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The Yellow God

Continued from page 15)

on some errand of her own. Far away something fell to the floor, a very light object, such as a flake of rock or a scale of gold. Yet the noise of it struck his nerves loud as a clap of thunder, and those of Jeeki also, for he felt him start at his side and heard the sudden hammerlike beat of his heart. What was the woman doing in this dreadful place, he wondered? Well, it was easy to guess. Doubtless she had brought them there to scare and impress them. Presently a voice, that of some hidden priest, would speak to them, and they would be asked to believe it a message from the spirit world, or a spirit itself might be arranged—what could be easier in their mood and these surroundings?

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT THE ASIKA SHOWED TO ALAN.

It seemed to Alan that he went to sleep and dreamed.

He dreamed that it was late autumn in England. Leaves drifted down from the trees beneath the breath of a strong, damp wind and ran or floated along the road till they vanished into a ditch, or caught against a pile of stones that had been laid ready for its repair. He knew the road well enough; he even knew the elm tree beneath which he seemed to stand on the crest of a hill. It was that which ran from Mr. Chompers-Haswell's splendid house, The Court, to the church; he could see them both, the house to the right and the church to the left, and his eyesight seemed to have improved since he was able to observe that at either place there was bustle and preparation as though for some ceremony.

Now the big gates of The Court opened, and through came a funeral. It advanced towards him with unnatural swiftness as though it floated upon air, the whole melancholy procession of it. In a few seconds it had come and gone, and yet during those seconds he suffered agony, for there arose in his mind a horrible terror that this was Barbara's burying. He could not have endured it for another moment; he would have cried out or died, only now the mourners passed him following the coffin, and in the first carriage he saw Barbara seated, looking sad and somewhat troubled, but well. A little farther down the line came another carriage, and in it was Sir Robert Aylward, staring before him with cold, impassive face.

In his dream Alan thought to himself that he must have borrowed this carriage, which would not be strange, as he generally used motors, for there was a peer's coronet upon the panels and the silver-mounted harness.

The funeral passed and suddenly vanished into the churchyard gates, leaving Alan wondering why his cousin Haswell was not seated at Barbara's side. Then it occurred to him that it might be because he was in the coffin, and at that moment in his dream he heard the Asika asking Jeeki what he saw; heard Jeeki answer also, "A burying in the land called England."

"Of whom, Jeeki?" Then, after some hesitation, the answer:

"Of a lady whom my lord loves very much. They bury her."

"What was her name, Jeeki?"

"Her name was Barbara."

"Bar-bara, why that you told me was the name of his mother and his sister. Which of them is buried?"

"Neither, O Asika! It was another lady who loved him very much and wanted to marry him, and that was why he ran away to Africa. But now she is dead and buried."

"Are all women in England called Barbara, Jeeki?"

"Yes, O Asika, Barbara means woman."

"If your lord loved this Barbara, why then did he run away from her? Well, it matters not since she is dead and buried, for whatever their spirits may feel, no man cares for a woman that is dead until she clothes herself in flesh again."

"I have earned nothing, O Asika," answered Jeeki modestly, "who only tell you what I see as I must. Yet, O Asika," he added, with a note of anxiety in his voice, "why do you not read these writings for yourself?"

"Because I dare not, or rather because I cannot," she answered fiercely.

The dream went on. A great forest appeared, such a forest as they had passed before they met the cannibals, and set beneath one of the trees, a tent, and in that tent Barbara, Barbara weeping. Someone began to lift the flap of the tent. She sprang up, snatching at a pistol that lay beside her, turning its muzzle towards her breast. A man entered the tent. Alan saw his face, it was his own. Barbara let fall the pistol and fell backwards as though a bullet from it had pierced her heart. He leapt towards her, but before he came to where she lay everything had vanished, and he heard Jeeki droning out his lies to the Asika.

A third time the dream descended on Alan like a cloud. It seemed to him that he was borne beyond the flaming borders of the world. Everything around was new and unfamiliar, vast, changing, lovely, terrible. He stood alone upon a pearly plain and the sky above him was lit with rosy moons, many and many of them, that hung there like lamps. Spirits began to pass him. It was the Asika, only a thousand times more splendid, clothed in all the glory of hell.

"Through many a life, through many a life," she said, "bought with much blood, paid for with a million tears, but mine at last, the soul that I have won to comfort my soul through the eternal day."

So she spoke, and though all his soul revolted, yet the fearful strength that was in her seemed to draw him onward whither she would go. Then a light shone and that light was the face of Barbara, and with a suddenness that was almost awful, the dream came to an end.

Alan was in his own room again, though how he got there he did not recollect.

"Jeeki, he said, 'what has happened? I seem to have had a very curious dream, there in the Treasure Place, and to have heard you telling the Asika a string of incredible falsehoods.'"

"Oh, no, Major, Jeeki too good Christian; he tell her what he see, or what he think she see if she look, 'cause p'raps he see nothing, she never believe that."

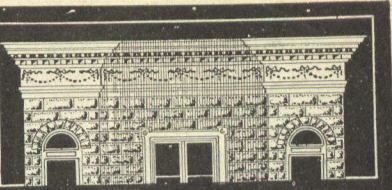
"Quite so, Jeeki, quite so; only I should advise you not to play too many tricks upon the Asika, lest she should happen to find you out. How did I get back here?"

"Like man that walk in his sleep, Major. She go first, you follow, just as little lamb after Mary in hymn."

"Jeeki, did you really see anything at all?"

"No, Major, nothing partic'lar, except ghost of Mrs. Jeeki and of your reverend uncle, both of them very angry. That magic all stuff, Major. Asika put something in your grub make you drunk, so that you think her very wise."

Fifteen more days had gone by, and it was the eve of the night of the second full moon, the night when Alan was destined to become the husband of Asika. She had sent for him that morning, and he found her radiant with happiness. Whether or



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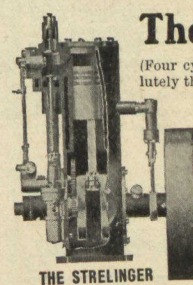


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