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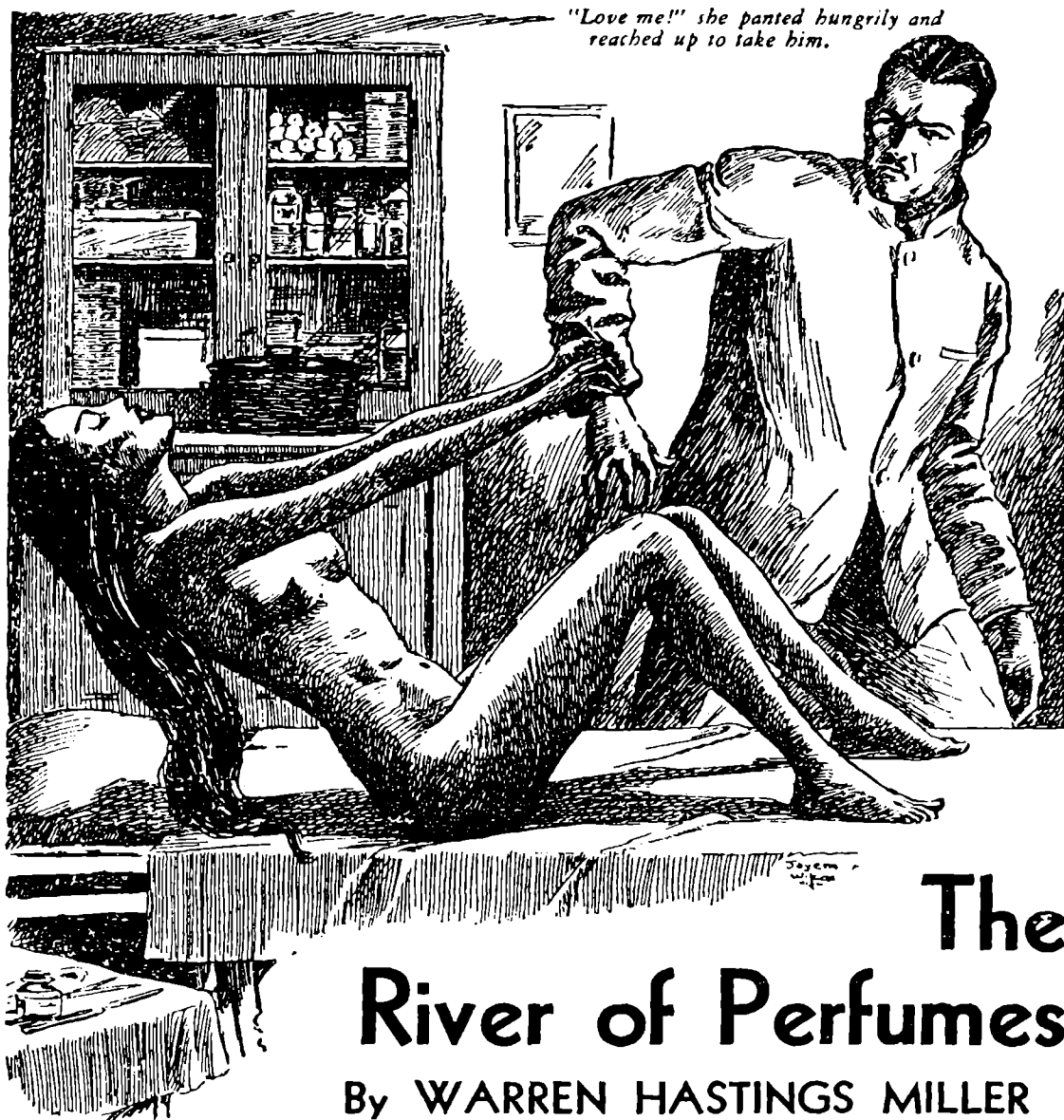
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The River of Perfumes

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

She drove men to madness by her sheer beauty, this little maid of Indo-China—an Oriental tale of love, lust, and sudden death, and a wild adventure

A FAIRY temple of pearl and rose seemed to be floating toward him on the dark waters of the River of Perfumes. Doctor Barrett rose in haste and clapped his hands for his house-boys. The temple undulated and swayed somewhat under the oar-strokes of the pirogue that floated it. It was fringed with translucent globes of color from its paper

lanterns; it was lit within, so that its silken walls radiated a luminous pearly-white glow. Coming through the scented night, over a black mirror of waters that was all reflected color from the lights of the Emperor's palace downstream, it thrilled Barrett.

"God! It takes Indo-China to stage a scene like this!" he exclaimed.

He spoke sharply to Number One: "My instruments, Song Ha. Serum. Alcohol. Bandages. You go chop-chop. Court lady coming."

He thought it another cobra case. The Emperor's gardens were extensive along the River of Perfumes. Cobras got in. There would be a tiny pin-prick on a soft ankle and then one of the beauties of his numerous harem would presently feel numb and faint. Her abundant vitality would sicken and pale; within half an hour she died.

It was that embarrassment that had caused the Emperor Bao Dai, on his return from his studies in France and investiture on the throne, to summon Doctor Barrett from Siam. Jim Barrett, of Georgia, U. S. A., was young, exceedingly handsome in the dark Southern type, and courageous. He had to be, for he was a graduate of that school of courage, the famous Snake Institute of Bangkok. The work there, carried on with death peering over one's shoulder at every step, had resulted in a serum effective against cobra bite. Its saving beneficence had spread all over the East as various progressive rulers heard of it. The men trained there were much in demand; hence Barrett's job as palace specialist here in Hué.

He stood on the wharf ready for immediate action as the float neared. His boys were lighting the lane of paper lanterns that led up to his Annamese house of stucco and brick. The victim would be carried in and the serum administered. It was astonishing to watch the arrest of that paralysis, the slow return of rose-ivory color to the girl's round cheeks, her rosebud lips. Many a raving beauty Barrett had so watched return to this world. They were pretty, these Indo-China girls. He would readily concede to Mrs. Sun Yat Sen, in her youth, the honor of being

the prettiest woman of any race, but these palace beauties ran her a close second. They were the pick of all the Five Provinces of Indo-China.

The results of that restoration to life had been embarrassing to him—at first. A rush back of amazing vitality, a surge of overwhelming passion—directed at the first male in sight, the handsome white doctor—the clasping him to her, as the starfish enfolds the mollusk. . . . He had resisted them—at first; then realized that it was part of his reward. It was all the girl had to give.

But no eunuchs bore any case for Doctor Barrett when the floating fairy temple arrived. Instead, Prince Tou Dac, one of the numerous brothers of the Emperor, stepped out on the wharf, alone. He kotowed with ceremony and shook hands with himself under the long blue silk sleeves of his mandarin robes. The red jade button on his black cap proclaimed his rank of Prince Imperial.

THE doctor saw that this visit had nothing to do with professional services and set himself to the honorifics due to Prince Tou Dac's rank. Tea was brought, as they seated themselves in the reception room. The Prince glanced around the room with loud smacks of appreciation of the doctor's honorable tea. He admired its carved teak, its cloisonné, its ceramics, its luxuriant embroideries in vast hangings of color. He beat about the subjects of the weather, Annamese politics, the state of the doctor's health, for some time, and then finally asked:

"The serum for cobra bite; does it cure as well with all snakes, Honorable Doctor?"

Barrett grunted non-committally. He was not giving that secret away! As a matter of fact, the serum had no effect against the Russell's viper, nor the cro-

talid asp venom, but there was no sense in publishing that fact. Such failures were excused on the score of being brought in too late.

Tou Dac took his grunt for an affirmative. "My people do not like all these changes, Honorable Foreign-devil," he said next.

That change of title from doctor to foreign-devil was subtle. So was "*my* people." Barrett eyed him fixedly. He did not like Tou Dac. The Emperor always dressed in the latest style from Saigon when he had any business in hand with Europeans; Tou Dac clung to his mandarin robes. He was a reactionary, and also older than Emperor Bao Dai. He had plenty of claims to the throne that were private grievances, ignored, however, by the French Protectorate.

"Look here, Your Highness," Barrett said, nettled, "there's no use in grousing over changes; they're bound to come. You remember the rebellion of 1916, when the French had their hands full at home? That failed utterly, didn't it? Not a chance in the world now!"

Tou Dac nodded. A gleam of desperation lurked in his eyes. He seemed like a leopard pacing the bars of its cage and no way out. Finally he broke out with: "She is the most beautiful girl in all the world, Doctor! Men are driven mad with the bare sight of her. I, even I, who have loved so many. . . . Perhaps, with your knowledge, you can help me. If so . . . any reward you care to name. . . . *Aiee*, little Nanya Chan! I am on fire! I have not slept for nights! But she is for the . . . the house-boy of M'sieur Saint."

His lips curled with bitter scorn over that description of the Emperor as the head-servant of the French Resident-General. He would lose his head for that remark if it were even repeated in a whis-

per about the palace. But an Annamese smitten by love parted with all his caution, his loyalty, his shrewdness, his honor. Barrett knew them. He knew the girls, too; their passion was wild, abandoned, insatiable. They were but traps of flesh, clamping tight with arms and heels the man caught in their toils. He said:

"Truly, love is a fever in the young, and even the aged are not exempt, Prince. But this girl; if she is for the Emperor, you had best go on an expedition somewhere and forget her. She'll fade. There are lovely ones also up in Tonkin."

"*La!* I want her *now!*" Tou Dac was beside himself. "I spoke to you about the snakes, hoping that there might be an—er—accident to the Emperor, and I would reign. But you say you can cure any snake-bite? *Howagh!* And little hope in a revolution, by which I might be put on the throne. . . . Remains—*you.*"

He was frankly revealing his mind. Extraordinary, in a subtle and reserved native prince! She must be a remarkable girl, this Nanya Chan, Barrett thought. And he had no intention of being used in her abduction. It was dangerous to offend Tou Dac, but—

"Suppose she happens to be bitten while walking in the gardens," Tou Dac mused, out loud. "She will be brought here in haste. And then, after her cure—" His eyes gleamed. He could see his kidnapping sampan swooping down on the floating temple with the girl convalescent in its fairy shrine; himself flying with her into wild Laos. He was desperate enough for that.

"Good Lord!" Barrett protested. "You aren't going to do anything so foolish as that, Prince! You are Minister of the Interior here, aren't you? You have vast provinces of Annam to look after. You have your share of this government, your

part to take off the Emperor's shoulders——"

"*Hoo!*" Tou Dac broke in. "We are all but puppets. We gabble and we koto and we deliberate—and the French do what they please. Decrees are put before us to sign. We sign. . . . They are poison to me, those decrees! I know what is good for my people. I sign with tears, with rage. The French mean well, but they know not what they do. *Ho-agh!* Gladly I give up all that farce for nights of love with *her!* O Pearl!—O Beauty!—O thou ruby treasure, Nanya Chan!"

He was quite mad. "Nevertheless I wash my hands of it, I warn you," Barrett told him sternly. "Go away and forget her. You won't have a chance in Laos with the French hunting you down. . . . Sorry, Prince; I would be a bad friend to you if I assisted in this idiotic scheme in any way."

"You can't help yourself, Doctor!" Tou Dac exulted. "A Hindoo snake-charmer that I know will manage it. He will cause her to be bitten and you will cure her. She will be brought over here. The rest is for me. . . . No; I've thought the way out, at last, after groping for three nights!"

The doctor shrugged; then eyed him defiantly. "A little word from me to the Emperor. . . . Mind, I wouldn't give you away, except that I am convinced that you've lost your reason temporarily."

Tou Dac nodded courteously, conceding the point. "I am desolated, Honorable Physician," he said silkily. "But you shall *not leave this house tonight!* Nor any of your house-boys. It would be . . . unhealthy."

His eyes glittered through the spectacles. Barrett shrugged his shoulders. He would see about that! Tou Dac commenced the honorifics of bowing himself out. Barrett could see that he was set on

this kidnapping, having found a workable plan. He kotoed back, with more cordiality and real feeling than when Tou Dac had come here as a reactionary prince in the doctor's regard, disliked and feared by the white colony as hostile to all modern progress in Indo-China. After all, there was a deal to be said for his side of it. . . .

And this infatuation, for which he would gladly throw away a kingdom for love, commanded a man's sympathy. Barrett approved—except for Tou Dac's age. It was difficult to guess that age beyond the evidence of those hard and seamed features, but he could not be less than fifty. The girl would not be over sixteen; Barrett had the physician's natural repugnance for such a mismatching of ages as that. Give her a man near her own age to love. . . .

He sat smoking over it after Tou Dac had gone. What should he do? He had been forced into his part in this abduction; there was no escaping that. He could not let the girl die. As a trusted white retainer of the Emperor's, it was also his duty to let him know about an affair like this and let him take his own steps. His higher duty to Tou Dac was furthermore to save him from himself, from this folly. But—"Bab!" Barrett exclaimed impatiently over that smug Puritan meddling. "Who am I to say what's good for him? Let him have her. I'll get a knife in my ribs for my pains if I meddle in this. She must be some beauty!"

SHE was. Tou Dac moved fast. Within two hours Barrett saw a commotion down at the water-gate of the palace along the River of Perfumes. Paper lanterns bobbed agitatedly. An illuminated orchid, in rose-violet and pale yellow, came floating swiftly upstream. An enor-

mous orchid of silk on a sampan it was, with its purple tongue curving over from astern as a sunshade and canopy. The swift thumps of its oar betokened haste.

Barrett called his boys and hastened down to the wharf. The Annamese rower jumped out and cast a turn of rope around a cleat. Within the orchid, the heart of the lotus, was a couch in a riot of silken pillows, and on it lay a glittering little court beauty. She scarcely breathed. Her eyes were closed, and the pallor of death had driven all the rose from her cheeks. Barrett gasped at the sheer beauty of her; then signed to his men to carry her in haste. The sampan man squatted for a long wait.

On the operating-table the hospital boys were quickly divesting her of her blaze of embroidery encrusted with jewels, then her filmy under-silks. Their sponges began bathing her with the powerful alcohol. Barrett gasped again. Never had he seen a more perfect woman's form. She was made for love. Her intense glossy blue-black hair was brushed back tight from a round and smooth forehead, giving an aspect of innocence and girlishness. The nose was piquant, saucy. Her mouth was a red flower, in which one would bury one's lips as in a rose. And her eyes . . . they now drooped, closed, under downy lashes of black and were arched over with thin pencil-bows of black brows, but they would be opals of brown and red fire when they opened.

"Oh, you little beauty!" Barrett breathed hard in a tumult of emotions. He sought for and found, just under her knee above the shapely turn of her calf, the two red pin-pricks of the cobra. He made two sharp incisions that welled blood; then he sucked it and the venom out, spat it away. It was only preliminary, that draining of the reservoir; the venom was already all through her blood, para-

lyzing all nerves as it went. Barrett drove in the sharp hypodermic needle above the wound and pressed steadily on the serum plunger. A second hypodermic, applied under the curve of her left breast to protect the heart. A third, injected in the smooth curve of her right thigh where it swept into the slender sweep of her waist. Then he stood and waited.

Slowly, miraculously, her quick, tight respiration lengthened. The paralyzed muscles relaxed. A faint glow of rose color appeared in her palms, her breasts, her feet. The pale ivory skin took on richness, the soft glow of health.

"Enough with the alcohol," he said.

They wrung out the sponges, gathered up basins, and left. Barrett braced himself for the recovery. . . .

SHE was charming. They all were charming, in a physical way; but it took charm plus intelligence to enchant an educated white man. Her eyes alone could tell him if there was intelligence. They were mainly little pretty animals, without the ghost of a thought beyond finery, the seduction of men, the delights of food. Barrett could easily understand that this girl would set all men mad with her perfections, so far as they went. Good enough for Orientals; they did not demand anything more. . . . He wondered if this one would act differently. . . . No; she hadn't a chance with what he was about to give her.

Her eyelids fluttered. Barrett had ready a beaker of a strong vital solution that flooded all over the more important organs, whipping them into an intense activity and setting the heart to pounding furiously so as to restore circulation. Gently he parted her flower lips and made her swallow the dose.

She stirred, presently, moved her whole body slightly to a more comfortable position. Then her eyes opened. They stud-

ied him a moment. They were rich with intelligence, humor, keenness. A pretty wrinkle of puzzlement appeared on her brow. Then they changed swiftly to the glowing fires of passion. Her arms opened to receive him.

"Love me, O man!—Love me!—Love me!" she panted hungrily and reached up to take him.

Barrett eluded her. No. . . . He had made a bargain, in a way, with Tou Dac. She was for Tou Dac if he had courage and ingenuity enough to carry out her abduction. He must refrain. He was on fire himself, but he shook his head and tried to raise a warning hand.

Quick as a leopard she snatched at it, dragged him down upon her. She was not to be denied. Fierce, lithe, strong, she enveloped him, locked him fast.

SOME time later Barrett's detachment asserted itself. The girl was now content just to sit up and look at him; then would come a fresh wave of affection and she wanted his arms again. She was completely and utterly in love with him. Her eyes danced, sparkled, blazed, invited; repelled in sheer mischief, to relent and invite again. Her laugh was like music, her voice caressing, wise, merry, deep with feeling as she talked. Barrett wondered when, if ever, she would return to the normal and rather disdainful girl who wanted now to go back to the palace. That reaction always set in.

But it did not with her. An hour had gone and she was still absorbed in him. She was charming, vivacious, intelligent, abounding in humor. Her exotic beauty was intoxicating. Barrett considered the appalling fact that he, too, was fast falling in love with her. He had heard of love at first sight and had scoffed. Now he was experiencing it. . . . The rest had been mere physical dalliances that

satisfied, in a way; this was the real thing.

He fought against it. Sardonicly his inner mind was telling him that he was being moved to do precisely as Prince Tou Dac had done—throw away everything, position, professional standing, comforts of home and income, even his social status in the white colony of Hué, all for love of this Oriental beauty. He must not permit it. . . . He glanced in the general direction of the wharf.

"They will begin to be uneasy about you at the palace," he hinted.

"*Aieeee!*" Her brown eyes grew round. "The palace? You would not send me there, delight of my heart? It is to my death! The Emperor will find that I am not now virgin and"—her graceful hand with its tapering fingers clutched at her throat—"no more little Nanya Shan!"

Shan? Of course! He had been misled by Tou Dac's pronunciation, the harsh *ch* of Chan. She was a Shan girl. Barrett had heard of them. Ask the English! They had the bulk of that race over in Burma, across the river from Laos. "Why, how ridiculous! They make charming little wives!" Barrett heard in memory that sharp rejoinder by an English officer's wife to an ignorant American who was questioning a marriage with "a yellow woman," to use his own coarse phrase. Nanya was a Shan. She had those rare Burmese qualities of humor, comradeship, capability and intelligence that, better than the Japanese, set them apart from all other Oriental girls as worthy any man, even the haughty white man. She was no pretty doll!

But Barrett was now much disturbed. He had known immediately that he was risking her very life when first in her embrace. He should have denied himself, at once. The Emperor would simply have her strangled. Never before had a close-guarded virgin been sent to him as a

patient from snake-bite. It had taken Prince Tou Dac's Hindoo snake-juggler to accomplish that.

"Let me stay with you for ever, my heart's joy!" Nanya begged. "You that have brought me love! I worship you! *Aiee*—I die if you are not near—always!" She cast herself on him with passion. Barrett clasped her to him with renewed fervor, in a tumult of pity, perplexity, remorse. A rebellion against parting with her—ever—gripped him. Like Tou Dac, he felt, wildly, that nothing else in life was of any importance compared to the love of this starry and vivid beauty. And he had it, and Tou Dac hadn't. . . .

He was her first love. She had never been permitted to so much as look at any youth since the beauty-child of some obscure Laos village waxed into a womanhood fit for the Emperor. There is nothing more ardent or enduring with any woman than that love for the man first to open the gates of life to her. She would remember the white man all her days. . . .

But there weren't going to be any days, not for Nanya. Strangled, tomorrow, in some closet in the palace. Barrett did not know what to advise. He did not mention the sheer cruelty of returning her again, but she read the doubt in his eyes. She sighed, reached for the heap of jewel-encrusted finery, and her hand came away with a steel *da-sye* in it, a glittering needle of a blade five inches long.

"Love me, one last time—my all—my heart's treasure!" she murmured passionately on his breast. "Then this dagger! I swear it before the Buddha."

Tears made her eyes gorgeous as she looked out over the dank River of Perfumes in farewell. Its scented aromas of frangipani and moon-flower and lotus came in languorously through the marble lacery of Barrett's windows. Out there all

was beauty, peace, lights on the black flowing mirror of the river, glistening foliage winnowing in the breeze. It was her farewell to life; but to die was sweet in the first rapture of love, in the odors of blossoms, in the arms of her man. She could care for no other after him. . . .

Barrett rose with resolution. He had decided. Her life was precious to him now. He *was* her life; she preferred death without him. Her devotion was equal to that supreme sacrifice. And with her lay supreme happiness. Like most bachelors of long standing, he was hungry in heart for the mate of his dreams to come into his life. But he had found no one so far. She would be for ever a delight; vivacious, charming, intelligent—and a raving beauty in any style of womanly apparel she chose, European or Asiatic. His position here? *Bah!* His services as a specialist commanded employment anywhere in the East! He must get her out of this. . . .

"Wait," he said. "Put on those filmy underthings. Do up the rest. . . . Boy!" He clapped his hands. "Bring coolie suit, chop-chop!" To Nanya: "We go, Nanya, dearest! Out of this! Out of Indo-China. Away! Bangkok—Singapore—Rangoon—where you will! There is no need to die."

"Oh, my love!" In her eyes shone rapture. She reached at once for the filmy things. Rodin would have wept over the poem of her body as she stepped into them.

But his problem bristled with practical difficulties as Barrett explored into what he was letting himself in for. Escape out of the house was impossible; Tou Dac's daggers guarded every egress from its gardens, for white man or house-boy, and Nanya was now dressed as such. There was but one way left open; back to the sampan waiting at the wharf. And

that sampan would be swooped upon by another sampan, bearing Tou Dac, hot for his girl and aided by a dozen retainers. . . .

Where would Tou Dac attempt her abduction? Somewhere during that brief trip down the River of Perfumes to the palace water-gate. Tou Dac's eyes would be on her sampan every moment. No matter which way it left the wharf, he would pounce in pursuit. He would listen to no evasions either; the girl, or her dead body in proof that she had succumbed to the cobra bite, one or the other, would have to be on board.

BARRETT eyed Nanya critically. That long black gown of coarse silk worn by both sexes, with its straight lines, hid her graceful curves. She wore the flat turban of many turns of thick ribbon silk—but under it beamed her piquant ivory face, all a-sparkle with merriment. It would never do! Her beauty glorified any clothes; men would not look at them, but at her. And gasp—and remember. Tou Dac could trace her, anywhere they went.

"Can you row, dear one?" Barrett asked.

She nodded, smiled, gripped his forearm. Lord, she was strong! He resisted, but his arm was nearly bent back. That training of the dance since childhood had given her endurance and lithe strength. "Many times, on the Mekong, have I paddled the pirogue, beloved one," she told him, with her saucy eyes dancing.

"We're fixed, then," Barrett said with relief, and stepped into his laboratory. Presently he emerged with a brush and chemical pigments; also a good Colt revolver was now strapped on his belt. Caste marks with the brush disfigured Nanya's lovely face; frightful lines of worry, labor, and semi-starvation smeared her

eyebrows and grooved her piquant cheeks. She looked now like a sampan rowing-woman, gaunt with toil.

"You'll do," said Barrett. "Come."

Together they went down to the wharf, she following him as the white man's coolie. Barrett spoke sharply to the squatting sampan man:

"Go! Help them up at the house. She must be carried. Careful, now!—Coolie, make ready the bed," he ordered Nanya.

She stepped clumsily aboard and busied herself with the pillows under the great canopy tongue of the orchid. Barrett watched the sampan man till his shuffling figure darkened his doorway.

"Quick, Nanya! Take the oar," he called softly. "Straight down the river," he directed her. "Keep to the middle when passing the palace. Keep rowing, no matter what happens."

He was gone in a dive into the heart of the lotus. Swiftly he blew out the paper lanterns. Then he banked the pillows close around him, so as to hide as much as possible his lean masculine form. Over them he drew a large coverlet of eyelet-embroidered silk, then loosened the revolver in its holster. The strokes of her oar kept up steadily.

Barrett could only guess how Tou Dac would manage his abduction, but he could picture the raiding sampan dashing alongside and the Prince leaping aboard to snatch up his prey out of the heart of the lotus. He was ready for him! The oarsman? Ah, there was uncertainty enough in his plan to sicken the heart! He could not foretell what she would do when the crisis came! The Prince's retainers would deal summarily with any sampan rower who showed the least resistance. At least three of them would board with the Prince to help carry off the girl. And she would fly to his defense, reckless of risks to herself. She

had given him proofs enough of that devotion. . . . It was a fool plan, Barrett groaned miserably. He wished he hadn't tried it, but it was the best that he could think of. Once down to the river-mouth, there would be tramp steamers off the bar of Hué.

Where were they now? He could hear the distant cries of the sampan man discovering that his boat was gone. A powerful waft of frangipani perfume reminded him of a great tree of that species that grew by the garden wall some distance above the water-gate. Then came the pungent odor of teak in full blossom. To him who knew it, the River of Perfumes was a guide in landmarks by its smells alone. Those teak trees were near the water-gate; they were passing it, unchallenged.

Then her oar-strokes quickened. The craft leaped ahead. "My lord!" her voice called to him. "Boat following, fast!"

Barrett heard the faint rhythmic dip of many paddles in the silence of the river. "Jump overboard, Nanya!" he called tensely. "Meet me down the river—left bank. I'll take care of 'em! It is Prince Tou Dac, who comes to take thee."

"*Aarrh!*" That cry of rebellion against the lust of men raged from her lips. She had found love; its exaltation scorned the thought of the loveless palace girl, the plaything of princes. "That withered old ape?—Better the dagger, my heart! I have it with me."

Barrett almost broke up his ruse in his anxiety. "*Don't!*" he cried. "Jump and swim ashore. They will take you for the sampan rower. You can meet me below——"

THERE was no time for more. A ferocious gabble of yells barked out, close at hand, over the River of Perfumes. Paddles splashed furiously. A heavy,

wooden bump careened the sampan as a great long war pirogue swept alongside.

"*Jump!*" Barrett yelled; then lay tense under the coverlet, one hand gripping his revolver butt. There was commotion on board, the sampan rocking wildly under the thrust of sandals, a violent leap of some powerful man down into the heart of the lotus. Gripping hands tore away the coverlet for a gloat over the languid beauty ensconced in the pillows, and then—Prince Tou Dac arrested his clutch in midair. His mouth gaped open. He was looking down into the bore of Barrett's revolver.

"Hands up! *Back!*—Back to your pirogue, all of you!" That order was imperative as Barrett leaped up with a thrust of his left hand. Tou Dac gave back before the revolver, his hands on high; then he found his voice.

"Doctor Barrett!" he grated, his eyes all ferocity, astonishment, bafflement. "What do you here? Where is she? What does this mean?"

"It means," said Barrett bitingly, "that you are not to have her, Prince. I sent her back to the Emperor some other way——"

"*You did!* You dared, dog of a white man?" A white-hot glare of rage made Tou Dac's eyes feral. The chains of his wrath were loosed. "Upon him! *Kill!*" He clutched for Barrett's pistol with that harsh shout.

Barrett eluded his groping talons with a swift circular twist of the gun that brought its barrel down viciously, with all his force, on Tou Dac's turban with the movement. The Prince crashed down across his legs. But close behind him followed a circle of long, curved *dab-syes* thrusting for Barrett's life under their guarding arms. He could back no further into the orchid shrine.

"*Mawng Shwé!*" That piercing silvery

voice was no sampan man's! It arrested them all, to glance back at her. Nanya stood dragging at the dagger within her coolie robe. She was tensed to leap to his help. She had not jumped overboard. Her accents were of extreme terror for the life of her love. The raiders grinned diabolically. They had them both now! The Prince would come to. . . . Two of them faced her way; the rest crouched to close in on Barrett and finish him.

"Don't! Keep away, Nanya!" He bared clenched teeth at her; then fired as rapidly as he could pull trigger. The rest was a confused hurly-burly of struggle in the darkness, the sulfurous flame and smoke of his revolver at close quarters, cuts, stabs, blows, men groaning and stumbling. He was conscious of her in the thick of it, active, swift-turning as any dancing-girl, meeting their slashes with thrusts of her dagger, warding off with quick blow of her arm some fatal stab at him. And then it was all over and the bower smoldered with red patches of fire on its pillows and reeked with powder-smoke fumes.

Barrett, bleeding from gashes and sobbing for breath, flung his assailants hastily over the gunwale, one by one, back into the pirogue they had come from. Then he sat down and let the sampan drift; on down the River of Perfumes. Nanya lay dead among the pillows. She had given her life to save his. . . .

LISTLESSLY he watched the Prince's pirogue drift away. There was commotion now along shore over the shooting, but what did it all matter? Her loss was too cruel to be borne. To have a great love awakened in his own heart, after all these empty and cynical and unsatisfied years in the East, only to— He had seen that fatal stab at the last moment. On guard for herself, it would

never have more than scratched. . . . But there was one greasy knife-hand in his grip at that moment. A successful wrench, and it would have killed him. . . .

Mechanically he slapped out with a wetted palm those patches of fire that threatened to become flame too near her body. And then he got up and bent over her. By heaven, there was just a chance! They knew that it was essential to take her alive. The Prince would execute, with exquisite tortures, that man who dared really harm her. A man can take the force out of his blow at the very last instant, if his mind so directs. Barrett felt her again, a faint thread of hope lighting his gloom. His first examination had been hasty. Dead; he had been only too sure of it! But she was still warm. And, after a long time, Barrett nodded and a throb of poignant joy flooded all over him. Yes, her heart was still going; in the faintest of beats and at long intervals. . . . That heart was his. . . .

Frantically he set to work to do what had long been left undone. It would be a fight to save her. And he had no stimulants, no laboratory, no aids of any kind save his own medical skill—and his own fierce will-power. He raged with the intensity of that and prayed fervidly! "God! Have mercy! Give her back to me! . . . They shan't have her! They *shan't!*" His thoughts raved against the powers of darkness as he worked over her, alternately begging God and defying Death. He knew, now, the agony of a lost loved one; and there is no greater. He sobbed ungovernably as he bandaged.

And then he had done all he could for her. He went back to take the oar. The sampan had long since drifted past the excited crowds in the palace gardens; it now leaped ahead down the River of Perfumes, impelled by Barrett's vigorous and stinging strokes. A quiet happiness

suffused him as the boat entered the city area of Hué and passed lines of thatched-roofed pirogues moored side by side along both banks. There was just a chance, yet! Reach a steamer and a medicine chest, and he could bring her around. . . .

IT WAS no longer the River of Perfumes, but a river of stinks and industrial smells. Tall black factory chimneys in the night; rice mills; moored steam launches, lighters. All were asleep in the dead of night. Then came a faint tang of salt air, and Barrett quickened his strokes. Lagoons; the lighterage port of Thuan-an; and then, at last, tramp steamers anchored out in the offing.

Barrett hailed one: "Ship ahoy! Can you take a couple of passengers?"

A gabble of Malay from some serang on watch. "Am waking capman, boss."

Presently a sleepy officer, in pajamas and naval cap, stood by the rail. Barrett repeated his query.

"Aye. We're leaving for Singapore on the turn of the tide. If that suits ye, come aboard."

Barrett surged with satisfaction. Good! Singapore! There would be French complications over this affair at either Saigon or Hanoi.

A rope ladder was lowered. Up it he bore his limp burden. He kicked the sampan adrift. A lantern shone on their faces as the grizzled Scotch captain sized up his passengers.

"Man, she's a beauty! Ye're in luck, I'd say," he commented with a knowing twinkle over the old, old story—in the East. White man taking a little trip with a native girl. . . .

"She's my wife." Barrett shut that off sternly. "Your medicine chest, Captain. She got hurt, badly, by a jealous native. I'd like a stateroom if you can manage it."

"Oh, aye." The captain shrugged and gave him up. He had seen that brief infatuation for a native girl too. It always ended badly—for the girl. Nevertheless he hurried off for the ship's medicine chest.

Barrett faced his attitude defiantly. He loved her, sincerely, and with his whole heart. Let them take it as they would! She was a treasure. In Singapore he would look around for a position at the court of some Oriental potentate whose gardens were pestered with snakes. . . .

And it was in the stateroom berth that Nanya finally came to. Her eyes opened, looked up at him with recognition. Then they glowed on him with a steadfast adoration. Barrett could do nothing but murmur tenderly her name.

She was too weak to touch. She held onto life but with the merest thread as yet. But she was gaining on it. An arch look came, presently, into her eyes; her lips quirked.

"Man," she said feebly, but there was the faint music of laughter in her voice. "My man! . . . What is your name?"

Barrett smiled down at her delightedly. They had omitted that trifle, up to the present. "Jim," he told her. "Jim Barrett, love."

She puzzled prettily. "Djeem? . . . What a funny noise! I have a better one, my all. Mawng Shwé, my Golden Prince! Kiss me. . . ."

Barrett ventured to do so. He held her, very gently, and drank in the poignant happiness of it. She was adorable, this gift of the River of Perfumes; she was worthy the best that was in him; and she was his. . . .

The love-theme from *Madam Butterfly* was singing in his soul; it would never end like that tragedy, he vowed before God.