"It has not been an element for two weeks," said Barris; "and, except General Drummond, Professor La Grange, and myself, you two youngsters are the only people, except one, in the world who know it or have known it."

"Do you mean to say that gold is a composite metal?" said Pierpont slowly.

"I do. La Grange has made it. He produced a scale of pure gold day before yesterday. That nugget was manufactured gold."

Could Barris be joking? Was this a colossal hoax? I looked at Pierpont. He muttered something about that settling the silver question, and turned his head to Barris; but there was that in Barris's face which forebade jesting, and Pierpont and I sat silently pondering.

"Don't ask me how it's made," said Barris quietly; "I don't know. But I do know that somewhere in the region of the Cardinal Woods there is a gang of people who do know how gold is made, and who make it. You understand the danger this is to every civilised nation. It's got to be stopped, of course. Drummond and I have decided that I am the man to stop it. Wherever and whoever these people are—these gold-makers—they must be caught, every one of them—caught or shot."

"Or shot," repeated Pierpont, who was owner of the Cross-Cut Gold Mine, and found his income too small. "Professor La Grange will of course be prudent; science need not know things that would upset the world!"

"Little Willy," said Barris, laughing, "your income is safe."

"I suppose," said I, "some flaw in the nugget gave Professor La Grange the tip."

"Exactly. He cut the flaw out before sending the nugget to be tested. He worked on the flaw and separated gold into its three elements."

"He is a great man," said Pierpont; "but he will be the greatest man in the world if he can keep his discovery to himself."

"Who?" said Barris.

"Professor La Grange."

"Professor La Grange was shot through the heart two hours ago," replied Barris slowly.

II.

We had been at the shooting-box in the Cardinal Woods five days when a telegram was brought to Barris by a mounted messenger from the nearest telegraph

station, Cardinal Springs, a hamlet on the lumber railroad which joins the Quebec and Northern at Three Rivers Junction, thirty miles below.

Pierpont and I were sitting out under the trees, loading some special shells as experiments; Barris stood beside us, bronzed, erect, holding his pipe carefully so that no sparks would drift into our powder-box. The beat of hoofs over the grass aroused us, and when the lank messenger drew bridle before the door, Barris stepped forward and took the sealed telegram. When he had torn it open he went into the house and presently reappeared, reading something that he had written.

"This should go at once," he said, looking the messenger full in the face.

"At once, Colonel Barris," replied the shabby countryman.

Pierpont glanced up, and I smiled at the messenger who was gathering his bridle and settling himself in his stirrups. Barris handed him the written reply and nodded good-bye, there was a thud of hoofs on the greensward, a jingle of bit and spur across the gravel, and the messenger was gone. Barris's pipe went out, and he stepped to windward to relight it.

"It is queer," said I, "that your messenger, a battered native, should speak like a Harvard man."

"He is a Harvard man," said Barris.

"And the plot thickens," said Pierpont; "are the Cardinal Woods full of your Secret Service men, Barris?"

"No," replied Barris; "but the telegraph stations are. How many ounces of shot are you using, Roy?"

I told him, holding up the adjustable steel measuring-cup. He nodded. After a moment or two he sat down on a camp-stool beside us and picked up a crimper.

"That telegram was from Drummond," he said; "the messenger was one of my men, as you two bright little boys divined. Pooh! If he had spoken the Cardinal County dialect you wouldn't have known."

"His make-up was good," said Pierpont.

Barris twirled the crimper and looked at the pile of loaded shells. Then he picked up one and crimped it.

"Let 'em alone," said Pierpont; "you crimp too tight."

"Does his little gun kick when the shells are crimped too tight?" inquired Barris tenderly; "well, he shall crimp his own shells then—where's his little man?"

His little man was a weird English importation, stiff, very carefully scrubbed,

tangled in his aspirates, named Howlett. As valet, gillie, gun-bearer, and crimpler he aided Pierpont to endure the ennui of existence by doing for him everything except breathing. Lately, however, Barris's taunts had driven Pierpont to do a few things for himself. To his astonishment he found that cleaning his own gun was not a bore, so he timidly loaded a shell or two, was much pleased with himself, loaded some more, crimped them, and went to breakfast with an appetite. So when Barras asked where "his little man" was, Pierpont did not reply, but dug a cupful of shot from the bag and poured it solemnly into the half-filled shell.

Old David came out with the dogs, and of course there was a pow-wow when Voyou, my Gordon, wagged his splendid tail across the loading-table, and sent a dozen unstopped cartridges rolling over the grass, vomiting powder and shot.

"Give the dogs a mile or two," said I ; "we will shoot over the Sweet Fern Covert about four o'clock, David."

"Two guns, David," added Barris.

"Are you not going?" asked Pierpont, looking up as David disappeared with the dogs.

"Bigger game," said Barris shortly. He picked up a mug of ale from the tray which Howlett had just set down beside us, and took a long pull. We did the same, silently. Pierpont set his mug on the turf beside him and returned to his loading.

We spoke of the murder of Professor La Grange, of how it had been concealed by the authorities in New York at Drummond's request, of the certainty that it was one of the gang of gold-makers who had done it, and of the possible alertness of the gang.

"Oh, they know that Drummond will be after them sooner or later," said Barris ; "but they don't know that the mills of the gods have already begun to grind. Those smart New York papers builded better than they knew when their ferret-eyed reporter poked his red nose into the house on 58th Street and sneaked off with a column on his cuffs about the 'suicide' of Professor La Grange. Billy Pierpont, my revolver is hanging in your room ; I'll take yours too——"

"Help yourself," said Pierpont.

"I shall be gone over night," continued Barris ; "my poncho and some bread and meat are all I shall take except the barkers."

"Will they bark to-night?" I asked.

"No, I trust not for several weeks yet.

I shall nose about a bit. Roy, did it ever strike you how queer it is that this wonderfully beautiful country should contain no inhabitants?"

"It's like those splendid stretches of pools and rapids which one finds on every trout river, and in which one never finds a fish," suggested Pierpont.

"Exactly ; and Heaven alone knows why," said Barris. "I suppose this country is shunned by human beings for the same mysterious reasons."

"The shooting is the better for it," I observed.

"The shooting is good," said Barris ; "have you noticed the snipe on the meadow by the lake? Why, it's brown with them! That's a wonderful meadow."

"It's a natural one," said Pierpont ; "no human being ever cleared that land."

"Then it's supernatural," said Barris. "Pierpont, do you want to come with me?"

Pierpont's handsome face flushed as he answered slowly, "It's awfully good of you—if I may."

"Bosh!" said I, piqued because he had asked Pierpont. "What use is little Willy without his man?"

"True," said Barris gravely ; "you can't take Howlett, you know."

Pierpont muttered something which ended in "d—n."

"Then," said I, "there will be but one gun on the Sweet Fern Covert this afternoon. Very well, I wish you joy of your cold supper and colder bed. Take your night-gown, Willy, and don't sleep on the damp ground."

"Let Pierpont alone," retorted Barris ; "you shall go next time, Roy."

"Oh, all right ; you mean when there's shooting going on?"

"And I?" demanded Pierpont, grieved.

"You, too, my son ; stop quarrelling ! Will you ask Howlett to pack our kits—lightly, mind you—no bottles, they clink."

"My flask doesn't," said Pierpont, and went off to get ready for a night's stalking of dangerous men.

"It is strange," said I, "that nobody ever settles in this region. How many people live in Cardinal Springs, Barris?"

"Twenty, counting the telegraph operator and not counting the lumbermen ; they are always changing and shifting. I have six men among them."

"Where have you no men? In the Four Hundred?"

"I have men there also—chums of Billy's, only he doesn't know it. David tells me that there was a strong flight of

woodcock last night. You ought to pick up some this afternoon."

Then we chatted about alder-cover and swamp until Pierpont came out of the house and it was time to part.

"Au revoir!" said Barris, buckling on his kit; "come along, Pierpont, and don't walk in the damp grass."

"If you are not back by to-morrow noon," said I, "I will take Howlett and David and hunt you up. You say your course is due north?"

"Due north," replied Barris, consulting his compass.

"There is a trail for two miles, and a spotted lead for two more," said Pierpont.

"Which we won't use for various reasons," added Barris pleasantly; "don't worry, Roy, and keep your confounded expedition out of the way; there's no danger."

He knew, of course, what he was talking about, and I held my peace.

When the tip end of Pierpont's shooting-coat had disappeared in the Long Covert, I found myself standing alone with Howlett. He bore my gaze for a moment, and then politely lowered his eyes.

"Howlett," said I, "take these shells and implements to the gun-room, and drop nothing. Did Voyou come to any harm in the briars this morning?"

"No 'arm, Mr. Cardenhe, Sir," said Howlett.

"Then be careful not to drop anything else," said I, and walked away, leaving him decorously puzzled. For he had dropped no cartridges. Poor Howlett!

III.

About four o'clock that afternoon I met David and his dogs at the spinney which leads into the Sweet Fern Covert. The three setters, Voyou, Gamin, and Mioche, were in fine feather. David had killed a woodcock and a brace of grouse over them that morning, and they were thrashing about the spinney at short range when I came up, gun under arm and pipe lighted.

"What's the prospect, David?" I asked, trying to keep my feet in the tangle of wagging, whining dogs. "Hello, what's amiss with Mioche?"

"A briar in his foot, Sir; I drew it and stopped the wound, but I guess the gravel's got in. If you have no objection, Sir, I might take him back with me."

"It's safer," I said. "Take Gamin too; I only want one dog this afternoon. What is the situation?"

"Fair, Sir; the grouse lie within a quarter

of a mile of the oak second growth. The woodcock are mostly on the alders. I saw any number of snipe on the meadows. There's something else in by the lake—I can't just tell what, but the wood-duck set up a clatter when I was in the thicket, and they came dashing through the wood as if a dozen foxes was snappin' at their tail feathers."

"Probably a fox," I said; "leash those dogs—they must learn to stand it. I'll be back by dinner-time."

"There is one more thing, Sir," said David, lingering with his gun under his arm.

"Well," said I.

"I saw a man in the woods by the Oak Covert—at least, I think I did."

"A lumberman?"

"I think not, Sir—at least—do they have Chinamen among them?"

"Chinese? No. You didn't see a Chinaman in the woods here?"

"I—I think I did, Sir—I can't say positively. He was gone when I ran into the covert."

"Did the dogs notice it?"

"I can't say—exactly. They acted queer-like. Gamin here lay down and whined—it may have been colic—and Mioche whimpered—perhaps it was the briar."

"And Voyou?"

"Voyou, he was most remarkable, Sir; and the hair on his back stood up. I did see a ground-hog makin' for a tree near by."

"Then no wonder Voyou bristled. David, your Chinaman was a stump or tussock. Take the dogs now."

"I guess it was, Sir; good afternoon, Sir," said David, and walked away with the Gordons, leaving me alone with Voyou in the spinney.

I looked at the dog and he looked at me.

"Voyou!"

The dog sat down and danced with his fore-feet, his beautiful brown eyes sparkling.

"You're a fraud," I said; "which shall it be, the alders or the upland? Upland? Good!—now for the grouse—heel, my friend, and show your miraculous self-restraint."

Voyou wheeled into my tracks and followed close, nobly refusing to notice the impudent chipmunks and the thousand and one alluring and important smells which an ordinary dog would have lost no time in investigating.

The brown and yellow autumn woods were crisp with drifting heaps of leaves

and twigs that crackled under foot as we turned from the spinney into the forest. Every silent little stream hurrying toward the lake was gay with painted leaves afloat, scarlet maple or yellow oak. Spots of sunlight fell upon the pools, searching the brown depths, illuminating the gravel bottom where shoals of minnows swam to and fro, and to and fro again, busy with the purpose of their little lives. The crickets were chirping in the long brittle grass on the edge of the woods, but we left them far behind in the silence of the deeper forest.

"Now!" said I to Voyou.

The dog sprang to the front, circled once, zigzagged through the ferns around us, and, all in a moment, stiffened stock still, rigid as sculptured bronze. I stepped forward, raising my gun, two paces, three paces, ten, perhaps, before a great cock-grouse blundered up from the brake and burst through the thicket fringe toward the deeper growth. There was a flash and puff from my gun, a crash of echoes among the low wooded cliffs, and through the faint veil of smoke something dark dropped from mid-air amid a cloud of feathers, brown as the brown leaves underfoot.

"Fetch!"

Up from the ground sprang Voyou, and in a moment he came galloping back, neck arched, tail stiff but waving, holding tenderly in his pink mouth a mass of mottled bronzed feathers. Very gravely he laid the bird at my feet and crouched close beside it, his silky ears across his paws, his muzzle on the ground.

I dropped the grouse into my pocket, held for a moment a silent caressing communion with Voyou, then swung my gun under my arm and motioned the dog on.

It must have been five o'clock when I walked into a little opening in the woods and sat down to breathe. Voyou came and sat down in front of me.

"Well?" I inquired.

Voyou gravely presented one paw, which I took.

"We will never get back in time for dinner," said I, "so we might as well take it easy. It's all your fault, you know. Is there a briar in your foot? Let's see—there! it's out, my friend, and you are free to nose about and lick it. If you loll your tongue out, you'll get it all over twigs and moss. Can't you lie down and try to pant less? No, there is no use in sniffing and looking at that fern patch, for we are going to smoke a little, doze a little, and go home by moonlight. Think what a

big dinner we will have! Think of Howlett's despair when we are not in time! Think of all the stories you will have to tell to Gamin and Mioche! Think what a good dog you have been! There! you are tired, old chap; take forty winks with me."

Voyou was a little tired. He stretched out on the leaves at my feet, but whether or not he really slept I could not be certain, until his hind legs twitched and I knew he was dreaming of mighty deeds.

Now I may have taken forty winks, but the sun seemed to be no lower when I sat up and unclosed my lids. Voyou raised his head, saw in my eyes that I was not going yet, thumped his tail half-a-dozen times on the dried leaves, and settled back with a sigh.

I looked lazily around, and for the first time noticed what a wonderfully beautiful spot I had chosen for a nap. It was an oval glade in the heart of the forest, level and carpeted with green grass. The trees that surrounded it were gigantic; they formed one towering circular wall of verdure, blotting out all except the turquoise blue of the sky-oval above. And now I noticed that in the centre of the greensward lay a pool of water, crystal clear, glimmering like a mirror in the meadow grass, beside a block of granite. It scarcely seemed possible that the symmetry of tree and lawn and lucent pool could have been one of nature's accidents. I had never before seen this glade, nor had I ever heard it spoken of by either Pierpont or Barris. It was a marvel, this diamond-clear basin, regular and graceful as a Roman fountain, set in the gem of turf. And these great trees, they also belonged not to America but to some legend-haunted forest of France, where moss-grown marbles stand neglected in dim glades and the twilight of the forest shelters fairies and slender shapes from shadow-land.

I lay and watched the sunlight showering the tangled thicket where masses of crimson cardinal flowers glowed, or where one long dusty sunbeam tipped the edge of the floating leaves in the pool, turning them to palest gilt. There were birds, too, passing through the dim avenues of trees like jets of flame—the gorgeous cardinal-bird in his deep-stained crimson robe, the bird that gave to the woods, to the village fifteen miles away, to the whole country the name of Cardinal.

I rolled over on my back and looked up at the sky. How pale—paler than a robin's egg—it was! I seemed to be



HER HAMMER FELL INTO THE FOUNTAIN, AND I LEANED OVER AND PLUNGED MY ARM
INTO THE WATER TO FIND IT.

lying at the bottom of a well, walled with verdure, high-towering on every side. And as I lay, all about me the air became sweet-scented. Sweeter and sweeter and more penetrating grew the perfume, and I wondered what stray breeze, blowing over acres of lilies, could have brought it. But there was no breeze—the air was still. A gilded fly alighted on my hand—a honey-fly. It was as troubled as I by the scented silence.

Then, behind me, my dog growled.

I sat quite still at first, hardly breathing, but my eyes were fixed on a shape that moved along the edge of the pool among the meadow grasses. The dog had ceased growling, and was now staring, alert and trembling.

At last I rose and walked rapidly down to the pool, my dog following close to heel.

The figure, a woman's, turned slowly toward us.

IV.

She was standing still when I approached the pool. The forest around us was so silent that when I spoke the sound of my own voice startled me.

"No," she said, and her voice was smooth as flowing water, "I have not lost my way. Will he come to me—your beautiful dog?"

Before I could speak, Voyou crept to her and laid his silky head against her knees.

"But surely," said I, "you did not come here alone?"

"Alone? I did come alone."

"But the nearest settlement is Cardinal, probably nineteen miles from where we are standing."

"I do not know Cardinal," she said.

"Ste. Croix in Canada is forty miles, at least. How did you come into the Cardinal Woods?" I asked, amazed.

"Into the woods?" she repeated a little impatiently.

"Yes."

She did not answer at first, but stood caressing Voyou with gentle phrase and gesture.

"Your beautiful dog I am fond of, but I am not fond of being questioned," she said quietly. "My name is Ysonde, and I came to the fountain here to see your dog."

I was properly quenched. After a moment or two I did say that in another hour it would be growing dusky, but she neither replied nor looked at me.

"This," I ventured, "is a beautiful pool—you call it a fountain—a delicious fountain: I have never before seen it. It is hard to imagine that nature did all this."

"Is it?" she said.

"Don't you think so?" I asked.

"I haven't thought; I wish when you go you would leave me your dog."

"My—my dog?"

"If you don't mind," she said sweetly, and looked at me for the first time in the face.

For an instant our glances met, then she grew grave, and I saw that her eyes were fixed on my forehead. Suddenly she rose and drew nearer, looking intently at my forehead. There was a faint mark there, a tiny crescent, just over my eyebrow.

It was a birth-mark.

"Is that a scar?" she demanded, drawing nearer.

"That crescent-shaped mark? No."

"No! Are you sure?" she insisted.

"Perfectly," I replied, astonished.

"A—a birth-mark?"

"Yes; may I ask why?"

As she drew away from me, I saw that the colour had fled from her cheeks. For a second she clasped both hands over her eyes, as if to shut out my face; then, slowly dropping her hands, she sat down on a long square block of stone which half encircled the basin, and on which, to my amazement, I saw carving. Voyou went to her again and laid his head in her lap.

"What is your name?" she asked at length.

"Roy Cardenhe."

"Mine is Ysonde. I carved these dragon-flies on the stone, these fishes and shells and butterflies you see."

"You! They are wonderfully delicate; but those are not American dragon-flies."

"No; they are more beautiful. See, I have my hammer and chisel with me."

She drew from a queer pouch at her side a small hammer and chisel, and held them toward me.

"You are very talented," I said; "where did you study?"

"I? I never studied—I knew how. I saw things and cut them out of stone. Do you like them? Some time I will show you other things that I have done. If I had a great lump of bronze I could make your dog, beautiful as he is."

Her hammer fell into the fountain, and I leaned over and plunged my arm into the water to find it.

"It is there, shining on the sand," she said, leaning over the pool with me.

"Where?" said I, looking at our reflected faces in the water. For it was only in the water that I had dared, as yet, to look her long in the face.

The pool mirrored the exquisite oval of her head, the heavy hair, the eyes. I heard the silken rustle of her girdle, I caught the flash of a white arm, and the hammer was drawn up dripping with spray.

The troubled surface of the pool grew calm, and again I saw her eyes reflected.

"Listen," she said in a low voice, "do you think you will come again to my fountain?"

"I will come," I said. My voice was duli; the noise of waters filled my ears.

Then a swift shadow sped across the pool; I rubbed my eyes. Where her reflected face had bent beside mine there was nothing mirrored but the rosy evening sky with one pale star glimmering. I drew myself up and turned. She was gone. I saw the faint star twinkling above me in the afterglow, I saw the tall trees motionless in the still evening air, I saw my dog slumbering at my feet.

The sweet scent in the air had faded, leaving in my nostrils the heavy odour of fern and forest mould. A blind fear seized me, and I caught up my gun and sprang into the darkening woods. The dog followed me, crashing through the undergrowth at my side. Duller and duller grew the light; but I strode on, the sweat pouring from my face and hair, my mind a chaos. How I reached the spinney I can hardly tell. As I turned up the path I caught a glimpse of a human face peering at me from the darkening thicket—a horrible human face, yellow and drawn, with high-boned cheeks and narrow eyes.

Involuntarily I halted; the dog at my heels snarled. Then I sprang straight at it, floundering blindly through the thicket; but the night had fallen swiftly, and I found myself panting and struggling in a maze of twisted shrubbery and twining vines, unable to see the very undergrowth that ensnared me.

It was a pale face, and a scratched one, that I carried to a late dinner that night. Howlett served me, dumb reproach in his eyes, for the soup had been standing and the grouse was juiceless.

David brought the dogs in after they had had their supper, and I drew my chair before the blaze and set my ale on a table beside me. The dogs curled up at my feet, blinking gravely at the sparks that snapped and flew in eddying showers from the heavy birch logs.

"David," said I, "did you say you saw a Chinaman to-day?"

"I did, Sir."

"What do you think about it now?"

"I may have been mistaken, Sir—"

"But you think not. What sort of whisky did you put in my flask to-day?"

"The usual, Sir."

"Is there much gone?"

"About three swallows, Sir, as usual."

"You don't suppose there could have been any mistake about that whisky; no medicine could have gotten into it, for instance."

David smiled and said, "No, Sir."

"Well," said I, "I have had an extraordinary dream."

When I said "dream," I felt comforted and reassured. I had scarcely dared to say it before, even to myself.

"An extraordinary dream," I repeated; "I fell asleep in the woods about five o'clock, in that pretty glade where the fountain—I mean the pool is. You know the place?"

"I do not, Sir."

I described it minutely twice, but David shook his head.

"Carved stone, did you say, Sir? I never chanced on it. You don't mean the New Spring—"

"No, no! This glade is away beyond that. Is it possible that any people inhabit the forest between here and the Canada line?"

"Nobody short of Ste. Croix; at least I have no knowledge of any."

"Of course," said I, "when I thought I saw a Chinaman, it was imagination. Of course I had been more impressed than I was aware of by your adventure. Of course you saw no Chinaman, David."

"Probably not, Sir," replied David dubiously.

I sent him off to bed, saying I should keep the dogs with me all night. And when he was gone I took a good long draught of ale, "just to shame the devil," as Pierpont said, and lighted a cigar. Then I thought of Barris and Pierpont and their cold bed, for I knew they would not dare build a fire, and, in spite of the hot chimney corner and the crackling blaze, I shivered in sympathy.

"I'll tell Barris and Pierpont the whole story, and take them to see the carved stone and the fountain," I thought to myself; "what a marvellous dream it was—Ysonde—if it was a dream!"

Then I went to the mirror and examined the faint white mark above my eyebrow.

V.

About eight o'clock next morning, as I sat listlessly eyeing my coffee-cup which Howlett was filling, Gamin and Mioche set up a howl, and in a moment more I heard Barris's step on the porch.

"Hello, Roy!" said Pierpont, stamping into the dining-room, "I want my breakfast, by jingo! Where's Howlett? None of your *café-au-lait* for me—I want a chop and some eggs. Look at that dog—he'll wag the hinge off his tail in a moment—"

"Pierpont," said I, "this loquacity is astonishing but welcome. Where's Barris? You are soaked from neck to ankle."

Pierpont sat down and tore off his stiff muddy leggings.

"Barris is telephoning to Cardinal Springs—I believe he wants some of his men. Down, Gamin, you idiot! Howlett, three eggs poached and more toast! What was I saying? Oh, about Barris—he's struck something or other which he hopes will locate these gold-making fellows. I had a jolly time—he'll tell you about it."

"Billy! Billy!" I said in pleased amazement, "you are learning to talk! Dear me! You load your own shells and you carry your own gun and you fire it yourself. Hello! here's Barris all over mud. You fellows really ought to change your rig. Whew! what a frightful odour!"

"It's probably this," said Barris, tossing something on to the hearth, where it shuddered for a moment and then began to writhe. "I found it in the woods by the lake. Do you know what it can be, Roy?"

To my disgust I saw it was another of those spidery, wormy, crab-like creatures Godfrey had in Tiffany's.

"I thought I recognised that acrid odour," I said. "For the love of the saints take it away from the breakfast-table, Barris!"

"But what is it?" he persisted, unslinging his field-glass and revolver.

"I'll tell you what I know after breakfast," I replied firmly. "Howlett, get a broom and sweep that thing into the road. What are you laughing at, Pierpont?"

Howlett swept the repulsive creature out, and Barris and Pierpont went to change their dew-soaked clothes for drier raiment. David came to take the dogs for an airing, and in a few minutes Barris reappeared and sat down in his place at the head of the table.

"Well," said I, "is there a story to tell?"

"Yes; not much. They are near the lake on the other side of the woods—I

mean these gold-makers. I shall collar one of them this evening. I haven't located the main gang with any certainty—shove the toast-rack this way, will you, Roy—no, I am not at all certain, but I've nailed one anyway. Pierpont was a great help, really—and, what do you think, Roy? He wants to join the Secret Service!"

"Little Willy!"

"Exactly. Oh, I'll dissuade him. What sort of a reptile was that I brought in? Did Howlett sweep it away?"

"He can sweep it back again for all I care," I said indifferently, "I've finished my breakfast."

"No," said Barris, hastily swallowing his coffee, "it's of no importance; you can tell me about the beast—"

"Serve you right if I had it brought in on toast," I returned.

Pierpont came in radiant, fresh from the bath.

"Go on with your story, Roy," he said; and I told them about Godfrey and his reptile pet.

"Now, what in the name of common sense can Godfrey find interesting in that creature?" I ended, tossing my cigarette into the fireplace.

"It's Japanese, don't you think?" said Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, "it is not artistically grotesque, it's vulgar and horrible—it looks cheap and unfinished—"

"Unfinished—exactly," said I, "like an American humorist—"

"Yes," said Pierpont, "cheap. What about that gold serpent?"

"Oh, the Metropolitan Museum bought it. You must see it—it's marvellous!"

Barris and Pierpont had lighted their cigarettes, and after a moment we all rose and strolled out to the lawn, where chairs and hammocks were placed under the maple-trees.

David passed, gun under arm, dogs heeling.

"Three guns on the meadows at four this afternoon," said Pierpont.

"Roy," said Barris as David bowed and started on, "what did you do yesterday?"

This was the question that I had been expecting. All night long I had dreamed of Ysonde and the glade in the woods, where, at the bottom of the crystal fountain, I saw the reflection of her eyes. All the morning while bathing and dressing I had been persuading myself that the dream was not worth recounting, and that a search for the glade and the imaginary stone carving would be ridiculous. But now, as Barris

asked the question, I suddenly decided to tell him the whole story.

"See here, you fellows!" I said abruptly, "I am going to tell you something queer. You can laugh as much as you please to, but first I want to ask Barris a question or two. You have been in China, Barris?"

"Yes," said Barris, looking straight into my eyes.

"Would a Chinaman be likely to turn lumberman?"

"Have you seen a Chinaman?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I don't know. David and I both imagined we did."

Barris and Pierpont exchanged glances.

"Have you seen one also?" I demanded, turning to include Pierpont.

"No," said Barris slowly; "but I know that there is, or has been, a Chinaman in these woods."

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes," said Barris gravely, "the devil, if you like—a devil—a member of the Kuen-Yuin."

I drew my chair close to the hammock where Pierpont lay at full length, holding out to me a ball of pure gold.

"Well?" said I, examining the engraving on its surface, which represented a mass of twisted creatures—dragons, I supposed.

"Well," repeated Barris, extending his hand to take the golden ball, "this globe of gold engraved with reptiles and Chinese hieroglyphics is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Where did you get it?" I asked, feeling that something startling was impending.

"Pierpont found it by the lake at sunrise this morning. It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," he repeated; "the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth."

We puffed our cigarettes in silence until Barris rose, and began to pace backward and forward among the trees, twisting his grey moustache.

"The Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers," he said, pausing before the hammock where Pierpont lay watching him; "I mean exactly what I say—sorcerers. I've seen them—I've seen them at their devilish business, and I repeat to you solemnly, that as there are angels above, there is a race of devils on earth, and they are sorcerers. Bah!" he cried, "talk to me of Indian magic and Yogis and all that clap-trap! Why, Roy, I tell you that the Kuen-Yuin have absolute control of a

hundred millions of people, mind and body, body and soul. Do you know what goes on in the interior of China? Does Europe know—could any human being conceive of the condition of that gigantic hell-pit? You read the papers, you hear diplomatic twaddle about Li-Hung-Chang and the Emperor, you see accounts of battles on sea and land, and you know that Japan has raised a toy tempest along the jagged edge of the great unknown; but you never before heard of the Kuen-Yuin; no, nor has any European except a stray missionary or two; and yet I tell you that when the fires from this pit of hell have eaten through the continent to the coast, the explosion will inundate half a world—and God help the other half!"

Pierpont's cigarette went out; he lighted another, and looked hard at Barris.

"But," resumed Barris quietly, "'sufficient unto the day,' you know—I didn't intend to say as much as I did—it would do no good—even you and Pierpont will forget it—it seems so impossible and so far away—like the burning out of the sun. What I want to discuss is the possibility or probability of a Chinaman—a member of the Kuen-Yuin, being here, at this moment, in the forest."

"If he is," said Pierpont, "possibly the gold-makers owe their discovery to him."

"I do not doubt it for a second," said Barris earnestly.

I took the little golden globe in my hand, and examined the characters engraved upon it.

"Barris," said Pierpont, "I can't believe in sorcery while I am wearing one of Sanford's shooting-suits, in the pocket of which rests an uncut volume of the 'Duchess.'

"Neither can I," I said; "for I read the *Evening Post*, and I know Mr. Godkin would not allow it. Hello! What's the matter with this gold ball?"

"What is the matter?" said Barris grimly.

"Why—why—it's changing colour—purple—no, crimson—no, it's green I mean—good Heavens! these dragons are twisting under my fingers—"

"Impossible!" muttered Pierpont, leaning over me; "those are not dragons—"

"No!" I cried excitedly; "they are pictures of that reptile that Barris brought back—see—see—how they crawl and turn—"

"Drop it!" commanded Barris; and I threw the ball on the turf. In an instant we had all knelt down on the grass beside it; but the globe was again golden,

grotesquely wrought with dragons and strange signs.

Pierpont, a little red in the face, picked it up, and handed it to Barris. He placed it on a chair, and sat down beside me.

"Whew!" said I, wiping the perspiration from my face, "how did you play us that trick, Barris?"

"Trick?" said Barris contemptuously. I looked at Pierpont, and my heart sank. If this was not a trick, what was it? Pierpont returned my glance and coloured; but all he said was, "It's devilish queer," and Barris answered, "Yes, devilish." Then Barris asked me again to tell my story, and I did, beginning from the time I met David in the spinney to the moment when I sprang into the darkening thicket where that yellow mask had grinned like a phantom skull.

"Shall we try to find the fountain?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes—and—er—the lady," suggested Pierpont vaguely.

"Don't be an ass," I said, a little impatiently; "you need not come, you know."

"Oh, I'll come," said Pierpont, "unless you think I am indiscreet—"

"Shut up, Pierpont," said Barris, "this thing is serious; I never heard of such a glade or such a fountain, but it's true that nobody knows this forest thoroughly. It's worth while trying for. Roy, can you find your way back to it?"

"Easily," I answered; "when shall we go?"

"It will knock our snipe-shooting on the head," said Pierpont; "but then when one has the opportunity of finding a live dream-lady—"

I rose, deeply offended, but Pierpont was not very penitent, and his laughter was irresistible.

"The lady's yours by right of discovery," he said; "I'll promise not to infringe on your dreams—I'll dream about other ladies—"

"Come, come," said I, "I'll have Howlett to put you to bed in a minute. Barris, if you are ready—we can get back to dinner—"

Barris had risen, and was gazing at me earnestly.

"What's the matter?" I asked nervously, for I saw that his eyes were fixed on my forehead, and I thought of Ysonde and the white crescent scar.

"Is that a birth-mark?" said Barris.

"Yes; why, Barris?"

"Nothing — an interesting coincidence—"

"What? —for Heaven's sake!"

"The scar, or rather the birth-mark. It is the print of the dragon's claw, the crescent symbol of Yue-Laou—"

"And who the devil is Yue-Laou?" I said crossly.

"Yue-Laou, the Moon Maker, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin. It's Chinese mythology, but it is believed that Yue-Laou has returned to rule the Kuen-Yuin."

"The conversation," interrupted Pierpont, "smacks of peacocks' feathers and yellow jackets. The chicken-pox has left its card on Roy, and Barris is guying us. Come on, you fellows, and make your call on the dream-lady. Barris, I hear galloping. Here come your men!"

Two mud-splashed riders clattered up to the porch and dismounted at a motion from Barris. I noticed that both of them carried repeating rifles and heavy Colt's revolvers.

They followed Barris deferentially into the dining-room, and presently we heard the tinkle of plates and bottles and the low hum of Barris's musical voice.

Half-an-hour later they came out again, saluted Pierpont and me, and galloped away in the direction of the Canadian frontier. Ten minutes passed, and, as Barris did not appear, we rose and went into the house to find him. He was sitting silently before the table, watching the small golden globe, now glowing with scarlet and orange fire, brilliant as a live coal. Howlett, mouth ajar and eyes starting from the sockets, stood petrified behind him.

"Are you coming?" asked Pierpont, a little startled. Barris did not answer. The globe slowly turned to pale gold again, but the face that Barris raised to ours was white as a sheet. Then he stood up and smiled with an effort that was painful to us all.

"Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," he said.

Howlett brought it. Barris went to the window and wrote rapidly. He folded the paper, placed it in the top drawer of his desk, locked the drawer, handed me the key, and motioned us to precede him.

When again we stood under the maples, he turned to me with an impenetrable expression.

"You will know when to use the key," he said. "Come, Pierpont, we must try to find Roy's fountain."

VI.

At two o'clock that afternoon, at Barris's suggestion, we gave up the search for the fountain in the glade and cut across the

forest to the spinney, where David and Howlett were waiting with our guns and the three dogs.

Pierpont guyed me unmercifully about the "dream-lady," as he called her, and but for the significant coincidence of Ysonde's and Barris's questions concerning the white scar on my forehead, I should long ago have been perfectly persuaded that I had dreamed the whole thing. As it was, I had no explanation to offer. We had not been able to find the glade, although fifty times I came to landmarks which convinced me that we were just about to enter it. Barris was quiet, scarcely uttering a word to either of us during the entire search. I had never before seen him depressed in spirits. However, when we came in sight of the spinney, where a cold bit of grouse and a bottle of Burgundy awaited each, Barris seemed to recover his habitual good-humour.

"Here's to the dream-lady!" said Pierpont, raising his glass and standing up.

I did not like it. Even if she was only a dream, it irritated me to hear Pierpont's mocking voice. Perhaps Barris understood—I don't know, but he bade Pierpont drink his wine without further noise, and that young man obeyed with a childlike confidence which almost made Barris smile.

"What about the snipe, David?" I asked; "the meadows should be in good condition."

"There is not a snipe on the meadows, Sir," said David solemnly.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Barris, "they can't have left."

"They have, Sir," said David in a sepulchral voice which I hardly recognised.

We all three looked at the old man curiously, waiting for his explanation of this disappointing but sensational report.

David looked at Howlett and Howlett examined the sky.

"I was going," began the old man, with his eyes fastened on Howlett, "I was going along by the spinney with the dogs when I heard a noise in the covert and I seen Howlett come walkin' very fast toward me. In fact," continued David, "I may say he was runnin'. Was you runnin', Howlett?"

Howlett said "Yes," with a decorous cough.

"I beg pardon," said David, "but I'd rather Howlett told the rest. He saw things which I did not."

"Go on, Howlett," commanded Pierpont, much interested.

Howlett coughed again behind his large red hand.

"What David says is true, Sir," he began. "I observed the dogs at a distance 'ow they was a-workin', Sir, and David stood a-lightin' of 's pipe be'ind the spotted beech, when I see a 'ead pop up in the covert 'oldin' a stick like 'e was haimin' at the dogs, Sir—"

"A head holding a stick?" said Pierpont severely.

"The 'ead 'ad 'ands, Sir," explained Howlett, "'ands that 'eld a painted stick—like that, Sir. 'Owlett, thinks I to meself, this 'ere's queer, so I jumps in and runs, but the beggar 'e seen me, an' w'en I comes alongside of David 'e was gone. 'Ello, 'Owlett,' sez David, 'what the 'ell—I beg pardon, Sir,—'ow did you come 'ere,' sez 'e very loud. 'Run,' sez I, 'the Chinaman is harryin' the dawgs!' 'For Gawd's sake, wot Chinaman?' sez David, haimin' 'is gun at every bush. Then I thinks I see 'm, an' we run an' run, the dawgs a-boundin' close to heel, Sir; but we don't see no Chinaman."

"I'll tell the rest," said David, as Howlett coughed and stepped in a modest corner behind the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in a strange voice.

"Well, Sir, when Howlett and I stopped chasin' we were on the cliff overlooking the south meadow. I noticed that there was hundreds of birds there, mostly yellow-legs and plover, and Howlett seen them too. Then before I could say a word to Howlett, something out in the lake gave a splash—a splash as if the whole cliff had fallen into the water. I was that scared that I jumped straight into the bush, and Howlett, he sat down quick, and all those snipe wheeled up—there was hundreds—all a-squealin' with fright, and the wood-duck came bowlin' over the meadows as if the Old Nick was behind."

David paused and glanced meditatively at the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris, in the same strained voice.

"Nothing more, Sir. The snipe did not come back."

"But that splash in the lake?"

"I don't know what it was, Sir."

"A salmon? A salmon wouldn't have frightened the duck and the snipe that way!"

"No—oh, no, Sir. If fifty salmon had jumped they couldn't have made that splash. Could they, Howlett?"

"No 'ow," said Howlett.

"Roy," said Barris at length, "what David tells us settles the snipe-shooting

for to-day. I am going to take Pierpont up to the house. Howlett and David will follow with the dogs; I have something to say to them. If you care to come, come along; if not, go and shoot a brace of grouse for dinner, and be back by eight if you want to see what Pierpont and I discovered last night."

David whistled Gamin and Mioche to heel and followed Howlett and his hamper toward the house. I called Voyou to my side, picked up my gun and turned to Barris.

"I will be back by eight," I said; "you are expecting to catch one of the gold-makers, are you not?"

"Yes," said Barris listlessly.

Pierpont began to speak about the Chinaman; but Barris motioned him to follow, and, nodding to me, took the path that Howlett and David had followed toward the house. When they disappeared I tucked my gun under my arm and turned sharply into the forest, Voyou trotting close to my heels.

In spite of myself the continued apparition of the Chinaman made me nervous. If he troubled me again I had fully decided to get the drop on him and find out what he was doing in the Cardinal Woods. If he could give no satisfactory account of himself I would march him in to Barris as a gold-making suspect—I would march him in anyway, I thought, and rid the forest of his ugly face. I wondered what it was that David had heard in the lake. It must have been a big fish, a salmon, I thought; probably David's and Howlett's nerves were overwrought after their Celestial chase.

A whine from the dog broke the thread of my meditation, and I raised my head. Then I stopped short in my tracks.

The lost glade lay straight before me.

Already the dog had bounded into it across the velvet turf to the carved stone, where a slim figure sat. I saw my dog lay his silky head lovingly against her silken kirtle, I saw her face bend above him, and I caught my breath and slowly entered the sunlit glade.

Half timidly she held out one white hand.

"Now that you have come," she said, "I can show you more of my work. I told you that I could do other things besides these dragon-flies and moths carved here in stone. Why do you stare at me so? Are you ill?"

"Ysonde," I stammered,

"Yes," she said, with a faint colour under her eyes.

"I—I never expected to see you again," I blurted out; "you—I—I—thought I had dreamed—"

"Dreamed—of me? Perhaps you did. Is that strange?"

"Strange? N—no, but—where did you go when—when we were leaning over the fountain together? I saw your face—your face reflected beside mine, and then—then suddenly I saw the blue sky and only a star twinkling."

"It was because you fell asleep," she said, "was it not?"

"I—asleep?"

"You slept—I thought you were very tired, and I went back—"

"Back!—where?"

"Back to my home where I carve my beautiful images; see, here is one I brought to show you to-day."

I took the sculptured creature that she held toward me, a massive golden lizard with frail claw-spread wings of gold so thin that the sunlight burned through and fell on the ground in flaming gilded patches.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "this is astounding! Where did you learn to do such work? Ysonde, such a thing is beyond price!"

"Oh, I hope so," she said earnestly, "I can't bear to sell my work, but my step-father takes it and sends it away. This is the second thing I have done, and yesterday he said I must give it to him. I suppose he is poor."

"I don't see how he can be poor if he gives you gold to model in," I said, astonished.

"Gold!" she exclaimed, "gold! he has a room full of gold! He makes it."

I sat down on the turf at her feet, completely unnerved.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, a little troubled.

"Where does your step-father live?" I said at last.

"Here."

"Here!"

"In the woods near the lake. You could never find our house."

"A house!"

"Of course. Do you think I lived in a tree? How silly! I live with my step-father in a beautiful house—a small house, but very beautiful. He makes his gold there, but the men who carry it away never come to the house, for they don't know where it is, and if they did they could not get in. My step-father carries the gold in lumps to a canvas satchel. When the satchel is full he takes it out into the

woods where the men live, and I don't know what they do with it. I wish he could sell the gold and become rich, for then I could go back to Yian, where all the gardens are sweet and the river flows under the thousand bridges."

"Where is this city?" I asked faintly.

"Yian? I don't know. It is sweet with perfume and the sound of silver bells all day long. Yesterday I carried a blossom of dried lotus buds from Yian in my breast, and all the woods were fragrant. Did you smell it?"

"Yes."

"I wondered last night whether you did. How beautiful your dog is! I love him. Yesterday I thought most about your dog, but last—"

"Last night," I repeated below my breath.

"I thought of you. Why do you wear the dragon-claw?"

I raised my hand impulsively to my forehead, covering the scar.

"What do you know of the dragon-claw?" I muttered.

"It is the symbol of Yue-Laou, and Yue-Laou rules the Kuen-Yuin, my step-father says. My step-father tells me everything that I know. We lived in Yian until I was sixteen years old. I am eighteen now; that is two years we have lived in the forest. Look! see those scarlet birds! what are they? There are birds of the same colour in Yian."

"Where is Yian, Ysonde?" I asked with deadly calmness.

"Yian? I don't know."

"But you have lived there?"

"Yes, a very long time."

"Is it across the ocean, Ysonde?"

"It is across seven oceans and the great river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"Who told you that?"

"Who? My step-father; he tells me everything."

"Will you tell me his name, Ysonde?"

"I don't know it; he's my step-father: that is all."

"And what is your name?"

"You know it—Ysonde."

"Yes, but what other name?"

"That is all—Ysonde. Have you two names? Why do you look at me so impatiently?"

"Does your step-father make gold? Have you seen him make it?"

"Oh, yes. He made it also in Yian, and I loved to watch the sparks at night whirling like golden bees. Yian is lovely if it is all like our garden and the gardens

around. I can see the thousand bridges from my garden and the white mountain beyond—"

"And the people—tell me of the people, Ysonde!" I urged gently.

"The people of Yian? I could see them in swarms like ants—oh! many, many millions crossing and recrossing the thousand bridges."

"But how did they look? Did they dress as I do?"

"I don't know. They were very far away, moving specks on the thousand bridges. For sixteen years I saw them every day from my garden, but I never went out of my garden into the streets of Yian, for my stepfather forbade me."

"You never saw a living creature near by in Yian?" I asked in despair.

"My birds; oh! such tall, wise-looking birds, all over grey and rose colour."

She leaned over the gleaming water and drew her polished hand across the surface.

"Why do you ask me these questions?" she murmured. "Are you displeased?"

"Tell me about your step-father," I insisted. "Does he look as I do? Does he dress, does he speak, as I do? Is he American?"

"American? I don't know. He does not dress as you do, and he does not look as you do. He is old—very, very old. He speaks sometimes as you do, sometimes as they do in Yian. I speak also in both manners."

"Then speak as they do in Yian," I urged impatiently; "speak as—Why, Ysonde, why are you crying? Have I hurt you? I did not intend—I did not dream of your caring—there, Ysonde, forgive me! See, I beg you on my knees here at your feet."

I stopped, my eyes fastened on a small golden ball which hung from her waist by a golden chain. I saw it trembling against her thigh; I saw it change colour, now crimson, now purple, now flaming scarlet. It was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

She bent over me and laid her fingers gently on my arm.

"Why do you ask me such things?" she said, while the tears glistened on her lashes. "It hurts me here"—she pressed her hand to her breast—"it pains; I don't know why. Ah! now your eyes are hard and cold again. You are looking at the golden globe which hangs from my waist. Do you wish to know also what that is?"

"Yes," I muttered, my eyes fixed on the infernal colour flames which subsided as I spoke, leaving the ball a pale gilt again.

"It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," she said in a trembling voice. "Why do you ask?"

"Is it yours?"

"Y—yes."

"Where did you get it?" I cried harshly.

"My—my step-fa——"

Then she pushed me away from her with all the strength of her slender wrists, and covered her face.

If I slipped my arm about her and drew her to me, if I kissed away the tears that fell slowly between her fingers—if I told her how I loved her, how it cut me to the heart to see her unhappy—after all, that is my own business. When she smiled through her tears, the pure love and sweetness in her eyes lifted my soul higher than the high moon vaguely glimmering through the sunlit blue above. My happiness was so sudden, so fierce and overwhelming, that I only knelt there, her fingers clasped in mine, my eyes raised to the blue vault and the glimmering moon. Then something in the long grass beside me moved close to my knees and a damp acrid odour filled my nostrils.

"Ysonde!" I cried; but the touch of her hand was already gone, and my two clenched fists were cold and damp with dew.

"Ysonde!" I called again, my tongue stiff with fright; but I called as one awaking from a dream—a horrid dream, for my nostrils quivered with the damp acrid odour, and I felt the crab-reptile clinging to my knee. Why had the night fallen so swiftly—and where was I—where?—stiff, chilled, torn, and bleeding, lying flung like a corpse over my own threshold, with Voyou licking my face and Barris stooping above me in the light of a lamp that flared and smoked in the night breeze like a torch. Faugh! the choking stench of the lamp aroused me and I cried out—

"Ysonde!"

"What the devil's the matter with him?" muttered Pierpont, lifting me in his arms like a child; "has he been stabbed, Barris?"

VII.

In a few minutes I was able to stand and walk stiffly into my bed-room, where Howlett had a hot bath ready and a hotter tumbler of Scotch. Pierpont sponged the blood from my throat, where it had coagulated. The cut was slight, almost invisible, a mere puncture from a thorn.

A shampoo cleared my mind, and a cold plunge and alcohol friction did the rest.

"Now," said Pierpont, "swallow your hot Scotch, and lie down. Do you want a broiled woodcock? Good, I fancy you are coming about."

Barris and Pierpont watched me as I sat on the edge of the bed, solemnly chewing on the woodcock's wishbone and sipping my Bordeaux, very much at my ease.

Pierpont sighed his relief.

"So," he said pleasantly, "it was a mere case of ten dollars or ten days. I thought you had been stabbed——"

"I was not intoxicated," I replied, serenely picking up a bit of celery.

"Only jagged?" inquired Pierpont, full of sympathy.

"Nonsense," said Barris; "let him alone. Want some more celery, Roy? It will make you sleep."

"I don't want to sleep," I answered; "when are you and Pierpont going to catch your Goldmaker?"

Barris looked at his watch and closed it with a snap.

"In an hour; you don't propose to go with us?"

"But I do; toss me a cup of coffee, Pierpont, will you; that's just what I propose to do. Howlett, bring the new box of Panatellas—the mild imported—and leave the decanter. Now, Barris, I'll be dressing, and you and Pierpont keep still and listen to what I have to say. Is that door shut tight?"

Barris locked it and sat down.

"Thanks," said I; "Barris, where is the city of Yian?"

An expression akin to terror flashed into Barris's eyes, and I saw him stop breathing for a moment.

"There is no such city," he said at length; "have I been talking in my sleep?"

"It is a city," I continued calmly, "where the river winds under the thousand bridges, where the gardens are sweet-scented and the air is filled with the music of silver bells——"

"Stop!" gasped Barris, and rose trembling from his chair. He had grown ten years older.

"Roy," interposed Pierpont coolly, "what the deuce are you harrying Barris for?"

I looked at Barris and he looked at me. After a second or two he sat down again.

"Go on, Roy," he said.

"I must," I answered; "for now I am certain that I have not dreamed."

I told them everything ; but, even as I told it, the whole thing seemed so vague, so unreal, that at times I stopped with the hot blood tingling in my ears, for it seemed impossible that sensible men, in the year of our Lord 1896, could seriously discuss such matters.

I feared Pierpont, but he did not even smile. As for Barris, he sat with his handsome head sunk on his breast, his unlighted pipe clasped tight in both hands.

When I had finished, Pierpont turned slowly and looked at Barris. Twice he moved his lips as if about to ask something, and then remained mute.

"Yian is a city," said Barris, speaking dreamily. "Was that what you wished to know, Pierpont ?"

We nodded silently.

"Yian is a city," repeated Barris, "where the great river winds under the thousand bridges, where the gardens are sweet-scented and the air is filled with the music of silver bells."

"My lips formed the question, "Where is this city ?"

"It lies," said Barris, almost querulously, "across the seven oceans and the river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"What do you mean ?" said Pierpont.

"Ah," said Barris, rousing himself with an effort and raising his sunken eyes, "I am using the allegories of another land ; let it pass. Have I not told you of the Kuen-Yuin ? Yian is the centre of the Kuen-Yuin. It lies hidden in that gigantic shadow called China, vague and vast as the midnight heavens—a continent unknown, impenetrable."

"Impenetrable," repeated Pierpont below his breath.

"I have seen it," said Barris dreamily. "I have seen the dead plains of Black Cathay, and I have crossed the mountains of Death, whose summits are above the atmosphere. I have seen the shadow of Xangi cast across Abaddon. Better to die a million miles from Yezd and Ater Quedah than to have seen the white water lotus close in the shadow of Xangi ! I have slept among the ruins of Xaindu where the winds never cease and the Wulwulleh is wailed by the dead."

"And Yian," I urged gently.

There was an unearthly look on his face as he turned slowly toward me.

"Yian—I have lived there—and loved there. When the breath of my body shall cease, when the dragon's claw shall fade from my arm"—he tore up his sleeve, and

we saw a white crescent shining above his elbow—"when the light of my eyes has faded for ever, then, even then, I shall not forget the city of Yian. Why, it is my home—mine ! The river and the thousand bridges, the white peak beyond, the sweet-scented gardens, the lilies, the pleasant noise of the summer wind laden with bee-music and the music of bells—all these are mine. Do you think because the Kuen-Yuin feared the dragon's claw on my arm that my work with them is ended ? Do you think that because Yue-Laou could give, that I acknowledge his right to take away ? Is he Xangi, in whose shadow the white water-lotus dares not raise its head ? No, no !" he cried violently ; "it was not from Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, the Maker of Moons, that my happiness came. It was real ; it was not a shadow to vanish like a tinted bubble. Can a sorcerer create and give a man the woman he loves ? Is Yue-Laou as great as Xangi then ? Xangi is God. In His own time, in His infinite goodness and mercy, He will bring me again to the woman I love. And I know she waits for me at God's feet."

In the strained silence that followed, I could hear my heart's double beat, and I saw Pierpont's face blanched and pitiful. Barris shook himself and raised his head. The change in his ruddy face frightened me.

"Heed !" he said, with a terrible glance at me ; "the print of the dragon's claw is on your forehead, and Yue-Laou knows it. If you must love, then love like a man, for you will suffer like a soul in hell in the end. What is her name again ?"

"Ysonde," I answered simply.

VIII.

At nine o'clock that night we caught one of the Goldmakers. I do not know how Barris had laid his trap ; all I saw of the affair can be told in a minute or two.

We were posted on the Cardinal road about a mile below the house, Pierpont and I with drawn revolvers on one side, under a butternut-tree, Barris on the other, a Winchester rifle across his knees.

I had just asked Pierpont the hour, and he was feeling for his watch, when far up the road we heard the sound of a galloping horse, nearer, nearer, clattering, thundering past. Then Barris's rifle spat flame, and the dark mass, horse and rider, crashed into the dust. Pierpont had the half-stunned horseman by the collar in a second—the horse was stone dead—and,

as we lighted a pine knot to examine the fellow, Barris's two riders galloped up and drew bridle beside us.

"Hm!" said Barris with a scowl, "it's the Shiner, or I'm a moonshiner."

We crowded curiously around to see the "Shiner." He was red-headed, fat, and filthy, and his little red eyes burned in his head like the eyes of an angry pig.

Barris went through his pockets methodically while Pierpont held him and I held the torch. The Shiner was a gold mine; pockets, shirt, bootlegs, hat, even his dirty fists, clutched tight and bleeding, were bursting with lumps of soft yellow gold. Barris dropped this "moonshine gold," as we had come to call it, into the pockets of his shooting-coat, and withdrew to question the prisoner. He came back again in a few minutes and motioned his mounted men to take the Shiner in charge. We watched them, rifle on thigh, walking their horses slowly away into the darkness, the Shiner, tightly bound, shuffling sullenly between them.

"Who is the Shiner?" asked Pierpont, slipping the revolver into his pocket again.

"A moonshiner, counterfeiter, forger, and highwayman," said Barris, "and probably a murderer. Drummond will be glad to see him, and I think it likely he will be persuaded to confess to him what he refuses to confess to me."

"Wouldn't he talk?" I asked.

"Not a syllable. Pierpont, there is nothing more for you to do."

"For me to do? Are you not coming back with us, Barris?"

"No," said Barris.

We walked along the dark road in silence for a while, I wondering what Barris intended to do, but he said nothing more until we reached our own verandah. Here he held out his hand, first to Pierpont, then to me, saying good-bye as though he were going on a long journey.

"How soon will you be back?" I called out to him as he turned away towards the gate. He came across the lawn again and again, took our hands with a quiet affection that I had never imagined him capable of.

"I am going," he said, "to put an end to his gold-making to-night. I know that you fellows have never suspected what I was about on my little solitary evening strolls after dinner. I will tell you. Already I have unobtrusively killed four of these gold-makers, my men put them underground just below the new wash-out at the four-mile stone. There are three left alive—the Shiner, whom we have;

another criminal named 'Yellow' or 'Yaller' in the vernacular, and the third—"

"The third!" repeated Pierpont excitedly.

"The third I have never yet seen. But I know who and what he is—I know; and if he is of human flesh and blood, his blood will flow to-night."

As he spoke a slight noise across the turf attracted my attention. A mounted man was advancing silently in the starlight over the spongy meadowland. When he came nearer, Barris struck a match, and we saw that he bore a corpse across his saddle-bow.

"Yaller, Colonel Barris," said the man, touching his slouched hat in salute.

This grim introduction to the corpse made me shudder, and, after a moment's examination of the stiff, wide-eyed dead man, I drew back.

"Identified!" said Barris. "Take him to the four-mile post, and carry his effects to Washington—under seal, mind, Johnstone."

Away cantered the rider with his ghastly burden, and Barris took our hands once more for the last time. Then he went away gaily, with a jest on his lips, and Pierpont and I turned back into the house.

For an hour we sat moodily smoking in the hall before the fire, saying little until Pierpont burst out with: "I wish Barris had taken one of us with him to-night."

The same thought had been running in my mind, but I said: "Barris knows what he's about."

This observation neither comforted us nor opened the lane to further conversation, and after a few minutes Pierpont said good-night and called for Howlett and hot water. When he had been warmly tucked away by Howlett, I turned out all but one lamp, sent the dogs away with David, and dismissed Howlett for the night.

I was not inclined to retire, for I knew I could not sleep. There was a book lying on the table beside the fire, and I opened it and read a page or two, but my mind was fixed on other things.

The window-shades were raised, and I looked out at the star-set firmament. There was no moon that night, but the sky was dusted all over with sparkling stars, and a pale radiance, brighter even than moonlight, fell over meadow and wood. Far away in the forest I heard the voice of the wind, and a soft warm wind that whispered a name—"Ysonde."

"Listen!" sighed the voice of the wind, and "Listen!" echoed the swaying trees with every little leaf a-quiver. I listened.

Where the long grasses trembled with the crickets' cadence I heard her name—"Ysonde." I heard it in the rustling woodbine where grey moths hovered; I heard it in the drip, drip, drip of the dew from the porch. The silent meadow brook whispered her name, the rippling woodland streams repeated it—"Ysonde, Ysonde"—until all earth and sky were filled with the soft thrill—"Ysonde, Ysonde, Ysonde."

A night-thrush sang in a thicket close by the porch, and I stole to the verandah to listen. After a while it began again a little further on. I ventured out into the road. Again I heard it far away in the forest, and I followed it, for I knew it was singing of Ysonde.

When I came to the path that leaves the main road and enters the Sweet Fern Covert below the spinney, I hesitated; but the beauty of the night lured me on and the night-thrushes called me from every thicket. In the starry radiance shrubs, grasses, field flowers, stood out distinctly, for there was no moon to cast shadows. Meadow and brook, grove and stream, were illuminated by the pale glow. Like great lamps lighted, the planets hung from the high domed sky, and through their mysterious rays the fixed stars, calm, serene, stared from the heavens like eyes.

I waded on waist-deep through fields of dewy golden-rod, through late clover and wild-oat wastes, through crimson-fruited sweetbriar, blueberry, and wild plum, until the low whisper of the Wier Brook warned me that the path had ended.

But I would not stop, for the night air was heavy with the perfume of water-lilies, and far away, across the low wooded cliffs and the wet meadowland beyond, there was a distant gleam of silver, and I heard the murmur of sleepy waterfowl. I would go to the lake. The way was clear except for the dense young growth and the snares of the moose-bush.

The night-thrushes had ceased, but I did not want for the company of living creatures. Slender, quick darting forms crossed my path at intervals, sleek mink, that fled like shadows at my step, wiry weasels and fat musk-rats, hurrying onward to some tryst or killing.

I never had seen so many little woodland creatures on the move at night. I began to wonder where they all were going so fast, why they all hurried on in

the same direction. Now I passed a hare hopping through the brushwood, now a rabbit scurrying by, flag hoisted. As I entered the beech second-growth two foxes glided by me; a little further on a doe crashed out of the underbrush, and close behind her stole a lynx, eyes shining like coals.

He neither paid attention to the doe nor to me, but loped away towards the north.

The lynx was in flight.

"From what?" I asked myself, wondering. There was no forest fire, no cyclone, no flood.

If Barris had passed that way could he have stirred up this sudden exodus? Impossible; even a regiment in the forest could scarcely have put to rout these frightened creatures.

"What on earth," thought I, turning to watch the headlong flight of a fisher-cat, "what on earth has started the beasts out at this time of night?"

I looked up into the sky. The placid glow of the fixed stars comforted me, and I stepped on through the narrow spruce belt that leads down to the borders of the Lake of the Stars.

Wild cranberry and moose-bush entwined my feet, dewy branches spattered me with moisture, and the thick spruce needles scraped my face as I threaded my way over mossy logs and deep spongy tussocks down to the level gravel of the lake shore.

Although there was no wind, the little waves were hurrying in from the lake, and I heard them splashing among the pebbles. In the pale star-glow thousands of water-lilies lifted their half-closed chalices toward the sky.

I threw myself full length upon the shore, and, chin on hand, looked out across the lake.

Splash, splash came the waves along the shore, higher, nearer, until a film of water, thin and glittering as a knife-blade, crept up to my elbows. I could not understand it; the lake was rising, but there had been no rain. All along the shore the water was running up. I heard the waves along the seige-grass; the weeds at my side were awash in the ripples. The lilies rocked on the tiny waves, every wet pad rising on the swells, sinking, rising again, until the whole lake was glimmering with undulating blossoms. How sweet and deep was the fragrance from the lilies! And now the water was ebbing slowly, and the waves receded, shrinking from the shore-rim until the

white pebbles appeared again, shining like froth on a brimming glass.

No animal swimming out in the darkness along the shore, no heavy salmon surging could have set the whole shore afloat as though the wash from a great boat were rolling in. Could it have been the overflow, through the Wier Brook, of some cloud-burst far back in the forest? This was the only way I could account for it, and yet, when I had crossed the Wier Brook, I had not noticed that it was swollen.

And as I lay there thinking, a faint breeze sprang up and I saw the surface of the lake whiten with lifted lily pads.

All around me the alders were sighing; I heard the forest behind me stir; the crossed branches rubbing softly, bark against bark. Something—it may have been an owl—sailed out of the night, dipped, soared, and was again engulfed, and far across the water I heard its faint cry—“Ysonde.”

Then first, for my heart was full, I cast myself down upon my face, calling on her name. My eyes were wet when I raised my head—for the spray from the shore was drifting in again—and my heart beat heavily “No more, no more.” But my heart lied, for even as I raised my face to the calm stars, I saw her standing still, close beside me; and very gently I spoke her name, “Ysonde.” She held out both hands.

“I was lonely,” she said, “and I went to the glade, but the forest is full of frightened creatures and they frightened me. Has anything happened in the woods? The deer are running toward the heights.”

Her hand still lay in mine as we moved along the shore, and the lapping of the water on rock and shallow was no lower than our voices.

“Why did you leave me without a word, there at the fountain in the glade?” she said.

“I leave you—”

“Indeed you did, running swiftly with your dog, plunging through thickets and brush—oh, you frightened me!”

“Did I leave you so?”

“Yes—after—”

“After?”

“You had kissed me—”

Then we leaned down together and looked into the black water set with stars, just as we had bent together over the fountain in the glade.

“Do you remember?” I asked.

“Yes. See, the water is inlaid with

silver stars, everywhere white lilies floating and the stars below, deep, deep down.”

“What is the flower you hold in your hand?”

“White water-lotus.”

“Tell me about Yue-Laou, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin,” I whispered, lifting her head so that I could see her eyes.

“Would it please you to hear?”

“Yes, Ysonde.”

“All that I know is yours, as I am yours, all that I am. Bend closer. Is it of Yue-Laou you would know? Yue-Laou is Dzil-Nbu of Kuen-Yuin. He lived in the Moon. He is old—very, very old; and once, before he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin, he was the old man who unites with a silken cord all pre-destined couples, after which nothing can prevent their union. But all that is changed since he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin. Now he has perverted the Xin—the good genii of China—and has fashioned from their warped bodies a monster which he calls the Xin. This monster is horrible, for it not only lives in its own body, but it has thousands of loathsome satellites—living creatures without mouths, blind, that move when the Xin moves, like a mandarin and his escort. They are part of the Xin, although they are not attached. Yet if one of these satellites is injured, the Xin writhes with agony. It is fearful—this huge living bulk and these creatures spread out like severed fingers that wriggle around a hideous hand.”

“Who told you this?”

“My step-father.”

“Do you believe it?”

“Yes. I have seen one of the Xin’s creatures.”

“Where, Ysonde?”

“Here in these woods.”

“Then you believe there is a Xin here?”

“There must be—perhaps in the lake.”

“Oh! Xins inhabit lakes?”

“Yes, and the seven seas. I am not afraid here.”

“Why?”

“Because I wear the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.”

“Then I am not safe,” I smiled.

“Yes, you are, for I hold you in my arms. Shall I tell you more about the Xin? When the Xin is about to do to death a man the Yeth-hounds gallop through the night—”

“What are the Yeth-hounds, Ysonde?”

“The Yeth-hounds are dogs without heads. They are the spirits of murdered



I STUMBLED TO MY KNEES ; BUT SOMETHING HELD ME—SOMETHING WHICH BOUND ME
LIKE A WEB IN A THOUSAND STRONG SILKY MESHES.

children which pass through the woods at night, making a wailing noise."

"Do you believe this?"

"Yes, for I have worn the yellow lotus—"

"The yellow lotus—"

"Yellow is the symbol of faith—"

"Where?"

"In Yian," she said faintly.

After a while I said—

"Ysonde, you know there is a God?"

"God and Xangi are one."

"Have you ever heard of Christ?"

"No," she answered softly.

The wind began again among the tree-tops. I felt her hands closing in mine.

"Ysonde," I asked again, "do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Yes, the Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers; Yue-Laou is a sorcerer."

"Have you seen sorcery?"

"Yes, the reptile satellite of the Xin—"

"Anything else?"

"My charm—the golden ball, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin. Have you seen it change? Have you seen the reptiles writhe—?"

"Yes," said I shortly, and then remained silent, for a sudden shiver of apprehension had seized me. Barris also had spoken gravely, ominously, of the sorcerers, the Kuen-Yuin, and I had seen with my own eyes the graven reptiles turning and twisting on the glowing globe.

"Still," said I, aloud, "God lives, and sorcery is but a name."

"Ah," murmured Ysonde, drawing closer to me, "they say, in Yian, 'the Kuen-Yuin live; God is but a name.'"

"They lie," I whispered fiercely.

"Be careful," she pleaded, "they may hear you. Remember that you have the mark of the dragon's claw on your brow."

"What of it?" I asked, thinking also of the white mark on Barris's arm.

"Ah, don't you know that those who are marked with the dragon's claw are followed by Yue-Laou, for good or for evil, and the evil means death if you offend him?"

"Do you believe that?" I asked impatiently.

"I know it," she sighed.

"Who told you all this? Your step-father? What in Heaven's name is he then—a Chinaman?"

"I don't know; he is not like you."

"Have—have you told him anything about me?"

"He knows about you—no, I have told him nothing—ah, what is this?—see—it is

a cord, a cord of silk about your neck—and about mine!"

"Where did that come from?" I asked, astonished.

"It must be—it must be Yue-Laou who binds me to you—it is as my step-father said—he said Yue-Laou would bind us—"

"Nonsense!" I said almost roughly, and seized the silken cord; but to my amazement it melted in my hand like smoke.

"What is all this damnable jugglery?" I whispered angrily; but my anger vanished as the words were spoken, and a convulsive shudder shook me to the feet. Standing on the shore of the lake, a stone's-throw away, was a figure, twisted and bent—a little old man, blowing sparks from a live coal which he held in his naked hand. The coal glowed with increasing radiance, lighting up the skull-like face above it, and threw a red glow over the sands at his feet. But the face!—the ghastly Chinese face on which the light flickered—and the snaky slitted eyes, sparkling as the coal glowed hotter. Coal! It was not a coal, but a golden globe staining the night with crimson flames: it was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

"See! See!" gasped Ysonde, trembling violently. "See the moon rising from between his fingers! Oh, I thought it was my step-father, and it is Yue-Laou, the Maker of Moons—no! no! it is my step-father—ah, God! they are the same!"

Frozen with terror, I stumbled to my knees, groping for my revolver which bulged in my coat pocket; but something held me—something which bound me like a web in a thousand strong, silky meshes. I struggled and turned, but the web grew tighter; it was over us—all around us, drawing, pressing us into each other's arms until we lay side by side, bound hand and body and foot, palpitating, panting like a pair of netted pigeons.

And the creature on the shore below! What was my horror to see a moon, huge, silvery, rise like a bubble from between his fingers, mount higher, higher into the still air and hang aloft in the midnight sky, while another moon rose from his fingers, and another and yet another, until the vast span of heaven was set with moons and the earth sparkled like a diamond in the white glare.

A great wind began to blow from the east, and it bore to our ears a long, mournful howl—a cry so unearthly that for a moment our hearts stopped.

"The Yeth-hounds!" sobbed Ysonde. "Do you hear! they are passing through the forest! The Xin is near!"

Then all around us in the dry sedge grasses came a rustle as if some small animals were creeping, and a damp acrid odour filled the air. I knew the smell, I saw the spidery, crab-like creatures swarm out around me and drag their soft, yellow, hairy bodies across the shrinking grasses. They passed, hundreds of them, poisoning the air, tumbling, writhing, crawling with their blind, mouthless heads raised. Birds, half asleep and confused by the darkness, fluttered away before them in helpless fright, rabbits sprung from their forms, weasels glided away like flying shadows. What remained of the forest creatures rose and fled from the loathsome invasion; I heard the squeak of a terrified hare, the snort of stampeding deer, and the lumbering gallop of a bear; and all the time I was choking, half suffocated by the poisoned air.

Then, as I struggled to free myself from the silken snare about me, I cast a glance of deadly fear at the sorcerer below, and at the same moment I saw him turn in his tracks.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes.

"Barris!" I shouted, half leaping up in my agony.

I saw the sorcerer spring forward, I heard the bang! bang! bang! of a revolver, and, as the sorcerer fell on the water's edge, I saw Barris jump out into the white glare and fire again, once, twice, three times, into the writhing figure at his feet.

Then an awful thing occurred. Up out of the black lake reared a shadow, a nameless, shapeless mass, headless, sightless, gigantic, gaping from end to end.

A great wave struck Barris and he fell, another washed him up on the pebbles, another whirled him back into the water, and then—and then the thing fell over him—and I fainted.

* * * * *

This, then, is all that I know concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin. I do not fear the ridicule of scientists or of the Press, for I have told the truth. Barris is gone, and the thing that killed him is alive to-day in the Lake of the Stars, while the spider-like satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods. The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles that creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

General Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written—

Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him, or he will kill me. He made and gave me to the woman I loved. He made her—I saw him—he made her out of a white water-lotus bud. When our child was born he came again before me, and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysonde, may be my child. God help you if you love her, for Yue-Laou will give and take away, as though he were Xangi, which is God. I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest, or he will kill me.

FRANKLYN BARRIS.

Now the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung-Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting-box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first Government party to drag the Lake of the Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assembles, and a well-armed force, for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysonde and myself lying unconscious on the lake-shore the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear and Ysonde fears that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling-place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the gold serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes colour.

David and the dogs are waiting for me in the courtyard as I write. Pierpont is in the gun-room loading shells, and Howlett brings him mug after mug of my ale from the wood. Ysonde bends over my desk—I feel her hand on my arm, and she is saying: "Don't you think you have done enough to-day, dear? How can you write such silly nonsense, without a shadow of truth or foundation?"