

# *The Princess of the Purple Palace*



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*William Murray Graydon*

THE PRINCESS OF THE  
PURPLE PALACE

# The Princess of the Purple Palace

*By*  
*William Murray Graydon*

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*The Messenger from Shan Se*

"H E is not here yet?"

The boy spoke quickly, more in a tone of surprise than interrogation, as he sat up in bed and blinked at the window curtains of plaited bamboo, through which a fugitive ray of sunlight shone on carved panels, stools of terra-cotta, and a few rare porcelains and bronzes of the Ming dynasty. Twice before he had awakened abruptly from slumber to ask the same question, and again the answer was the same.

"Not yet, honoured young master," replied the elderly, benevolent-faced Chinaman, who was the other occupant of the room. "But he will surely come. The journey is long, and many things may have delayed him."

"This is the day—"

"And the end is not until the darkness

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falls. Rest in peace, my son, so that you may be refreshed and strengthened when the messenger arrives."

"I thought the hour was later," the boy muttered drowsily. "Tell me, Chow Yen, is there any news in the city?"

"It is reported," said the old man, "that the Tsung-li-Yamen have assented to the demands of the Legations, and that the foreign soldiers will enter this evening."

"The guards coming?—good for that! It will be a warning to the Boxers, eh, Chow Yen? I shall go—out—to see—"

The boy's head dropped back on the pillow, and his eyes closed. With a glance at the flushed face of the sleeper Chow Yen softly left the room, and presently he was attending to customers in his little shop downstairs, where he dealt in ancient scrolls, manuscripts, and printed books.

It was the 31st of May, 1900, and throughout the vast city of Peking, with its million and more of souls, excitement ran high. Day by day had added fuel to the smouldering fires, yet of the alien inhabitants only a few saw beneath the surface, were able to read the ominous signs correctly. The clouds

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were thickening; the Yellow Storm was gathering fury and purpose; the hour was very near when a new and bloody chapter was to be inscribed on the tablets of History and Civilization.

The society of Boxers, founded originally by the infamous Yu Hsien, a prefect of Shan Tung, had become a formidable power in that province. Their avowed object was the destruction of the foreigner and his religion, and but half-hearted attempts were made to suppress them. Soon, growing stronger, they spread to the metropolis itself, where they were at least sanctioned, if not secretly encouraged, by the Empress-Dowager and the Court. In April, teachers from Shan Tung were drilling the youth of Peking and arming them with knives and swords. Anti-foreign literature was openly sold in the streets. Refugees began to pour in from the country, bringing alarming reports of the murder of native Christians and the destruction of property. The outlook darkened. Foreigners were privately warned, by Chinese servants in their employ, of an impending massacre of Europeans. Imperial troops sent to disperse bodies of Boxers were said to have

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fraternized with them and embraced them as "blood brothers." A party of French engineers, isolated at a small station fifteen miles out of the city, were rescued and brought in by the exertions of the heroic August Chamot.

So May drew to its end, and on the last day of the month, while the bland and perfidious Tsung-li-Yamen were assuring the ministers of the foreign powers that the excitement was abating and there was no need for anxiety, Boxers were actually drilling in the grounds of the government barracks and within the precincts of the Imperial palace itself. Peking was rushing headlong to its doom; the fire-breathing dragon was straining to be let loose.

Strictly speaking, the capital consists of four cities, one within another. The Forbidden City, sacred to the persons of the ruling sovereign and the Court, is the kernel of the Imperial City. The two are enclosed by the Tartar City, which, between its massive walls, shelters a population almost wholly of Manchu descent, the race of the present dynasty. To the south of the Tartar City, and connected with it by various gates, lies

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the Chinese City, itself strongly walled and fortified. Across this, from north to south, stretches the imposing thoroughfare known as the Grand Avenue ; not far from which, in the Street of the Booksellers, was the house of Chow Yen.

Here, while the sun crept slowly down the western sky, the old man waited in his shop for customers, and in the darkened room overhead Alec Drury slept on without waking. Chow Yen lived quite by himself, keeping neither servant nor clerk. He was a trusted friend of the American soldier of fortune, Captain Ralph Drury—the gentleman adventurer, as some called him, who for the past four years had been military instructor to the Viceroy of the northern province of Shan Se. Alec, summoned to join his parent, had travelled as fast as steam and rail could carry him from Canton, where he had been visiting an uncle. After a long and sleepless journey from Tientsin he had arrived at Peking during the morning of the 31st, and on going straight to the house of Chow Yen he found there a week-old letter from his father bidding him remain in the capital until further instructions, which he

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was to expect that very day by special messenger. It was evident that the troubled state of the country had induced Captain Drury to alter his plans—to what extent the lad could only surmise. That he would either join his father in Shan Se, or that the latter intended coming down to Peking, he did not doubt. His conjectures were to fall far short of the truth.

As evening drew on, and the sultry air cooled, the Chinese City resounded with the tread of hundreds of feet, for huge crowds were wending their way towards the street along which the foreign troops were expected to pass. Chow Yen started to put up the shutters of his shop, and at the same moment Alec, who had slept off the fatigue of his journey, tumbled out of bed and dipped his face and hands in a basin of cool water. He was tall and well-built, broad-shouldered and muscular, for his seventeen years, eight months. Young as he was, he was quite competent to look after himself, having been thrown much on his own resources. He had his father's handsome features, and his dark brown eyes and hair matched the tan of his cheeks. Brave, yet



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prudent and cool-headed, manly and clean-minded, dogged as a bull-terrier—he was just the type of lad one likes to see upholding the prestige of Young America and the Stars and Stripes in foreign lands.

A noise in the distance, easily recognized as shrill and angry shouting, drew Alec to the window. As he listened the clamour suddenly died away, and for several minutes he stood looking down into the street, which was now almost deserted. Then the door opened and Chow Yen entered the room.

“The messenger—” began Alec.

“He has not come yet, my son. But he will doubtless be here by the time you have partaken of food and drink.”

“I am worried and anxious about him,” replied the lad. “Kin Soon is a native Christian, and he has many enemies. A year ago his life was attempted—”

“Hark!” interrupted Chow Yen.

A low, quick rapping was heard, and the quarter from whence it sounded was not to be mistaken. Down the stairs and to the rear of the house hastened Alec and Chow Yen. The latter unbarred and opened a door that gave entrance onto a narrow, high-

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walled court, and over the threshold, with a hoarse word of greeting, staggered a middle-aged Chinaman, with as ugly a face as could have been found in all Peking. In a trice the door was shut and barred behind him.

"Kin Soon!" exclaimed Alec. "What has happened."

It was a natural question. The messenger's pigtail had come uncoiled and was dangling down his back. One eye was swollen and disfigured. The short sword that he clenched in his right hand bore red stains, as did the folds of his coarse blue jacket where they were wrapped about his left arm.

"Honoured young master, I bring you this," said Kin Soon, handing to the lad an envelope sealed with yellow wax.

"Tell me what has happened," repeated Alec. "You are wounded."

Kin Soon leaned heavily against the wall, breathing in short gasps. The faithful fellow, who had been Captain Drury's body servant for five years, had travelled almost night and day, for one hundred and sixty miles, from the distant province of Shan Se.

"I was attacked," he answered with an effort, "this side of the Chien Men gate. A

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man in a Boxer's uniform, who hails from Taoting in Shan Se, recognized me and raised an outcry. I knocked him down with my fist, and was then set upon by another rascal, whom I disarmed and wounded with his own sword after he had first slashed me with it. Pursued by a yelling mob I took to my heels and ran, wrapping my left arm in my tunic lest I should be traced by the dripping blood. Having doubled and turned I lost my foes near the canal, the partly-dry bed of which I followed for a hundred yards. Then I scaled the wall, crept through a shady garden to one end of the street of the Lotus—which I crossed unseen—and so came to this hospitable sanctuary."

"And none saw you enter the passage to my court?" Chow Yen demanded anxiously.

"None, be assured," Kin Soon replied. "I watched on all sides with the eyes of a hawk."

Chow Yen drew a sigh of relief, as he took off his wooden-rimmed spectacles and rubbed them with a silken handkerchief. He was a Chinaman of the progressive party, and had no sympathy with the anti-foreign agitation.

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"Woe unto this wicked city!" he exclaimed. "There is madness in the very air. Blind indeed are those in high places who encourage these pigs of Boxers. Even the Son of Heaven [the Emperor] is drunk with folly." Turning to the lad, he added: "Is there good news of thy honoured parent, my son?"

Alec paid no heed to the question for a moment. He had eagerly opened the letter, finding therein a smaller sealed envelope and two sheets of thin paper covered with writing. As he read on, his breath came quicker and his face clouded with keen disappointment.

"I rely on you," Captain Drury concluded, in a paragraph that summed up the whole of the communication, "to follow my instructions. I wish it were otherwise, but in the present excited state of the country it would be madness either for me to start for Peking or for you to attempt to travel to Shan Se. So go without delay to the shelter of the American Legation, and present to our minister in person the enclosed letter, which contains information of the greatest importance that came secretly to my knowledge.

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Had I known what I know now I should not have recalled you from Canton. There can be no doubt that a general massacre of the Europeans in the capital is intended. But you will be safe at the Legation, and I myself am in no peril here, since I am assured of the Viceroy's loyal friendship and protection. I wish Kin Soon to remain with you, rather than risk his life needlessly on the return journey. My only fear is that he may be intercepted in the endeavour to reach Peking."

The above Alec read aloud, omitting the final words of affectionate farewell. He put the letter and the sealed envelope in a secure pocket of his jacket.

"Then you do not journey to Shan Se?" Chow Yen exclaimed.

"No; I must leave your friendly roof, Chow Yen, and go at once to the American Legation."

"It is well, my son. The wisdom of the parent is not to be questioned. And, indeed, I know not how long I could be answerable for your safety here."

"Where my young master goes," said Kin Soon, "I go also."

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As he spoke his face turned an ashy hue, and swaying to one side he slipped in a limp heap to the floor.

"He has swooned," cried Chow Yen.

With all haste he brought cold water and a small flask of some potent liquor, and when these had been administered to Kin Soon, the one externally and the other inwardly, he very quickly rallied and sat up.

"When I have dressed his arm," said Chow Yen, "he had better lie down for a time. To start for the Legation before darkness has fallen would be unwise."

"You are right," assented Alec. "We will wait until then."

He spoke in an absent tone as he stood looking into the court through a chink of the shuttered window. He was thinking of the miles of country, teeming with fanatical foes, that separated him from Shan Se. The letter had dealt him a sharp and unpleasant blow.

"I believed the worst was over," he told himself. "But my father knows best—I never knew him to be wrong. If the situation is really so serious the Legations will need many more guards than are coming to-day."

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Meanwhile, with gentle hands, the old Chinaman bathed and bandaged Kin Soon's wound, which was an ugly cut, penetrating nearly to the bone. Just as the task was finished, and Kin Soon had donned the clean tunic thoughtfully provided for him, a low word of alarm from Alec drew his companions to the window crack. Twenty yards away, at the far end of the court, were clustered half a dozen rough-looking men, two of whom wore red sashes. They were bending over the flagstones, examining a spot at which a lean, yellow hound was sniffing.

"Boxers!" gasped Kin Soon. "What a misfortune. Alas, they have tracked me with the aid of the dog—I must have lost a drop of blood here and there."

"Chow Yen emptied the basin of stained water down a hole in the floor, thrust the blood-soaked tunic after it, and hastily removed all other traces of his recent surgical operation.

"You must go at once, my friends," he whispered, with chattering teeth, "else you will surely be killed. I will let you out by the shop door."

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"And leave you to the fury of these devils?" said Alec. "Never!"

"They will do me no harm," protested Chow Yen. "What evidence can they find? I will swear that no one has entered my house—I will bid them search where they like."

"That's a good plan," assented Alec. "Yes, for your own sake we had better be off."

Chow Yen drove his companions before him into the shop. "Go quickly," he urged. "Tarry not an instant."

As he spoke the rear door was assailed with lusty blows, and several voices clamoured loudly for admittance. A moment later Chow Yen was alone.

The sun was touching the horizon, and the evening air was pleasant after the heat of the day, when Alec and Kin Soon found themselves shut out in the Street of the Booksellers, which was deserted in the immediate vicinity of Chow Yen's house. For prudent reasons they separated at once, with the understanding that they would meet at the American Legation. Kin Soon strode off to the right, swinging his wounded arm



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as if nothing was the matter with it and carrying his short sword concealed under his blouse, while the lad, bearing in the opposite direction, turned to the left before reaching the Grand Avenue.

At this hour a strange calm, a hush of expectancy and doubt, as it were, pervaded the great city. Now and then a distant bell pealed, or a gong clanged harshly. Most of the people had flocked to see the arrival of the foreign troops, but many were left in the district through which the young American picked his way. He had little more than a mile to traverse, allowing for cautious detours, and as he walked along with an air of boldness and unconcern, he encountered nothing worse than derisive laughter and a few insulting epithets.

"The curs—they daren't do more than bark," he reflected. "Kin Soon should be able to get through with less risk than myself, and as for Chow Yen, I needn't worry about him. He will play his part to perfection."

But Alec's progress was not to be all smooth sailing, by any means. He was close to the north wall of the Chinese town, and

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in a squalid, ill-smelling quarter of poor shops, when of a sudden an ominous shout arose behind him. Glancing back, he saw four or five ruffians approaching with drawn swords.

"Kill the foreign devil!. Slay the pig!" they yelled.

The terrible cry seemed to freeze the lad's blood for an instant, and the realization of his danger appalled his stout heart. What chance had he of escape in a neighbourhood that would almost certainly bristle with ravenous foes directly the murderous clarion of the Boxers called them from their burrows? But he did not entirely lose courage. Life was sweet, and for the sake of it—for the sake of the precious letter he bore—he ran like a deer.

The hue and cry throbbed in his wake, as he made a turn to the left and bounded through a narrow passage, where women and children screeched at him from dark doorways. A small revolver rested in his hip-pocket, but he was unwilling to shed blood, to fire a single shot, until all else had failed.

Already, indeed, a ray of hope cheered him. He was holding his own well in the

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race, and a backward glance showed him that his pursuers had not materially increased. But the greatest danger lay in front, and from that quarter it came suddenly and threateningly, in the shape of a man wearing a Boxer sash, who leaped out upon the fugitive from the mouth of an alley on the right. Yelling ferociously, and brandishing a knife, the ruffian made a vicious thrust at close quarters.

The lad's promptitude and presence of mind barely saved him from death, for as he grabbed the descending arm by the wrist the keen-edged blade slashed across the breast of his jacket, ripping the cloth as if it were paper. Instantly a struggle ensued for the possession of the weapon. It was very brief, for Alec, though he clung with a grip of iron to his assailant, was quickly and dexterously tripped and landed on his back. The burly Chinaman, while he knelt on his victim and held him down with one hand, raised the knife aloft in the other.

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IN vain the lad tried to free himself. A horrid fascination riveted his eyes on the devilish face of his enemy, on the glittering steel poised above him. He screamed hoarsely, and a lusty shout answered. There was a quick patter of feet, the uplifted arm wavered, and as the would-be assassin turned to look behind him a heavy blow cracked his skull. He lurched to one side and fell.

Alec, grateful beyond words for this timely intervention, breathless and unnerved, was quickly helped to his feet by a lad of about his own age, who held a short, thick truncheon in one hand. It was easy to guess his nationality.

"Hurt?" he asked.

"No; thanks to you, I'm all right," Alec panted. "But that knife would have settled me in another second—"

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"It's lucky I was near," broke in the young stranger. "I say, we must cut and run for it."

A shrill clamour fairly drowned the words. Though the attack and its ending had transpired in less than a minute, the little band of pursuers had almost reached the spot.

"Sha! Sha!" [Kill! Kill!] they cried.

Alec whipped out his revolver and pointed it at them, and at once the cowardly pack turned in panic and confusion and scuttled off down the narrow street.

"Look at them running," said the strange lad. "I wish all the Boxers were like that."

"I'm afraid they're not," Alec replied. "I don't believe those chaps are real Boxers at all, but this one is," pointing to the ruffian with the red sash, who lay in a limp, huddled heap on the cobblestones. "Come along," he added. "Now is our chance."

A very favourable chance it was, as the sequence proved. The sight of Alec's revolver had a salutary effect on the scowling Chinamen who were in the neighbourhood, for they slunk right and left without offering any violence to the two young foreigners, who hurried on from street to street, twisting like

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hares, until not an echo of the hue and cry that had followed them for a time reached their ears. Then they halted to gain breath by the porch of a Buddhist temple that stood in the shadow of the city wall.

Alec took a good look at his rescuer. He saw a slim, wiry lad with sandy hair and complexion, bluish-grey eyes, and plain, good-humoured features—the sort of face that instinctively wins one's liking at first sight.

"You are an American?" he asked.

"Right. And you?"

"I'm the same."

"Good! Shake."

Their hands met in a tight grip.

"How did you get here?" Alec inquired of his companion, who gave the name of Dan Killigrew.

"I slipped out to meet the guards," was the reply, "and I lost my way in trying to get round a crowded part of the Grand Avenue. You don't belong to our Legation, do you?" he added.

"No; but that's where I'm bound for now," said Alec. "I have a letter for the American Minister," feeling to make sure

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that the precious missive was safe. "It is from my father, who is military instructor to the Viceroy of Shan Se."

"And my father," replied Alec's new acquaintance, "is one of Mr. Conger's secretaries. We've only been over here six months. Do you know Washington?—that's where we lived."

"Never been there," said Alec. "But we mustn't stand here any longer, or we may stop living altogether. It's not a healthy neighbourhood for us."

They left the shelter of the temple, and were soon mingling with the crowd at the lofty Chien Men gate, which had been kept open, for the arrival of the troops, beyond the usual hour. They passed through into the Tartar City, and with lessened anxiety, reassured by an occasional glimpse of a foreign soldier, they made their way towards the Legation quarter.

"We're all right now," said Alec. "I'm surprised that the people take the coming of the guards so coolly."

"They know what it means," Dan replied, in a confident tone. "The Boxers will have to shut up shop and go out of business."

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The assemblage was so dense that the lads experienced considerable difficulty in getting through by the nearest route, so they turned off among the Imperial government buildings to the north of the eastern end of Legation Street. In this pretentious quarter, which was little less crowded, they halted curiously by an open gateway. Within, across a vast paved court, rose a splendid mansion. A terrace of pink stone, flanked by massive bronze urns and carved storks, led up to the main entrance. The embattled parapets, roof, and gables were covered with purple tiles, which lent a striking and brilliant effect to the house.

"Who lives here?" Alec inquired.

"A Lord High somebody or other—I forget his name," Dan replied. "They call it the Purple Palace."

Just then, through the parting ranks of the people in the street, approached two mounted men in purple liveries, closely followed by a carriage that was partly of European make. It was closed in with red curtains, which, as the vehicle passed the two boys, were lifted sufficiently for them to catch a glimpse of a young girl, whose delicate



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Oriental features were crowned by a mass of dark fluffy hair ornamented with bodkins of green jade. She favoured Dan with a smile and a nod of recognition, then drew back into the shadow.

"Who was that?" Alec exclaimed in surprise.

As he spoke the sharp crack of a pistol was heard from opposite the lads, and instantly all was tumult and commotion. The man who had fired was swallowed hopelessly by the crowd. The carriage, to which a pair of fine horses were attached, rolled on through the gateway and stopped with a jerk. A dignified, elderly Chinaman in a yellow jacket, his face livid with rage, leaped to the ground.

Then half a dozen attendants sprang out from the courtyard of the Purple Palace, and with cries of anger, unsheathing their swords as they ran, they made furiously at Alec and Dan, who had been left isolated by the sudden scattering of the bystanders. They had barely realized their peril when the cold steel flashed before their eyes.

Were the two brave boys, after emerging in triumph from the deadly perils of the

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native city, to be cut down almost in sight of the American Legation? They expected nothing else as for an instant of chilling horror they stared death in the face, and then a single word, shouted in the mandarin dialect, rang loudly and imperiously above the babel of savage, clamouring voices.

"Stop!"

The command came from the Chinaman in the yellow jacket, whose keen glance had discovered the imminent danger of the young foreigners. He spoke just in time to save them. As they shrank back the glittering swords hissed over their heads, to be reluctantly lowered and sheathed the next moment. There was a hoarse murmur of disappointment from the throng of spectators. The palace servants, equally disappointed, but not daring to disobey the word that had thwarted their murderous intent, indicated with angry gestures the revolver that Alec had thrust carelessly into his belt when he entered the Tartar City. But their master, with unspeakable meaning, first swept his arm towards the crowd and then pointed to a bullet hole in the sleeve of his jacket.

"There, that ought to satisfy you," Alec

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said, in the native tongue, to one of the attendants. "You are wrong, my good fellow; I didn't fire that shot. Will you tell me the name of your honoured master?"

"His highness Prince Lan," was the sullen reply, given in English.

"Yes, that's it—I remember now," exclaimed Dan. "He has lots of pluck to expose himself like this. He makes a splendid mark for a second shot."

Someone else, apparently, thought the same. The young girl suddenly showed herself at the carriage window and called entreatingly to the prince, who at the same moment seemed to realize that he was inviting disaster. With a glance at the crowd, which had begun to press forward again, he made a sign to his servants. Back they hastened to the courtyard, and in a trice the heavy gates had clanged shut.

"That's what I call cool treatment," said Dan. "Not even an apology."

The lads were left outside, confronted by the mob of two or three hundred natives that filled the street before the palace. They seemed mostly to belong to the lower classes, and they had been wrought up to a

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dangerous pitch of excitement by the recent stirring event. With black scowls and threatening looks they regarded the young Americans.

"They mean trouble," muttered Dan.

"Keep cool," Alec whispered. "Don't let them see we're afraid."

"Foreign devils!" cried a man from the rear.

The insulting epithet was taken up by others, and a couple of stones were hurled, though with poor aim. The situation looked very serious.

"Show them your revolver," urged Dan. "I've half a mind to pound on Prince Lan's gate. Shall I?"

But just then a most fortunate diversion occurred. The distant blast of a bugle heralded the approach of the foreign troops, and at once the crowd, their feelings of hatred transformed into eager and childish curiosity, began to melt rapidly away in the direction of the sound.

The lads waited several minutes before they followed at a slower pace, and they had gone but a dozen yards from the palace when Dan suddenly stooped with an ex-

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clamation of surprise and picked up an object at his feet. It was a brass-mounted pistol, oddly engraved, and large of calibre for its size.

"That has been dropped by the scoundrel who fired at Prince Lan," said Alec. "He dived into the crowd so quickly that I didn't get a glimpse of him."

Dan was staring at the weapon with a strange and puzzled expression. "I fancy I've seen this before," he said slowly.

"Where?"

"On—on a certain person at the American Legation."

"That's queer."

"It's more than queer, if I'm right. But I may be mistaken." Dan put the pistol in his pocket. "Come on," he added. "I want to see the guards march past."

"I don't understand that attempt to kill Prince Lan," said Alec, as he hastened with his companion towards the Legation quarter. "I've heard of him before, and it strikes me he is a prominent member of the government."

"I know very little about the prince," Dan replied, "except that he used to

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belong to the Tsung-li-Yamen, but doesn't now."

"And the girl?"

"I'll tell you what I know about her—it isn't very much. She came to Washington a year ago with the suite of the new Chinese Minister, and was there for a month or more. They called her the Princess Peach Blossom, which, I suppose, is English for her Chinese name. I saw her twice, once riding on Pennsylvania Avenue and once at the Minister's house, where my father took me."

"Is she Prince Lan's daughter?" asked Alec.

"That's more than I can tell you. "

"Wasn't the prince in Washington at the time?"

"No," declared Dan. "I never heard of him until I came to Pekin."

"It's a pretty name, the Princess Peach Blossom," his companion said, reflectively. "But I like the Princess of the Purple Palace better. She isn't half bad-looking for a Chinese girl."

The Princess of the Purple Palace! It sounded ancient and romantic, with its sug-

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gestion of tales from the Arabian Nights. She had crossed Alec's life like an Oriental vision, and he wondered vaguely if he would ever see her again. Little did he dream of the perils he was shortly to encounter, of the sea of horror and bloodshed in which he was to swim, for the sake of the little Eastern maid with the picturesque name.

### III

#### *The Flight of the Tiger*

FROM a point of vantage in Legation Street, which they reached just in time, the lads beheld the entry of the marine guards. It was a thrilling, never-to-be-forgotten spectacle, and hope revived that evening in many a depressed and anxious heart, as the steady tramp, tramp of the alien troops broke the hushed silence of the great hostile city. Grim and determined were the bronzed faces of the men. Over their heads fluttered menacingly the flags of six mighty nations, prominent among them the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack, the Tricolour of France and the Imperial eagles of the Muscovite. From the railway station at Machia-pu, across the native city and through the Yung-ting-Men and the Chien Men gates, the little party of three hundred and forty had marched past thou-



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sands of gaping, respectful Chinese, past grovelling officials, and battalions of soldiers. Followed by large crowds they entered the diplomatic quarter of Peking as darkness was closing in, and without delay guards were mounted at all the Legations.

Having extracted themselves from the surging throng that ebbed in the wake of the procession, the two lads speedily found themselves within the portals of the American Legation, a few words from Dan taking them by the sentries. They avoided the crowded part of the enclosure, where considerable excitement and bustle prevailed, and gained access to the main building by a side door. As they were passing along one of the halls a white object dropped noiselessly from the front of Alec's jacket. He did not discover his loss, and several minutes later a tall Chinaman, hurrying by in the same direction, caught sight of the envelope on the floor. He picked it up quickly and furtively, and thrust it into his clothing.

"Wait here a moment," said Dan, as he halted his companion in an empty ante-chamber, "and I'll speak to my father. I'm

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afraid you won't be able to see Mr. Conger at once."

The moment grew to a quarter of an hour, while Alec examined some curious carvings of dragons and elephants, and then Dan returned.

"Come this way," he said. "My father is disengaged now."

The boys entered a private office of the Legation, a business-like room severely furnished, and lighted with wax candles. Mr. Eustace Killigrew, one of the Minister's secretaries, sat at a desk littered with papers. He was a fine-looking man, with shrewd, intelligent features, and the conduct of the secret intelligence department was in his charge. He rose and shook hands cordially with Alec.

"I am glad to see you, my boy," he said. "I understand that you bring—"

The sentence was left unfinished. He gave a slight start, and for half a minute, in silence, he stared in a strange manner into Alec's face.

"Your name?" he asked abruptly in an altered voice.

"Alec Drury, sir."

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"And your father?"

"Captain Ralph Drury, military instructor to the Viceroy of Shan Se."

"Where were you born?"

"In San Francisco."

"You strongly resemble someone," said the secretary, "whom I once knew."

As he spoke a tall, well-built Chinaman entered the room. He was about forty years of age, more swarthy of complexion than is common with his race, and with regular features, to which greenish-black eyes and a curled dark mustache gave a fierce and haughty expression. This was Li Sheng, recently attached to the suite of the Chinese Minister at Washington, but now serving the American Legation at Peking in a secret and confidential capacity. He went forth daily, in disguise, to glean what information was to be picked up.

"Ah, you have returned from the city," said Mr. Killigrew.

"Yes, honoured sir," replied Li Sheng, with a keen glance at the two boys.

"Wait; I will speak with you in a moment," said the secretary. "Mr. Conger is too busy to see you at present," he ad-

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ded to Alec, "but if you have a letter for him—"

"I have, sir," the lad broke in. He opened his jacket and produced a couple of folded sheets of paper. Then, inserting his hand again, he uttered an exclamation of dismay. He shook himself, and felt every part of his clothing. "It is gone!" he cried. "I have lost the other letter—the one addressed to the Minister. It must have dropped from my pocket, which I see was slit open at the bottom by the sword that slashed me across the chest. I had no idea it had cut so deep."

Li Sheng gazed stolidly into space, and Dan, who had been watching him furtively, turned his eyes on Alec with mute sympathy.

"This is unfortunate," said Mr. Killigrew. "What was in the letter?"

Li Sheng drew a sharp breath.

"I wish I could tell you, sir," replied Alec. "I only know that it contained information of great value to Mr. Conger, which was discovered in some manner by my father."

There was a moment of anxious silence, which was broken by Dan.

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"Li Sheng," he said deliberately, "you are hurt. There is blood on your sleeve."

Li Sheng's greenish, tigerish eyes, glittering with an evil light, flashed a searching scrutiny at the lad, as if he would tear his inmost thoughts from him.

"The blood," he replied calmly, "comes from a bandage tied round my arm, which is slightly cut. The wound was inflicted by some drunken rogues who set upon me this afternoon by the An-ting-Men gate."

"And they disarmed you?"

Again the dark eyes flashed. "I was robbed of both my sword and my pistol," was the reply.

"The pistol is here," said Dan, producing it and noting the effect of the action. "I picked it up in front of Prince Lan's palace."

"Li Sheng, you must really be more careful," put in Mr. Killigrew. "We can't afford to lose you." He turned to Alec. "My lad, the letter must be found, if possible," he continued. "You may have dropped it inside the Legation grounds."

Just then footsteps were heard in the ante-room, and a rap on the door was followed by a respectful voice :

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"Beg your pardon, sir, but there's a native out here inquiring for a young gentleman named Drury. He won't take no for an answer—"

"It must be Kin Soon!" Alec exclaimed eagerly. "He may know what the letter contained."

"Bring the fellow in," commanded Mr. Killigrew.

A moment later the persistent visitor appeared in custody of a Legation soldier. It was indeed the faithful Kin Soon, and his face beamed with delight as he greeted his young master. The next instant he was glaring with surprise and anger at Li Sheng, whose own features had as quickly turned an ashy yellow hue.

"Kin Soon, do you happen to know the contents of my father's letter?" demanded Alec.

"Has it not yet been read?" was the eager reply.

"No; I have unfortunately lost it."

Kin Soon's eyes blazed. "It is well that I am here," he cried. "Your honoured father revealed to me the secret of which he wrote. The letter contained proofs of the

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treachery of a certain Li Sheng, who goes out daily from the American Legation to carry information to the Boxers, and is, moreover, a Boxer himself. And if that is the two-faced dog standing yonder, know that he is the same ruffian who attacked me but a few hours ago, and whom I wounded with his own sword. Yes, to that will I swear—"

Crash! Li Sheng, knowing that the game was up, and that the penalty for his guilt was certain death, had made the first move towards escape by overturning the desk between himself and the other occupants of the room. As he did so his face, distorted with rage and fear, bore a truly startling resemblance to a snarling tiger.

The heavy piece of furniture fell on the toes of the soldier, who began to hop about on one leg. Alec and Dan, leaping simultaneously at the traitor, seized and held him for a moment. But Li Sheng broke from them with the slipperiness of an eel, leaving part of his tunic in their grasp, and a bound took him through the open window. Kin Soon, who had whipped out his concealed sword and darted in pursuit, struck at and

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missed the flying figure, hitting instead the window-sill, with a force that temporarily paralyzed his arm.

"Foreign devils," came a mocking voice from without. "Your days are numbered."

A hue and cry was raised, and soon lights were flashing as eager searchers ran here and there about the Legation enclosure. But no trace of the perfidious Li Sheng could be discovered. He knew every nook and corner, and must have got quickly away by some loosely-guarded exit, under cover of the darkness.

"I always mistrusted that fellow," declared Dan. "He had bad eyes."

"There is no telling to what lengths his treachery might have gone," said Mr. Killigrew, when he had read Captain Drury's warning letter, which was found in the abandoned half of Li Sheng's tunic.

That night Alec and Kin Soon were the heroes of the Legation.

Short-lived were the hopes and relief born of the coming of the Legation guards, and as transient was the impression made by them on the native mind. Two days later arrived the Austrian and German guards,



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and after that, train communication with Peking was interrupted. June 2nd brought word from the south of the massacre of missionaries and railway engineers. Disaffection spread rapidly, and the destruction of miles of railway stifled the hope of further reinforcements. The arrogance of the Tsung-li-Yamen increased, and after the 9th of June, the day the Emperor and the Empress-Dowager returned from the Summer Palace to the capital, accompanied by large bodies of cavalry and infantry, the situation hurried to a climax.

A siege was now regarded as inevitable. The Legations, immured in the core of the great bloodthirsty city, deprived indefinitely of help from outside, must fight for their lives. Merchants, missionaries and teachers, native Christians, women and children, all the foreigners of Peking except those who fled to the distant Catholic cathedral, swelled the numbers within the Legation quarter. A council of war was held by the military officers, and a plan of defence was settled upon. Provisions were laid in, trenches cut, and earthworks thrown up. On the 10th the Imperial Government boldly and officially

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recognized the Boxers by announcing the appointment of their chief, Prince Tuan, as President of the Tsung-li-Yamen, and on the following day the Japanese secretary was dragged from his cart and brutally murdered by Chinese soldiers. Then dawned the fateful 13th of the month, destined to end in bloodshed and destruction, flame and smoke.

But we must go back a little. During the period of preparation Kin Soon and his young master were not idle, for there was plenty for all to do. The acquaintance between Alec and Dan, so strangely begun, ripened to a warm boyish friendship. Both had joined the irregular force of volunteers, composed of mixed nationalities, who were known as "Thornhill's Roughs," and who were also dubbed the "Carving Knife Brigade," because those useful weapons were lashed to their guns instead of bayonets.

The secretary's son, of an impulsive temperament and brave to recklessness, needed the restraining influence of his cooler-headed comrade. Alec had been mainly educated in China, except for two years spent recently at an English school. At an early age he had gone with his parents to Canton, and

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after his mother's death he had lived there for a long time with a maternal uncle, while his adventure-loving father was fighting as a free-lance in several South American republics and with the Foreign Legion in Algeria. Naturally the lad was familiar with the mandarin dialect and the rougher one of the common people, while Dan, on his part, had picked up enough words to get along with.

The safety of Chow Yen and his bookshop was reported by a native Christian who came in to the Legation from the Chinese City, and this was very pleasing news to Alec; but he could not help feeling worried and anxious about his father, from whom no further tidings had been received, or were likely to be. Captain Drury's warning letter proved beyond doubt the double dealing of Li Sheng and his complicity with the Boxers, and Mr. Killigrew was able to throw some light on the mysterious attempt to shoot Prince Lan, for which both Dan and Alec declared—and the circumstances supported them—Li Sheng was personally responsible.

"That is very probable," said the secretary, "since Li undoubtedly belongs to the

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Boxers. More than a year ago Prince Lan, on account of his pro-foreign views, quarrelled with the Imperial Court and was degraded. He himself went to Hong Kong, and he sent his daughter to America for a time, with his relative the newly-appointed Chinese Minister to Washington. Subsequently he was restored to favour, but at the present time, I understand, he is again under suspicion. Both the Boxers and the Empress-Dowager regard him with mistrust, and as yet he has held aloof and refrained from throwing his influence into the scales either for or against the conspiracy to drive the foreigners out of the Empire. When you saw him that afternoon he had just returned, by Imperial command, from his summer residence. The attempt on his life looks as if the true side of him had been unmasked—as if the Boxers had good reason to fear and hate him.”

“What else *could* it mean?” asked Dan. “It was Li Sheng who fired that shot, right enough. I hope I’ll get a chance to put a bullet through him some day.”

“I should enjoy doing that myself,” replied Alec. “The Tiger is a good name for

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him, for he looked just like one when Kin Soon spoilt his little game."

"Heaven grant that you never come within reach of his teeth and claws!" said Mr. Killigrew, gravely. "We have not heard the last of Li"; which was a true prophesy.

The above conversation occurred a day or two after Alec's arrival at the Legation, and with that we will pass on to the exciting 13th of June. No one anticipated any immediate danger, so that the consternation and alarm were all the greater when the storm actually broke. Late in the afternoon, a cry spreading that the Boxers were coming down from the north of the city, every man hurried to his post and a cordon was established round the Legation quarter, while the approaches to the different streets were commanded by machine-guns.

It was not a false report. Come the Boxers did, in strong, organized force, and when darkness fell their devilish work was in full swing. Awful yells of "Sha! Sha!" demoniacal and unforgettable, mingled with the shrieks of native Christians who were being sought out and butchered in their homes. Above the tumult sounded the

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hoarse blare of the Chinese bugle, which seemed to scream :

“Murrrr-der ! Murrrr-der ! Murrrr-der !”

#### IV

### *A Race with Death*

COLUMNS of flame and smoke, myriads of sparks, lit up the sky as the torch was applied, one after another, to the chapel of the Methodist Mission, the East Cathedral, the old Greek Church, the American Board Mission, the Imperial Maritimes Customs, and to numerous other buildings.

Though the frenzied hordes had everything their own way on the outskirts of the foreign quarter, that district was not molested until late in the night. Then a large party of Boxers poured down Customs Street towards the Austrian Legation, which was hastily reinforced by a dozen men of Thornhill's Roughs, the number including Alec and Dan.

The enemy came on ten and twelve deep, with rows of torches, but when volley after

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volley crashed, and the machine-guns swept the street, the lights were wiped out and the yelling ruffians disappeared as if by magic. No further attack being apprehended, the squad of "Roughs" marched back to their own command.

About that time, when sword and fire were doing their worst in the Tartar City, two marine sentries, on duty between the British and Russian Legations, met as they paced their respective beats. William Cocket of Whitechapel, London, and Nicolas Khilkaroff of Moscow, had, during the past fortnight, struck up a fraternal comradeship, based on a common hatred of "Pigtails" and a mutual thirst for loot in the glorious days that they trusted were coming.

"No fun fur us to-night, old Nick Killem-off," said Cocket, who had thus nicknamed his chum. "We're out of it all, eh?"

"They will to be shot come another day, these devils of yellow skin," replied the Russian; his English resembled that of a Calcutta baboo. "But listen you, my friend Bill," he added. "What is that?"

Footsteps were padding quickly across the



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darkness of the Mongol Market, and a dusky figure loomed up before the eyes of the sentries just as Alec and Dan, with their companions, approached from the left, patrolling towards the British Legation.

Two rifles were levelled, and two hammers clicked sharply as the sentries called out the challenge. The reply was inarticulate.

"It's a Pigtail," said Cocket, as he peered into the gloom, "an' 'e's limpin' along with 'is 'ands above 'is 'ead. 'E can't do no 'arm—I dessay 'e's one of them yellow Christyuns."

"Then we will shoot him not," declared Killehoff, lowering his gun.

An instant later the man staggered up to the curious, waiting group, falling in an exhausted state at their feet. There was blood on his face and clothing.

"Save my young mistress!" he screamed out hoarsely, in the native tongue.

"Who is in danger, my good fellow?" demanded Alec, who had caught the words. "Speak plainly."

"The Princess Loo-Lao," was the husky, almost inaudible reply. "The cherished

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daughter of my master Prince Lan. Save her, kind people!"

The Princess of the Purple Palace in danger! What did it mean? The explanation was doubtless to be found in Mr. Kilgrew's statement, and as Alec remembered that, and recalled the pretty, innocent face that had smiled from the carriage window, his heart filled with rage and pity.

"Tell us all, quick!" he cried in the Mandarin dialect, as he helped the messenger to his feet.

The man had to be held up; his breath was spent, and he was bleeding from a severe cut on the scalp. But a long pull at a pocket flask, which was thoughtfully handed to him by Bill Cocket, seemed to instantly renew his strength and vitality.

"I am Tai Ling, the trusted servant of Prince Lan," he said to Alec, "and when my master was unexpectedly summoned this evening to a secret audience with the Emperor, he told me that if he had not returned within three hours I was on no account to fail to take the Princess Loo-Lao to the shelter of the American Legation. But alas, when the prince came not, and the time was

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spent, there were Boxers lurking out in the street, and I even saw several admitted to the courtyard by traitors from within. I hastened to the apartments of the princess, and the way was mockingly barred to me by my fellow-servants. Then, having escaped from the palace, I was pursued and wounded as I fled thither to appeal for help. Let me not ask it in vain, honoured sir."

Tai Ling's excited speech suggested a deep-laid plot against Prince Lan and his daughter, and that the tale was a truthful one Alec did not doubt. He alone of those present understood the native tongue fluently, and in a few words he made the situation clear to his companions.

"I fear we can do nothing," said Lieutenant Blount, a young English officer, who had just come upon the scene. "It would be rushing to certain death—you can see and hear for yourselves." He pointed in the direction of Prince Lan's palace, where the sky was lurid with flame-shot smoke, while yells of rage told that the Boxers were still searching for victims.

"It will soon be too late," cried Tai Ling. "Is my cherished mistress to be carried off

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by these evil dogs? Will none lift a hand to save her?"

"Who will help me to rescue the girl?" cried Alec, vowing that no harm should befall her if he could prevent it. "Who volunteers?"

Dan was the first to respond, and the others cried out in chorus; there was not a dissentient voice.

"You're a plucky lot," declared Lieutenant Blount, "By Jove, I'll go with you, though the whole thing is against orders. Come along, my brave chaps. There is not a moment to lose."

With no thought but for the imperilled girl who was at the mercy of designing Boxers, heedless of the ravening foe who swarmed outside of the Legation quarter, the gallant little band of thirteen sped across the Mongol Market at the heels of Tai Ling, who had been armed with a cutlass. And as they disappeared in the darkness, enviously gazed after by Cocket and Killemoff, a running, breathless figure approached the two sentries. It was the faithful Kin Soon, who had recognized Alec's voice from a distance.

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"Where is my young master?" he cried.

"If 'e's with that lot yonder," replied Cocket, "'e's gone a-rescuin' of the Princess Lu-Lu-lu, or wotever 'er name is."

"I must follow him. Let me pass."

"No you don't," forbade Cocket. 'Ere, none of your games. Back you go, Pigtail, or I'll give you a taste of cold steel. 'Ear me?"

And poor Kin Soon, after threats, strategy, and entreaties had alike failed him, was obliged to abandon his desire. He retreated slowly, with tears in his eyes and his heart swollen with wrath and sorrow.

Meanwhile Tai Ling led the way shrewdly, by the safest if not the nearest route, and as he and his companions hurried on it became evident that the space between them and Prince Lan's residence was for the moment comparatively free from rebels. The murderous clamour was still at a distance.

"It looks as if we might pull the thing off," Lieutenant Blount declared hopefully. "Faster, men."

"Dan, I'm sorry you came," Alec said, as he uneasily remembered the responsibility he had incurred by calling for volunteers.

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"It's a dangerous business. Go back, for your mother's sake."

"Not if I know it," Dan replied, indignantly. "Do you want to brand me as a coward?"

There was no answer to this question, and the lads went on in silence. The glare from a distant burning building was reflected on the rescue-party as they dashed through a street to the eastward of the Mongol Market, and then, wheeling sharply round a corner, they saw the Purple Palace directly in front of them. So far they had advanced unseen, but now discovery and fighting were inevitable, for by the open gateway were massed at least two score of Boxers—the genuine type of fanatic—with consecrated headpieces and red sashes, wearing talismans of yellow paper to render them invulnerable to bullets.

"Give them a volley at close quarters," ordered Lieutenant Blount, "and then let them have the cold steel. That ought to clear the way for us."

Even as he spoke, and before the "foreign devils" had been seen, a strange panic seized the Boxers. With warning cries they bolted

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into the courtyard and closed the gates. Supposing themselves to be the cause of the fright the lieutenant's party ran forward to storm the main entrance, and as they reached the wall they were startled to see, advancing quickly towards them from the direction of the Imperial Board of Office, a body of Chinese soldiers. They were regular, uniformed troops, led by an officer in a Mandarin hat.

Lieutenant Blount bade his men keep cool and hold their ground. He did not like the situation, but he had hopes—since he supposed the newcomers to be on a similar errand—that trouble could be averted.

"You must explain to these chaps that we want to help them to rescue the princess," he said to Alec. "But first ask your heathen friend if he thinks it will be all right."

However, Tai Ling did not wait for the question to be put.

"All is lost!" he cried. "The Imperial soldiers also are seeking to carry off my young mistress."

"But the Boxers have fled from them in terror," exclaimed Alec. "What does it mean, Tai Ling?"

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As he spoke a shrill word of command rang out, and the front rank of the Chinese troops suddenly levelled their rifles and discharged a sheet of flame. The lieutenant was hit in the arm, and one of his men fell dead. The others after returning the fire with a straggling volley, began a rapid and disorderly retreat, and at the same moment, the wind having changed, they were enveloped in a murky cloud of smoke from the blazing buildings in the distance.

Alec and Dan kept together, but quickly missed their companions. They groped on blindly for a few yards, the bullets hissing around them, and then Tai Ling loomed alongside from out the haze. He caught an arm of each.

"Come, I will guide you to the rear gate of the palace," he urged, "and we will rescue my young mistress and escape with her to the Legations. Now is the time, for the Boxers in the courtyard will oppose the entrance of the Imperial troops."

Whether or not the plan was feasible the lads did not pause to consider. The thought of saving the princess fired their zeal and courage, and, moreover, they were lost in



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the smoke and darkness and were quite dependent on Tai Ling. So they ran on with him, making several confusing turns, until the tumult and shooting sounded far off. They hardly realized what had happened. The significance of it—the fact that Imperial soldiers had brazenly opened a murderous fire on foreigners from the Legations—was to dawn upon them later.

Tai Ling paused in a gloomy paved alley, about thirty feet wide, hemmed in by lofty walls. A few feet in front, on the left, was a closed gateway.

"This is the place," he said. "But, alas, it may be locked!"

"Then how are we to get in?" asked Alec.

"Hush!" Tai Ling replied warningly, as he drew his companions deeper into the shadow of the wall. The sound of near-by voices had called forth the caution, and the next instant the gate was flung wide open, and with a clatter of wheels and hoofs, to the accompaniment of a snapping whip, a mule-cart rolled into the alley and swung to the left.

A couple of flaring torches shed light from

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the palace enclosure, and one brief glance, as the vehicle turned directly in front of them, revealed the truth to the startled lads. Two armed Boxers were driving from the fore-end of the cart, and on the floor behind them sat a third, keeping guard over a shapeless object covered with a satin curtain, from the edge of which peeped a tiny foot, encased in a jeweled slipper.

"They've got the princess there!" gasped Alec.

A scream of rage that was scarcely human burst from Tai Ling's lips, as he made a bound forward and overtook the cart. As quickly—he dared not strike for fear of injuring the girl—he had seized the Boxer on the floor by his coiled pigtail and jerked him forcibly to the ground, where with a single thrust of the cutlass he despatched the unhappy wretch.

The lads witnessed the bloody deed. They heard a shrill tumult and a rush of feet from within the palace court, and saw the cart gaining speed as the two Boxers, who thought only of getting away, plied the whip.

Then Dan drew up his rifle and fired, and

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with the loud report the man who was driving let go of the lines and pitched headlong out of the vehicle, which ran over his body. The mule stopped and began to kick, and the remaining Boxer jumped down and ran to the balky animal's head.

Leaping past Tai Ling, who was withdrawing the reeking cutlass from his victim's corpse, both lads sprang into the cart, Dan from the rear, while Alec, slipping round to the front, recovered both lines and whip and scrambled to the seat. At that instant the third Boxer left the mule and turned, revealing the inflamed, tigerish features of Li Sheng. Yelling with rage, and swinging his great broadsword in the air, the Tiger threw himself at the lad.

Alec was taken at a disadvantage, for he had put his rifle down on the seat. But he quickly seized it, at the same time dropping the lines and whip at his feet, and as he made a sharp lunge—he had no chance to aim and fire—he intercepted the deadly blow, and the descending blade struck sparks from the barrel of the gun. Simultaneously the point of the bayonet pierced Li Sheng's right arm above the elbow, and dropping his

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sword he reeled back with a howl of pain. Then, seeing Dan's rifle leveled at him, he promptly took to his heels. There was a flash and a report, and down went the Tiger, pitching in a heap at the base of the wall.

"Hurrah! I hope you've settled him," exclaimed Alec. "And now to get clear with the girl, if we can. You must look after her, Dan."

"I'll do that," Dan shouted. "Wait for Tai Ling, and then drive like fury."

Scarcely a minute had elapsed since the opening of the gate, and that brief period had been crowded so full of dramatic incident and bloodshed that the two plucky young Americans, carried away by impulse and excitement, as yet did not realize their truly terrible plight. Tai Ling, who had meanwhile been set upon by another foe and had killed his man, now overtook the cart. But when he saw Alec lashing the mule without effect, and at the same moment discovered no less than a dozen Boxers swarming out of the palace court, he instantly turned back. Alone, armed only with his reeking cutlass, he confronted the screeching band of ruffians.

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The gallant fellow, this hero with a heathen soul and yellow skin, was evidently determined to sacrifice himself, to yield his life for his master's daughter, in the hope that while he checked the pursuers Alec might conquer the mule's obstinacy.

"Come, Tai Ling, quick!" the lads called after him. "You will be killed."

"Go! go!" he cried hoarsely. "Do not wait. Save my young mistress!"

Further entreaty proved vain, brought no response. The Boxers sprang to the attack like ravenous beasts, there was a ringing and clashing of steel, an inferno of frenzied yells mingled with cries of mortal agony. Then the human wave rolled on—it was all over with Tai Ling.

But his heroism was not wasted. As the brave Chinaman's life went out, and bloody feet trampled his body, the mule suddenly started and off went the cart, swept at a gallop down the narrow passage, in the only direction in which it was possible to go—straight away from the Legation quarter. Above the rumble and clatter rang the cries of the Boxers, as they pressed in hot pursuit. From some distance to the left a crashing,

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thunderous sound indicated that the Imperial troops were storming the main gateway of the Purple Palace.

V

*A Queer Hiding-Place*

CUT off from friends and shelter, completely encircled by foes who would show no mercy, impelled helplessly onward into the very jaws of death—no more disheartening prospect could well have faced the two lads. And they were not blind to their danger; in the chilling moment of reaction, while they gained on their pursuers, they understood what their daring feat was certain to cost them, unless as by a miracle some means of escape should arise.

"It's all up with us, old fellow," Dan exclaimed hoarsely. "Directly we come yonder, into the open—"

"Yes, I know," Alec interrupted. "How about the girl?—she is not dead?"

"Her face is warm, and she is breathing," Dan replied, as he partly lifted the covering. "Those scoundrels must have drugged her

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to make her unconscious. I say, do you think there is *any* chance for us?"

"I've got two in my mind, but the odds are a thousand to one against either of them."

"What are they?"

Alec did not answer. His teeth were set hard, and his eyes fixed ahead, as he tugged at the guiding lines. The walls flew by in a dizzy blur. The alley suddenly turned to the left, and the fugitives rounded the corner in safety. A minute later, after clattering through a passage on the right—there was no other way—and crossing a little bridge spanning a dry ditch, the cart swung out into a spacious square and emerged from the closely-built government quarter into the open heart of the capital.

From the clouds of smoke that rolled overhead a faint red glare was reflected on the vast enclosure. Torches, flashing in all directions, showed scattered groups of people, and from far and near the night echoed to the clamour of blood-seeking ruffians. Immediately on the right was one of the magnificent gateways that gave access to the Imperial Palace and the Forbidden City. A



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little to the left a tall triumphal arch marked the western end of Legation Street, and some hundred of yards beyond, where the imposing Chien Men gate reared itself darkly, a great avenue ran parallel with the south wall of the Tartar City.

Alec had his bearings, and he never faltered. The thought of seeking refuge at the portals of the Imperial Palace crossed his mind and was as quickly rejected, as he remembered Tai Ling's words.

"Now for it!" he cried. "Guard the rear, Dan, and stick tight."

So the dash for life began, and the story of it will find thrilled and eager listeners, in years to come, wherever men talk of the historic siege of Peking. The impudent boldness and daring of the deed were in its favour and at first, as the cart swerved to the left and bore down the east side of the square, those persons nearest to it were speechless and incredulous—struck dumb by the fleeting glimpse of the young American, his shoulders flung back and his feet braced, holding loose reins in one hand while with the other he plied the whip. Then the alarm came, bawled lustily by Imperial sen-

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tries at the palace gate, and caught up by bystanders here and there. In every direction, from throat to throat, spread the hoarse tumult.

Dan's heart seemed to be in his mouth as he gripped his rifle. With a steady rattle and rumble, swaying and jolting, the cart plunged on. The mule, kept at a mad gallop by the smarting rain of blows, struck showers of sparks from the paving-stones.

Could he do it? Even as Alec asked himself the question one chance faded and vanished. From the triumphal arch just ahead, through which he had hoped to turn into Legation Street, poured a noisy crowd of Boxers. They instantly ran at the cart, which whizzed by them as it left the arch behind.

"Here they come," cried Dan, "but they'll have to do some sprinting to catch us."

One chance was left, and to take the most advantage of it needed all Alec's nerve and daring. Hard and quick fell the strokes of the whip. A howling mob was in the rear, and from right and from left fresh foes sprang at the tearing vehicle. A bugle blared its murderous note, and a couple of firearms were

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discharged. Dan's rifle spoke shrilly, and one of the nearest pursuers dropped in his tracks. A Boxer leaped towards Alec with drawn sword, and a blinding cut from the whip sent him reeling back. Two more, who threw themselves recklessly at the mule's head, were knocked down and crushed beneath the iron-shod hoofs and wheels.

One hundred and fifty yards were covered—two hundred. Now was the critical moment. Close in front, on the left, was the mouth of the thoroughfare by which the fugitives might reach the Legation quarter. But that hope too was to fail, for the first glance into the avenue showed it to be choked from wall to wall with a horde of Boxers who were advancing towards the square, shouting and waving torches as they came. A bitter cry was forced to Alec's lips, and then, in that instant of black despair, he made a discovery that offered at least a reprieve from death. For the great Chien Men gate, doubtless opened to facilitate the night's bloody work, yawned wide and inviting.

"Keep low," cried Alec, "and hold fast for your life!"

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The mule, jerked first to right and then to left, galloped straight on. Through the lofty archways plunged the cart, scattering a group of yelling foes who barred the way at the outer gate, and jolting over some of them as it passed from the Tartar City to the Chinese town.

Behind swelled the hue and cry, and in front lay as yet silence and darkness. For a quarter of a mile, due south, Alec drove at full speed down the lonely avenue. Then he swerved eastward into a narrow street, which, several hundred yards farther on, made a sharp turn. Here the cart scraped on one wheel and instantly capsized, throwing its occupants over a low embankment. The mule, after dragging the vehicle a short distance, broke the traces and vanished with a thudding of hoofs.

The two lads were unhurt, and as far as they could tell the Princess Loo-Lao had also escaped injury, though she remained in an unconscious state. By the dim light it could be seen that the fugitives had been hurled into the bed of a canal, which was partly dried up. In the middle of the ditch a dull glimmering sheet of water stretched

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north and south, reflecting the tall outlines of buildings that rose darkly on either side.

"There is no one about," said Alec. "Quick, we must find a hiding-place. Where are the rifles?"

Dan found one lying close by, and the other, which was probably in the cart, was abandoned. Without delay the lads set off to the southward along the dry, sandy verge of the canal, Alec carrying the slim figure of the girl in his arms. They had gone a hundred yards or more, and the clamour of pursuit was swelling louder in the rear, when Dan, who was several feet in advance, uttered a low, eager exclamation. At the same instant, from one side, came an alarming sound.

A narrow cross-channel, penetrating for an invisible distance into the dusky mass of houses, branched off to the right of the canal. It was this discovery, with its suggestion of shelter, that prompted Dan's exclamation, and it was from here that a snarling dog, with open jaws and bristling hair, rushed suddenly out. It was evidently a scavenger cur, of the kind that abounds in Pekin, and in a double sense its bark

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was likely to be more dangerous than its bite.

Dan reversed his rifle and aimed a swinging blow, but to his chagrin he merely grazed the animal's foreshoulder, and sent it yelping back whence it came.

"We can't venture in there now," he said.

"We must," Alec replied. "It's the only chance."

He was right, for both in front and rear, so quickly had the alarm spread, torches were flashing from the bed of the canal. At once the lads turned into the cross-cutting, and in thick darkness groped their way along a path made of slabs of stone eighteen inches wide, which, being fortunately dry, retained no telltale marks. High walls rose on either side, and in the middle lay the strip of stagnant, foul-smelling water.

For thirty or forty yards the fugitives crept on, and then the dog, who had been retreating before them, and turning from time to time to utter a savage growl, suddenly made a leap at a clump of bushes and vanished. The mystery was soon explained, for the bushes, which grew at the base of the wall, concealed a jagged hole in the

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masonry. It was a doubtful and uncertain refuge, but no better was likely to be found.

"In with you, quick!" said Alec.

It was a tight squeeze for Dan and a tighter one for Alec, who followed after his companion had drawn the girl through. On the inner side of the wall was a floor of earth, and when the lads tried to stand erect they struck their heads. All was darkness except a murky grey patch some distance off, and this probably accounted for the disappearance of the dog, who could no longer be heard.

"I believe we are in a cellar," said Dan. "I should like to have a look round, but of course it won't do to strike a light."

"Hush!" Alec whispered. "You don't know who may hear us. And listen—those human bloodhounds are coming near."

As he spoke he looked cautiously out, and his feet struck a heap of loose stones which had fallen from the decayed wall. A shrewd idea instantly occurred to him, and with feverish haste he fitted the stones into the gap, one by one, until it was half blocked up.

The task was finished barely in time. From

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the canal, where they had been checked for a moment, the pursuers turned unerringly into the side channel. Filling the narrow ditch from wall to wall, pattering over the flagstones and splashing through the shallow water, they swept on with fiendish cries. The two lads scarcely dared to hope, as they crouched in front of the still unconscious girl. They heard the bloodthirsty threats of the Boxers, and saw overhead the lurid, flashing glare from the passing torches. It seemed impossible that they could escape discovery and death.

The ordeal lasted fully half an hour. To and fro, backward and forward, surged the ravenous pack, examining every nook and cranny, and lighting up every inch of the walls. Twice they pulled aside the bushes and revealed the hole, but never dreamed that their prey could have crept through so small a space. And in the end they reluctantly departed to seek elsewhere for the foreign devils, and the hue and cry faded until it was lost with other distant sounds of the Chinese City.

"Gone at last," said Dan. "They may return, but for the present we have a breathing



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spell. What will become of us, I wonder? Of course they believe us dead at the Legations."

"Later on we'll show them that we are very much alive," replied Alec. "Cheer up. Things might be worse, you know. As soon as it is daylight we'll have a look about, and if it is safe to stop on here until night comes again, I'll try to reach Chow Yen's house and bring back a supply of food. And he will be sure to suggest some good plan."

"That sounds all right," said Dan. "You put fresh courage into me, old fellow. I shouldn't mind if only my people knew that we had escaped."

Alec made the cheering suggestion that Chow Yen might get word to the Legations, and finally, reassured by the unbroken silence of their surroundings, both lads fell asleep on the damp floor, beside the little princess for whose sake they had braved such frightful perils.

They woke to find the sun shining, and the light revealed to them what they had suspected—that they were in a narrow space underneath the floor of a building. Alec

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took a cautious peep up and down the canal artery, and then crept to the other hole in the masonry, which looked in an opposite direction. From it he saw a paved courtyard hemmed in by blank walls, and at the far end an exit that turned sharply to the left.

"I haven't heard a sound overhead, so there can't be any people living there," Alec said to his companion. "From what I know of the neighbourhood I think it likely that we are under some merchant's warehouse."

"It would be a fine place to hide, if we could get in," said Dan.

"That is what we must do, for it really won't be safe to stop here. The dog may return and start a row, and it's ten to one the Boxers will come back to search the vicinity by daylight."

Just then Princess Loo-Lao stirred and opened her eyes. She had shaken off the curtain in which Alec had wrapped her, and from her dress it was evident she had been seized by the kidnappers before retiring for the night. She wore a long outer robe, richly embroidered, and confined at the waist by a stomacher of gold filigree. It reached almost to her slippers, which were studded with

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pearls. With her fair complexion and regular features she was very pretty, judged either by an Oriental or European standard.

"My father! Oh, my father!"

Those were her first words, spoken in English. She was clearly familiar with that tongue, and Dan, whom she recognized, told her briefly what had happened while she was unconscious. She listened eagerly, with dread and wonder growing in her dark eyes.

"How brave you were!" she said. "My father shall reward you as you deserve. But alas, he has been taken from me! It was a false and lying message that summoned him to the palace—he is in the power of the wicked Empress-Dowager, who hates and fears him. I must go to the Emperor and tell him of my father's danger. Take me, I implore you, to the gates of the Forbidden City."

The lads exchanged perplexed glances.

"You shall see your father again," Dan replied, "but first we must all try to reach the shelter of the Legations, and that can be done only by night."

The girl made no answer. Already she

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had lapsed into an indifferent, dreamy mood, and lay with half-closed eyes. The effects of the potent drug had by no means passed off, and her senses were clouded again.

"That's a relief," whispered Dan. "It will be all the better if she don't pull round in a hurry."

Alec laughed grimly. "I wonder," he said, "if two chaps were ever in such a fix as we are. A Chinese princess on our hands—it's a rum go! But we must face it. And now to find safer quarters."

This was accomplished with less difficulty than was anticipated. A thorough tapping of the floor overhead discovered a loose board, by means of which the lads, after a careful reconnoitering, climbed into a large, dimly-lit room. It was a warehouse belonging to some prosperous tradesman, and along the wall were piled bales of silks, satins and brocades, wrapped in paper and sacking. Several tiny windows near the ceiling admitted light, and at the end next the court were double doors locked on the outside.

"The man who owns this must have a shop close by, on the street," said Alec. "I

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don't believe he comes here very often, but we will take precautions against a visit."

An empty box, standing just where it was wanted, enabled the lads to reach the top of the merchandise, which, on the outer side, was packed very close and tight, and stacked to a height of eight feet. But it was at least three feet lower in the rear, thus forming, in the corner of the warehouse, a square, empty space that was invisible from below. On two sides was the bare wall, and on the other two were low ramparts of silks and satins.

"This is what I call luck," said Dan.

"Yes, it's as snug a place as we could wish for," Alec replied.

The depth was further increased by lifting the two top layers of bales, out of which was built a barrier that provided a separate apartment, so to speak. Without delay the Princess Loo-Lao was brought here—it was not easy to rouse her—and in a pretty, lisping voice she thanked her young protectors for their thoughtfulness. She soon fell into a sound sleep, and her companions settled themselves to wait with what patience they could summon for the coming of night.

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"We are safe enough, as far as the Boxers are concerned," said Alec. "If they search under the building, and find our footprints on the soft earth, they will suppose that we escaped by way of the court."

The Boxers did not come, though as the day wore on—it was the 14th of June—a distant clamour was heard at intervals, and several times a dog barked in the vicinity of the warehouse. The sharp pangs of hunger and thirst, anxiety on their own account and for the safety of the Legations, made the hours drag slowly by and kept the lads awake. In the afternoon they detected a strong smell of something burning, and from one of the near-by slits in the wall, which they reached by climbing over the bales, they were able to see above the tops of the adjacent buildings. The view was to the northwest, and in that direction—considerably to the left of the Legation quarter—the sky was obscured by volumes of black and yellow smoke. The conflagration was still raging when darkness fell, and not until towards midnight, as nearly as could be judged, did the crimson glare cease to play on the walls and ceiling of the warehouse.

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"I'm off now, old fellow," Alec then said.  
"And quite time, too."

"Better take me with you," urged Dan.

"No, that won't do. The girl must not be left alone, and besides it will be easier for one to get through than for two. Don't worry. I shan't be gone long."

"You'll be awfully careful? And don't forget the rifle."

"I will be safer without that," Alec replied. "It might attract attention if a light flashed on it."

He spoke cheerfully, but his heart was heavy as, after a few parting words of advice, he lowered himself to the floor and thence to the space under the building, which gave him speedy access to the courtyard. The task he was about to undertake bristled with perils, though fortunately the distance to be traveled was not very great, and at this hour the Chinese City was comparatively quiet. The canal by which the fugitives had eluded their pursuers was not the same that had helped Kin Soon on a previous occasion. It lay a quarter of a mile to the east of the Grand Avenue, and that central thoroughfare had to be crossed before Alec could

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reach Chow Yen's house in the Street of the Booksellers.

"I *must* succeed," he vowed, as he crept out of the dark court. "If anything happens to me what will become of Dan and the little princess?"

Equally trying, perhaps, was the lot that fell to Dan. While the girl slept peacefully on he crouched among the bales, waiting with keenest anxiety for his friend's return, and depressed by all sorts of fears. The minutes wore heavily by, nor was he far wrong when he guessed that they had grown to several hours.

"It must be nearly morning," he told himself. "Poor old Alec! I'm afraid he has been caught and killed. Or perhaps he has lost his way and is wandering about. I can't stand this much longer. If he don't soon come I'll venture out to look for him."

But happily the trying vigil was nearly over. Five minutes later, with a slight creaking, the loose plank in the floor was forced upward.

"All right!" came Alec's familiar voice. There was a gurgling, clinking noise as he climbed over the bales to his companion's



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side. "Luck's the word," he said. "I had to make a detour going and returning, or I should have been here long ago. I've got two bottles of water, and food to last for twenty-four hours. And good old Chow Yen is coming here after dark to-morrow night. He will bring disguises for the three of us, so that we can safely cross the city to the Legations. The princess must be rigged out as a boy. And another thing—Chow Yen will try to get a message through at once to your father."

"Hurrah! You've done splendidly!" exclaimed Dan. "And what is the news?"

"Bad enough. The Legations have not been attacked again, but this afternoon the Boxers massacred thousands of native Christians and destroyed acres of houses in the neighbourhood of the South Cathedral; that was the fire we saw. And the Imperial authorities have put a price on our heads. I mean on yours and mine; the princess is to be taken alive. Both soldiers and Boxers are searching for us, but fortunately they believe that we pushed on to the end of the ditch and found shelter in another part of the town."

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"A price on our heads! That sounds pleasant," muttered Dan. "Can Chow Yen find his way here?"

"Yes, he knew the place by my description of it," Alec replied. "The warehouse belongs to a wealthy silk merchant named Sam Wong, and his shop is just beyond the court. Chow Yen tells me that he is a miserly sort of a chap, so he wouldn't hesitate to earn that reward if he got the chance."

"Is he a Boxer?"

"I don't think so. But I say, I'm forgetting that you and the princess must be nearly starved. I've had my fill, and while you are eating I'll spin you the tale of my adventures in crossing the city. Waken little Miss Peach Blossom, Dan, and we'll cheer her up with the good news."

## VI

### *Betrayed*

THE dawn of the 15th of June was gladly welcomed by the young refugees in Sam Wong's warehouse, and they counted the hours that must elapse before they could expect Chow Yen, by whose aid they hoped to safely reach the Legations under cover of darkness ; and he had furthermore offered to hide them in his house if, as was not unlikely, they should find the gates closed between the Chinese and Tartar cities.

The Princess Loo-Lao, now that the somniferous effects of the drug had worn off, was quite another person. She chatted with her companions, and surprised them by the fortitude and pluck with which she accepted the terrible misfortune—the heart-rending grief—that had come upon her. But she could not speak without tears of her father,

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and the slightest allusion to her abduction from the palace brought a look of horror to her eyes ; so the lads were reluctant to question her too closely, and for the present no fresh light was thrown on the mysterious disappearance of Prince Lan and the attempt to carry off his daughter.

The day passed quickly and without alarm, Dan and Alec sleeping through the greater part of it, while the little princess kept vigilant watch. And when evening approached again, and the light faded from the gloomy building, the three waited confidently for Chow Yen.

But a bitter disappointment was in store for them. Hour grew to hour, and the old bookseller did not come. The night wore on slowly and painfully, morning drew near, and still he had not arrived. Twice Alec ventured out to look for him, and when he returned the second time the dawn was breaking.

"It's no use to expect him now," said Dan. "Something has happened."

"Yes ; he may have been taken ill," Alec assented. "It must be that," he added, in a tone of forced confidence, "or else he

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couldn't find the way. We won't worry about it. As soon as it is dark again I will go to his house and fetch the disguises."

There was nothing to do but to wait as patiently and hopefully as possible, and for the sake of their companion both lads assumed a cheerfulness that they were far from feeling, for well they knew that Chow Yen's aid was no longer to be relied upon. The food and water had been used sparingly, so that enough was left for another day. Loo-Lao slept after breakfast, and about the middle of the morning her protectors, worn out by the night-long vigil and by harassing anxiety, fell also into a heavy slumber.

Late on the afternoon of the 16th a sharp cry woke the lads simultaneously, and they sat up to find the warehouse hazy with pungent smoke—to see the frightened face of the princess looking at them over the silken barrier. A dull, throbbing noise filled their ears, and a lurid glow was reflected on the ceiling.

"It's another fire!" exclaimed Dan.

They climbed hastily to the nearest window-slit, and their courage was hardly proof

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against the terrible sight that met their gaze. The limited vista to the north showed an unbroken sheet of flame and smoke, spangled with myriads of sparks, flecked with burning brands and cinders, and shooting up every few seconds into waves of blue, purple and green fire. Nearby houses were blazing furiously, and the conflagration extended right and left as far as could be seen.

The steady roar of the devouring element, the crash of falling walls, the dull noise of frequent explosions, the hoarse cries of thousands of people and the rush of thousands of feet—all blended in such an awful inferno of sound as no words can describe.

"The Boxers again," said Alec. "I believe the entire native city is burning."

"We shall soon be driven out of here," Dan replied. "Where can we go next?"

Where, indeed? There was no answer to the question, and Loo-Lao read the mute despair in the faces of the lads when they returned to her.

"I am not afraid to die," she spoke heroically, "but, for my father's sake, I desire life. You will save me? Promise!"

Alec looked at her with admiration. "We

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will save you," he answered. "There *must* be a way."

"It means certain death," said Dan, huskily, "to venture out. And it is death to remain where we are."

He was right. While Alec with knitted brows and anxious face, pondered what could be done in this terrible extremity, the situation grew rapidly from bad to worse. The roar and tumult increased. The angry flames, fanned by a breeze, swept nearer and nearer. They licked the walls of the warehouse, and lurid, forked tongues were darted through the farthest window-slits. The interior, as the hot, stifling smoke hung in wreaths and billows, was already like a furnace. The heat became unbearable, and showers of sparks danced in the shimmering atmosphere. Dan brushed several from the girl's brocaded gown, and she clung to him with a choking, hysterical sob.

"Another minute will suffocate us," cried Alec. "Let us try the ditch—creep through the water to the canal."

"Come on!" Dan exclaimed. "Any end but by fire. And I've got a few shots for the first ruffians who molest us."

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But they had delayed too long ; it was too late for flight. That slim hope was suddenly frustrated by an interruption which, strangely enough, they had taken no reckoning of. There was a noisy rattle of wheels and drumming of hoofs in the courtyard, followed by the clanging of an iron bar on the flagstones. Then the double doors of the warehouse were torn open, and a middle-aged Chinaman appeared on the threshold. Like a ravenous bird he clawed with long-nailed fingers at the nearest pile of silks and satins, and the foundations, pulled out at the first frantic assault, suddenly let down an avalanche of bales from the top.

Loo-Lao and her companions, their retreat thus laid bare, were exposed to plain view. And the next instant, as the rear wall of goods crumbled and fell with their overbalancing weight, the three were flung uncere- moniously to the floor.

If they themselves were startled by the swift misfortune that had destroyed their hopes of escaping unseen to the ditch, the silk merchant—for such his dress proclaimed him to be—was equally frightened by his discovery. He stood rooted to the spot, his



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teeth chattering and his face turning to a sickly grey hue, while the lads rose to their feet and confronted him. The princess lay trembling beneath a couple of bales that had fallen lightly upon her. Through the open door a large cart was visible, and a second Chinaman, doubtless a servant, was staring with dilated eyes into the warehouse, from his post at the heads of the two mules that were harnessed to the vehicle.

"Kill the foreign devils, master!" he shouted. "Slay them, and gain the reward!"

This broke the spell of inaction—ended the brief moment of silence. The merchant whipped an ugly-looking knife from his waist, but as quickly, finding himself covered by Dan's rifle, his hand fell to his side, and he begged the lad not to shoot.

Alec struck up the barrel of the levelled weapon. "We are not going to harm you, Sam Wong," he cried. "We want to talk to you sensibly, but first drop that knife."

Sam Wong obeyed, and just then his servant attempted to slip off in order to fetch assistance. He did not get far, for Dan drew a bead on him from the doorway, and with a scowl and a curse the baffled fel-

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low came back to the mules, who were plunging and snorting with terror.

"This is not a time to talk!" Sam Wong exclaimed hoarsely. "Alas, I am a ruined man! The fire is nearly upon us, and soon it will be too late to save any of my goods. I might have rescued them all, but my cowardly clerks have fled and deserted me. Hinder me no longer. Go where you will—I shall not molest you."

"That is not enough," said Alec. "Tell me, is there a route open to the Tartar City?"

"Yes, by the Ha-ta Men gate," was the reply.

"Then listen, Sam Wong. You can take but one load from the warehouse. You must conceal us beneath the goods in the bottom of the cart, and drive to the foreign Legations. Name your own price."

"That's the way to work it!" Dan cried eagerly. "Offer him any amount. My father will see that it is found."

But Sam Wong shook his head. "It is impossible," he replied.

"You can do it easily and none will suspect," protested Alec. "Five hundred taels reward is offered for each of us—1,500 in

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all. Very well, you shall have 2,000 taels if you take us safely to the Legations. The sum will be paid. Have no fear of that. And you and your goods will be safe."

"Safe!" sneered Sam Wong. "Safe in the Legations? In a day or two the quarter of the foreign devils will be razed to the ground—not one stone will be left standing upon another."

"Don't you believe it," said Alec. "That is a fool's tale. The Legations can hold out for a year, if they like. But there is no need of that. Within a week they will be relieved by 20,000 soldiers from Tientsin. They are on the way now—they will surely come. The Boxers know that, and so they are making haste to do all the damage they can while they have the chance."

This was a bold stroke, and Sam Wong plainly wavered. The Princess Loo-Lao, who had extricated herself from the bales, joined timely in the conversation, and faced the silk merchant with an air of mingled hauteur and entreaty.

"Save us," she begged, "and earn the everlasting gratitude of my father, Prince Lan."

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"I shall lose my head," declared Sam Wong. "As for the prince, it is well known that he is a prisoner in the Imperial Palace—"

"He will shortly be released," interrupted Alec. "By the Emperor's command he was taken away lest the Boxers should kill him. Decide quickly. Did I say 2,000 taels?—you shall have 2,500. And in the evil days that are in store for Peking you will be glad of the friendship and protection of the foreign devils."

Sam Wong's skin had assumed its normal hue, and now his little piggish eyes glittered with greed. It is doubtful if he regarded Prince Lan's gratitude as an asset worth counting upon, but as for the rest, he was shrewd enough to foresee the possible overthrow of the Boxer crusade, and the offer that had been made to him possessed a double advantage. He had meant to follow the fugitives, and earn the government reward, but wiser counsels prompted him to restore them to their friends. With equal shrewdness he judged that the money in question would be paid.

"I will take the risk," he said. "For 2,500 taels I will drive you to the Legations."

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"Swear that you will not betray us," demanded Alec.

"I swear by the bones of my honoured ancestors. You can trust me fully."

"And your servant?"

"Have no fear," was the reply. "Chang will do my bidding. And I will promise him 1,000 taels for himself."

In spite of his confident assertion there was an anxious look in the merchant's eyes as he hurried out to the courtyard to explain matters; but the man Chang, on learning what had been arranged, nodded with evident approval. Sam Wong turned to the lads.

"In with you, quick!" he exclaimed.

It was high time, for the roof of the warehouse was a mass of flames, and cinders and sparks were falling into the yard. The three stretched themselves flat on the roomy bottom of the cart, the princess between her companions, and immediately the bales of silks and satins were piled upon them; there was plenty of air, and the weight did not press heavily.

The load was soon complete, and no whip was needed to start the terrified mules. The

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vehicle rattled noisily over the stones, out into the mad panic and excitement of the crowded street that lay close beyond the warehouse. The young fugitives had entered upon a new phase of their adventures, and one that promised to end as favourably as they could have wished.

"What luck!" said Dan. "I say, you *did* bluff old Sam Wong beautifully about the Boxers. I suppose he is all right?"

"It won't be his fault," was Alec's enigmatical reply, "if he don't land us safely at the Legations."

Loo-Lao was trembling with joy. "You heard?" she whispered to the lads. "My father is still a prisoner—they have spared his life. The Emperor has used his influence."

At this hour—it was now about five o'clock in the afternoon—the conflagration was at its height, and the scenes to be witnessed in the southerly district of Peking were such as no power of the mind can conceive. The Chinese City was given over to terror and chaos. Originating in the foreign drug-store by the north wall, which maddened Boxers had fired without a thought of the

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valuable property they were jeopardizing, the blaze had spread with frightful rapidity from house to house, from street to street, licking up the pearl and jewel shops, the great curio shops, and the district of the silk and fur merchants, ruthlessly devouring the melting-houses, the banks, and the Street of the Booksellers with its priceless treasures. A second fire had started at the end of Legation Street, and the triumphal arch was crumbling to ruins. The imposing temple that crowns the Chien Men gate was a pyramid of flame—was soon to topple to destruction and send its tiles and gables crashing thunderously towards the Imperial Palace.

The cart moved on slowly, by fits and starts, while Sam Wong led the mules and Chang kept guard at the rear. Stoppages were a frequent cause of alarm to the three who nestled under the bales, but they might have spared themselves the least anxiety on that score. The delay was due to the congested traffic, and none gave a thought to the vehicle or its load.

A wide avenue was crossed by dint of perseverance and hard struggling, and from a

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narrow crevice on his side Alec saw, under a wide-spread canopy of lurid smoke, the seething mass of pedestrians jumbled together with mules, horses and ponies. Then came confusing turns and narrower streets, where frantic crowds of people were emerging with their household goods from doors and passages, hastening to join the vast exodus that had already begun from the native city. And over all hung the sullen roar of the flames and the hoarse yelling from thousands of throats.

The pressure was not so great now, and the smoke and sparks were less in evidence. The cart swung round a corner and crept up a familiar thoroughfare. It came to a sudden halt, and for an anxious moment the voices of Sam Wong and his servant were raised in angry altercation. Then the interrupted progress was resumed, and the fugitives breathed freely again.

"How are we getting on?" Dan whispered.

"Famously, old fellow," Alec replied, with his eyes to the crevice. "I recognize the neighbourhood. We are close to the Ha-ta Men gate—we are rolling through it, and



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the people are making way for us. Hurrah, we are inside the Tartar City now! The worst is over."

"And Legation Street is near-by?"

"Yes; a little ahead, on the left."

"Good old Sam Wong—he has earned his money," muttered Dan. "Won't my people be glad to see us!" he added, with a lump in his throat.

And just then, from some cause or other, the mules suddenly took fright and bolted. Away they tore at a gallop, the vehicle jolting and swaying behind them. Alec, watching from the crevice, saw Sam Wong pick himself up from the stones and run alongside. He saw also the eastern end of Legation Street whizz by in a cloud of dust and vanish, and a moment later he was knocked roughly against little Loo-Lao.

The iron-shod hoofs began to beat a confused tattoo. The cart swerved to one side and stopped with a jerk as the runaway mules yielded to control. Above the din and shouting rose two voices—one hoarse and accusing, the other shrilly triumphant.

"What's wrong?" asked Dan.

"I can see soldiers—they wear the Impe-

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

rial uniform," Alec replied, chokingly. "By heavens, that scoundrel Chang has betrayed us!"

He had hardly spoken when the mules were cut loose and a dozen hands turned the cart over on one wheel, tipping the contents lightly out.

It was all done so quickly that Loo-Lao and her companions were sent sprawling on top of the bales almost before they could realize what had happened. A ferocious outcry greeted their discovery, and the next instant they were in the grasp of the seven or eight Imperial soldiers who surrounded the spot and who were responsible for the sudden checking of the vehicle. Dan had kept hold of his rifle, but it was snatched away from him at once, and he and Alec, in spite of desperate struggling, were brutally overpowered by four of their enemies. Another seized the girl, who screamed piteously for help as she was thrown over the ruffian's shoulder.

Chang, the traitor, was to blame for the calamity. Either through fear of detection and punishment, or because of the tempting opportunity that the stoppage of the cart

## *Betrayed*

offered, he had promptly made up his mind to denounce the fugitives and earn the reward. The deed was probably unpremeditated, but none the less he gloried in it.

"Which of us was lying?" he cried, pointing to the master he had betrayed. "Judge for yourselves. Did I not declare the truth?"

Sam Wong could not deny his guilt. Speechless and tremulous, his face grey and twitching, he looked the picture of terror. He turned to run, but two of the soldiers intercepted him and plunged their swords through his body. The unfortunate man fell, and his life blood ebbed on the stones.

"He deserved death," said Chang, contemptuously, "for he would have taken the young foreign devils and the daughter of Prince Lan to the Legations. I have given them into your hands, and the reward is mine. You will bear witness to that."

But the informer was not to taste the fruits of his blood-bought triumph. His hearers mocked him insolently and ridiculed his claim.

"Begone!" they cried. "The reward is ours. Did we not seize the cart? Off

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with you, lest we send you to join your master."

As the threat seemed likely to be carried out, the baffled and justly-punished Chang took to his heels, followed by derisive laughter.

This grim piece of jesting done with, the fate of the prisoners now came up for discussion. The Princess Loo-Lao had swooned in her captor's arms, and Dan and Alec found a ray of comfort in the thought that her life was not in danger. For themselves, they expected to be put immediately to the sword, yet at this terrible moment their courage did not desert them, and save for the ashen hue of their cheeks they showed no sign of fear. But it was hard to die; doubly hard when help and friends were so near, for the disaster had befallen just off the right-hand side of the Ha-ta Men Street, close to the left of which lay the Legation quarter.

"Sha! Sha!" ("kill! kill!") the soldiers clamoured fiercely; and the man in charge of them, a petty officer whose face was hideous from small-pox pits, assented readily enough to the bloodthirsty demand.

"Yes, let the two foreign devils be decapi-

## *Betrayed*

tated," he said, "and we will take their heads to the Military Commandant."

"They are worth more alive," spoke up a voice. "Li Sheng will pay 1,000 taels for each."

"Li Sheng indeed promises that sum, but we might wait for it till the Pei-ho freezes over in mid-summer," replied the officer; "and besides, he would certainly take the girl also, by which we should get into trouble with Tuan."

This argument was effective. The lads were forced to their knees and swords flashed above their heads.

## VII

### *In the Tiger's Clutch*

APPARENTLY their last moment had come, for the word was on the leader's lips, and the keen-edged blades were ready to strike. But they did not fall. A shout rang loudly just then, and one of the party, who had been posted at the nearby corner of Ha-ta Men street, dashed back to his companions.

"The foreign soldier-devils!" he cried. "They are coming up the road—more than a score of them! That fellow who fled from us has given information to the Legations."

Something like a panic seized the yellow ruffians, and at once, abandoning their murderous intentions for the present, they jerked their captives to their feet and made off rapidly at the heels of the officer. It was a reprieve for Alec and Dan, but noth-

## *In the Tiger's Clutch*

ing more. As they were hauled roughly along, by devious turns, the hope that had momentarily lightened their despair faded again from their hearts. And yet an actual chance of rescue, which it was just as well they knew nothing of, narrowly missed them; for at that very time of the afternoon, and in the same district of Pekin, a patrol of American, British and Japanese troops were searching for native fugitives.

It was through the East City—as the southerly part of the Tartar City is called—that the lads were hurriedly taken. Here the isolated fires had raged on the terrible night of the 13th, and here, on succeeding days and nights, the Boxers had done terrible work with sword and lance among the native Christians. It was like a city of the dead; there was no sign of life. Those who had escaped the massacre, and were unable to reach the shelter of the Legations, had joined the general exodus from the capital. Shops were deserted and houses empty. At nearly every step the bodies of the slain were to be seen, lying in ghastly attitudes.

The rescue party from the Legations might have been a myth so far as any sight

### *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

of it was concerned, but so great was the dread of the "foreign soldier-devils" that the little band of Imperial troops continued their rapid flight for nearly a mile. Then they made a detour back towards Ha-ta-Men Street, and they had crossed a large burnt area, and entered a thoroughfare to the left of it, when fate sprung an unpleasant surprise upon them. While they were yet passing the charred ruins of the American Mission their approach had been observed by a man who was posted at a corner some little distance ahead. His keen eyes spied the prisoners, and without delay he bore word of his discovery to a quarter where he knew it would be eagerly welcomed.

So it happened, several minutes later, that a mob of Boxers poured suddenly from a cross-street. The soldiers, surrounded before they had time to think of flight, opposed by superior numbers, offered little or no resistance. Their leader blustered and threatened in vain; he was pushed roughly about and struck with the flat of a lance. The Princess Loo-Lao was yielded up, and violent hands tore Dan and Alec from their guards.



## *In the Tiger's Clutch*

"Slay the foreign devils!" clamoured the ruffians. "Off with their heads!"

Swords hissed in air, then were reluctantly lowered at the bidding of an authoritative voice. The sound of it, so familiar and so reminiscent of past horrors, seemed to chill the blood of the two lads; nor could they help shrinking when they were brought face to face with their worst enemy—with the man they dreaded most in all Peking. It was indeed Li Sheng, whom they had unfortunately failed to kill, though he bore plain marks of his encounter at the rear gateway of the Purple Palace. Well-named was the Tiger, and the expression that now looked from his bloodshot eyes combined the ferocity of the jungle monarch and the venomous hatred of the serpent.

"So I have you at last," he said, in soft, purring tones. "See, this is your work," pointing to his bandaged head and then to his useless right arm, which he carried in a sling. "They will pain me no longer, these wounds. I shall forget them when I hear your cries of agony and see you writhing in torment. I spared your lives a moment ago, but before I have done with you, before the

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

sun goes down, you will beg for the mercy that would have plunged a dozen swords into your bodies."

With that the Tiger made a sign to his men, and the whole party began to move off at a rapid pace, leaving the baffled and disappointed soldiers to vent their suppressed wrath as they liked.

"The reward that you offered for the foreign devils?" cried the officer. "Surely you will pay it? And you will answer to Tuan for the safety of the girl."

"My word is good," Li Sheng replied. "You shall have the money."

"But when?"

A mocking laugh floated back. The Boxers swept round a corner and hastened on towards a gabled building that stood out prominently at the far end of the street. The day was now drawing to its close, and the sun was low on the horizon. To the southeast the fire was still raging, and the tumult was borne faintly on the breeze.

"Brace up, old fellow," said Alec, as rough hands forced the lads along. "We must try to show these devils how Americans can face death."

### *In the Tiger's Clutch*

"We'll need all our courage," Dan replied hoarsely. "What do you suppose the Tiger intends to do with us?"

The question was speedily answered.

Cries and shrieks, the meaning of which was unmistakable, swelled louder and louder as the Boxers drew near to their destination. Passing through an open gateway, then crossing a paved courtyard, they entered a low building that blazed with garish colour as the last rays of the sun touched the orange and azure pillars, the vivid yellow tiles of the roof and the green and purple gables.

Inside were more Boxers, all wearing the uniform of the Society, and armed with swords and lances. They desisted from the bloody work on which they were engaged, and with devilish glee they gathered about the two American lads, whose sight was for the moment dimmed by the quick transition from light to semi-darkness. Then, as they got a clearer glimpse of their surroundings and realized the awful truth, they turned fairly sick with horror.

They were in the gloomy interior of a Bhuddist temple, where some of the Boxers had been performing their fiendish rites when

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interrupted by the return of Li Sheng's party. Half a dozen native Christians, in kneeling positions and with their hands tied behind their backs, awaited torture and execution, the while appealing to deaf ears for mercy. Here and there on the marble floor, shockingly mutilated, lay warm and bleeding bodies. Hideous carved gods looked down stonily from their pedestals, and each was wreathed in filmy blue smoke that rose from little altars where fragrant incense was burning.

"They are going to put us to a slow death—to kill us by inches," said Dan. "I wouldn't mind a bullet so much, or a slash from a sword, but this—"

His voice faltered and broke. Alec set his teeth hard and tried to repress a shudder.

"God help us!" he said huskily. "Perhaps if we struggle they will finish us quickly."

"No fear of that, old fellow. The Tiger won't have his revenge spoilt."

The clamour subsided a little, and smeared blades were wiped clean. The Princess Loo-Lao, who mercifully remained unconscious, was carried out of sight, into a dark passage

### *In the Tiger's Clutch*

at the rear of the temple. Near-by stood a huge image of Bhudda, and before this the lads were placed, hemmed about by Boxers. Their wrists were drawn behind them and tied, and then Li Sheng stepped up to them.

"Your time is not yet," he said, with a fiendish smile. "Watch closely, and learn what is in store for you."

The scene that followed, as two of the native converts were dragged to the altars, is too harrowing to describe. The lads closed their eyes, but they could not deaden their ears to the awful sounds that lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. Gradually the incantations drowned the shrieks of the victims, and then fell an ominous, expectant silence.

"Now for the foreign devils!" cried several voices.

"Bring them forward," directed Li Sheng, "and let them be—"

But as he spoke there came a sharp sound that stifled the sentence on his lips. Crack! crack!—two rifles went off in rapid succession. The double report drew all eyes through the open door to the courtyard, where two sentries were posted. One lay

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

kicking on the flagstones, and the other was seen to reel and clutch at a pillar.

A hoarse, mighty sound of cheering rose. In the open gateway, where wisps of powder-smoke were curling lazily upward, loomed a stalwart figure—an American corporal of marines. Others pressed behind him, British and Japanese tars elbowing one another. A ringing word of command, and on they swept at a quick trot.

“Legation soldiers!” exclaimed Alec.

“Can they save us?” Dan gasped.

Their voices were lost in the yelling tumult that seemed to shake the temple roof. Panic and terror held sway for a moment, and the Boxers thought only of escape. Then, stirred to a sullen fury by their cool-headed leader, Li Sheng, they rallied and met the attack. Those nearest the door rushed to the courtyard, where a volley from the marines dropped several of them, but failed to dishearten the rest. The odds were fairly even, for while the Boxers outnumbered their foes five to one, with a single exception they possessed no firearms.

All this happened in less time than it takes to tell, and at the first the inhuman butch-

## *In the Tiger's Clutch*

ers, interrupted so suddenly in the midst of their sacrificial orgies, were too concerned for their own lives to pay much heed to the victims they had been on the point of dragging to torture.

Temporarily forgotten even by the Tiger himself, reprieved a second time within an hour, the lads stood for half a minute at the rear of the temple, listening to the yells and cheers, to the rifle-fire and the clash of steel. They were dazed and confused, uncertain which way to turn, and they might have lost the passing opportunity of escape had it not been forced upon them, and none too soon, in a most strange manner. In two strokes of a sharp weapon their wrists were deftly cut loose, and a sword was thrust into Alec's hand.

"Off with you!" said a voice behind them. "Hasten for your lives!"

With that the speaker was gone, lost in the shouting crowd that was struggling towards the temple portico. The light was dim, and the lads caught but a brief glimpse of their unknown benefactor, who unmistakably wore a Boxer uniform. They could make no guess at his identity, nor was the present a time to

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

puzzle over the mystery. At once they darted round the idol and ran several yards down the passage. Then, on the right, was a narrow turning that showed a gray glimmer at the farther end. And straight ahead, ten feet away, were the vague outlines of a door.

With one accord the lads stopped, hesitated for an instant. The cross-passage doubtless led to the rear of the temple and meant freedom and safety, while the door was a mute reminder of capture and death. But not the horrors from which they had just escaped, nor the yellow peril at their heels, could commit the young Americans to a craven impulse.

"I'm sure the Princess is in there!" exclaimed Alec. "We must take her with us—"

"By all means," Dan agreed. "Hang the risk!"

As yet their flight was undiscovered, but they had scarcely reached the end of the corridor when there was a rush of pattering feet behind them, and a couple of savage cries rang close in their ears. Even then they might have darted back to the cross-passage. Instead they drew the single bolt



## *In the Tiger's Clutch*

of the door, which swung on rusty hinges as they bore their weight against it.

The pursuing Boxers, to the number of five, were almost at the spot. The Tiger had doubtless sent them to make an end of the two foreign devils, and they were in haste to do the deed. But they were a little too late. The door was driven shut in their faces, and when their furious assault forced it partly open again, Alec's sword flashed out and stabbed the foremost ruffian in the chest. The man fell, and a comrade, who thrust his arm through the aperture, yelled with agony as he withdrew a bleeding stump minus fingers and thumb.

For a few seconds—precious seconds of golden worth—the Boxers desisted from the attempt. A weapon of defense in the hands of the fugitives was something they had not counted upon.

"There is no fastening to the inner side," panted Dan, as he braced his feet against the floor. "We're done for! When the next shove comes they'll have a dead easy thing of it,"

"I'll settle a couple more of the devils, anyway," Alec cried hoarsely. "Hold on!"

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he added, in an eager tone. "Bear hard—just a moment. Ready! Out of the way, quick!"

With that, as Dan leapt nimbly aside, there was a stunning crash that shook the whole building. Alec had overbalanced a huge idol, pedestal and all, that stood to the left of the entrance, and now the bulky mass of stone, several tons in weight, lay prostrate across and against the bottom of the door.

"Hurrah, they won't move that in a hurry?" Dan cried.

"It's a good thing the door opened inwards," said Alec.

A single brief effort to gain admittance convinced the Boxers that for the present at least their murderous intent was frustrated. So, after shooting the heavy bolt on the outer side of the door, and uttering some bloodthirsty threats and imprecations, the four of them sullenly withdrew. The victim of Alec's steel was left lying in the passage, to judge from gurgling moans that could be heard in spite of the near-by strife and tumult.

"That idol has done more for us than it

## *In the Tiger's Clutch*

ever did for the people who worshipped it," said Dan. "We're safe enough now, eh?"

"But we are prisoners—they have locked us in," Alec replied.

"The marines will let us out. And it won't be long to wait, old fellow. Hark, they are hard at it! I wonder how they knew we were here. They must have come on purpose to rescue us. I say, you don't suppose—"

"That the Boxers will get the best of it?" interrupted Alec, "It's not likely, but we must be prepared for anything."

It had all happened in a very few minutes—the attack on the temple, the remarkable episode of the severed bonds, and the repulse of the would-be assassins. On breaking into the room behind the bolted door the lads had merely observed that the Princess Loo-Lao was there, and then they had to give their undivided attention to the five Boxers. So now, their hopefulness turned to fresh anxiety and alarm by the thought that the Legation party might be driven off, they at once proceeded to take stock of their surroundings.

This was the work of half a minute. They

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were prisoners—and secure ones apparently—in a sort of inner shrine of the temple, which probably was used for special ceremonies. It was a small square room with stone floor, and walls of beams and masonry. It contained, in addition to the idol that Alec had utilized for a barrier, two more massive stone images, the one representing the Joyful Bhudda, the other a figure of Kwanti the God of War. There was no exit but by the door, and light and air entered through a window, about three feet by two, which was cut just under the high ceiling.

"No chance of getting up there," said Dan.

"It doesn't look like it," Alec assented, "but if it comes to the worst we'll have to escape by that means or not at all."

As he spoke there was a cry from the princess. She had returned to consciousness, and was sitting up when the lads hurried to her side. On recognizing them her alarm was partially allayed.

"Where am I?" she asked. "Are we hiding? Will you save me from those evil men?"

Hearing the sound of rifle-fire and the

### *In the Tiger's Clutch*

shouts of the combatants, she clung to Dan with renewed terror ; but when the situation was made plain to her, in words that were meant to cheer and comfort, she smiled through her tears.

"Your soldiers are so brave, none can stand against them," she exclaimed confidently. "Soon they will slay all our enemies, and come and rescue us. And then will they take us to the Legations?"

"Yes, to the Legations," replied Dan. "I say, old fellow," he added in an undertone, "the noise seems to be getting farther away."

Alec nodded gravely. A thought struck him, and mounting the fallen idol, he found at the top of the doorway, and level with his face, a crevice five or six inches wide. He glued his eyes to it.

"I can see to the end of the passage and across the temple," he said. "They are fighting in the courtyard, Dan. By Jove, it's terrific—a hand-to-hand struggle! The marines are holding their ground. They are flooring the Boxers right and left. I can distinguish Li Sheng ; he towers above the rest. He is brave enough, the Tiger, for he is right in the front. He has a pistol—he is firing.

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By heavens, he has shot the American corporal! It's poor old Lawson, whom we knew so well. The Boxers are hacking at the rifle-barrels now, and another of our fellows is down. Oh, it's maddening to watch it!"

The lad was silent for a moment, and then the fiendish yelling took a deeper, hoarser note.

"What does that mean?" Dan cried, excitedly.

"It means," declared Alec, as he stepped off his perch, "that our hope has failed us. The handful of marines have fallen back, and the Boxers are driving **them** foot by foot from the courtyard. The Tiger and his cubs will soon be here to finish their bloody work."

"And it won't take them long," said Dan. "A dozen men will very quickly have the door down. What a terrible trap we are in!"

"It sha'n't hold us," Alec vowed grimly. "Yonder is a window, and that," pointing to the figure of the Joyful Bhudda, "must help us to reach it. Don't be frightened," he added to the princess. "There is time to escape, and we are going to save you. Now then, Dan, bear a hand here."

## VIII

### *A Friend Indeed*

ALEC'S confident words, his air of assurance, inspired his companions with courage. He briefly explained the plan that had occurred to him. The Joyful Bhudda stood about three feet out from the wall, and directly beneath the window. It was an enormously heavy idol, and it was no easy task that the lads undertook to perform ; but by the exercise of all their strength they finally succeeded in overbalancing the tall mass of stone and throwing it back against the wall. It fell straight and true, lodging fast just where it was wanted. The prisoners did not fear that the dull crash would betray them, for their enemies were making an incessant noise, and the fighting, though it had abated a little, was still being fiercely maintained.

"We did that all right," exclaimed Alec.

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"I was afraid the thing would slip to one side."

"There's a good eight feet between the window-ledge and the head of the idol," Dan replied. "And it's sheer, smooth wall."

"We'll tackle it in a moment," said Alec, as he returned to the door.

Dan followed him, and for a short time, each with an eye to the crevice, the lads watched eagerly. They could not see clearly, for the after-glow of the sun had given place to the grey shadows of twilight, but none the less they could perceive what the exact situation was. The Boxers were barricading the entrance to the temple with what material they could find, and meanwhile they were exposed to a straggling rifle-fire from the Legation marines, who had fallen back from the courtyard and had sought cover beyond the open gateway. They were too few in numbers to attempt another hand-to-hand assault.

"It's no use to look for help from our fellows," said Dan. "They'll be cut off from the rear if they stop here much longer; but I hope they won't leave before we can creep round and join them. I would give some-



## *A Friend Indeed*

thing to know who the chap was that cut us loose and told us to disappear. He was one of the Boxers—”

“Of course he was,” interrupted Alec. “It’s a deep mystery, and I don’t suppose we’ll ever get to the bottom of it. Come, Dan, we’ve seen enough. We must escape while we have the chance. It will soon be too late, for directly the barricade is finished Li Sheng will turn his attention to us.”

The night had now fallen in earnest, and out of the black curtain that shrouded the courtyard, and the street beyond, the rifles were flashing redly. Savage yells and sharp cries of pain mingled with the thud of timber and stone, which told that the Boxers were hurrying their work to completion. There was no time to lose. Alec went cautiously up the rough surface of the Joyful Bhudda and planted his feet on the broad granite shoulders. To the lad’s own shoulders climbed Dan, and grasping the window-ledge, he pulled himself up to it.

“All right!” he called down. “There’s lots of room—a wide stone slab. It’s too dark to make out what lies on the other side,

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

but the coast seems to be clear. Ready for the next?"

"Yes; watch sharp," Alec replied.

He helped Loo-Lao to mount the idol, and then lightly raised her higher. Dan, stretching himself flat on the ledge, with his arms lowered, caught the girl's hands and drew her up beside him. In like manner he assisted Alec to scale the wall, and with emotions of joy and gratitude the three found themselves safely together in the lofty window embrasure.

They had won the first step, gained the outlet from their gloomy prison; and for the moment, as they listened to the distant tumult and firing, they felt that the worst was over. Below them, at no great depth, a narrow thoroughfare appeared to run right and left. It was dark and silent.

"Hark! What is that?" exclaimed the princess.

There was a clamour of voices, a patter of feet across the temple floor, and along the passage leading to the shrine. The bolt was shot back. The door rattled and creaked.

"The Tiger and his butchers," Alec whispered. "They have come after us. But

## *A Friend Indeed*

they won't break in easily—that idol will take some budging. Now, then, I'll go first, and when I whistle for you, Miss Peach Blossom, you must drop."

"And you will catch me?" asked the girl.

"Yes; no fear."

"Hurry up, old fellow," urged Dan. "They're hard at it."

Alec swung himself over the window ledge, let go, and landed lightly on soft earth. Loo-Lao dropped into his arms and Dan followed.

"Where are we?" he said. "Oh, I see. It's a lane with blank walls on either side. Which way now?"

"It don't matter much," Alec answered. "We'll take the left. What we want to do is to cut round and join the marines, and if we succeed we'll sleep to-night in the Legation quarter."

"If we succeed!" echoed Dan. "That seems too good to come true. It's high time our luck changed, though."

As the three moved off they could distinctly hear the door being assaulted by Li Sheng and his companions, who had not yet discovered the escape of the prisoners. The

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

marines were still shooting at intervals into the courtyard, and from the southwesterly part of the city, where a lurid glare played on the sky, floated a humming, throbbing noise.

The lane was tortuous, squalid, and nearly as rough as a ploughed field. For some hundred and fifty yards there was no break in the walls, but finally a turn to the left brought the fugitives into a fairly wide street. They picked their way along cautiously, by sacked and abandoned houses, past unburied bodies of murdered Christian converts; and then, of a sudden, pandemonium seemed to break loose. Rapid and prolonged rifle-firing was heard, and as it dwindled to a few shots, bloodcurdling screams and yells mingled with hoarse shouting and cheering.

"Our fellows have been reënforced!" exclaimed Alec. "They have rushed the barricade and taken the temple, and now they are giving the Boxers cold steel."

That such was the case there was no room to doubt. Until the horrid sounds of massacre had died gradually away, and been succeeded by a silence that was only partly

## *A Friend Indeed*

reassuring, Loo-Lao and her companions listened anxiously. They had stopped beneath the portico of an empty shop.

"It's all over," said Alec. "I hope our fellows have not started back to the Legations."

"They are more likely holding the temple and searching there for us," replied Dan. "If we return the way we came—"

"That is too risky," Alec interrupted. "We might meet some of the Boxers, if any have escaped by the rear. No; our only plan is to get round to the front of the temple, and we must lose no time in doing it."

Leaving their place of shelter, the three set forth again. The ominous silence continued, broken by occasional faint sounds, as they made one turn after another, steering their course by the flame-glow on the south-east horizon. They were drawing near to a cross-street, which they believed would lead them to the immediate vicinity of the temple, when they heard rapid footsteps and almost as quickly saw a dark figure start up in front of them. There was light enough to reveal the man's Boxer uniform and the lance that he carried on his shoulder.

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With a frightened cry Loo-Lao shrank behind her protectors, and Alec lifted his sword in both hands. But before he could strike a remarkable thing happened, for clearly and eagerly a voice pronounced his name. The lad made a step forward, peered into the Boxer's face.

"Ping Tang!" he exclaimed eagerly.

It was strange indeed to hear words of greeting under such circumstances, and it may be imagined with what relief Dan and the princess, who had expected a bloody encounter, waited for what was to happen next. They could scarcely credit the evidence of their own eyes when, an instant later, they saw Alec and the Boxer clasp each other's hand in a hearty grip.

"So it's really you, Ping Tang!" said the lad. "I should hardly have known you—you've grown so much. You spoke just in time, and I'm jolly glad of it, for I should have had a slash at you before your lance was at point. But how did you recognize me in the darkness?"

"I was looking for you," was the reply.

"Looking for *me*?" Alec exclaimed. "But I say," he added mistrustfully, "what

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does this rig mean? You are wearing the Boxer uniform. I hope—"

"Have no fear, Alec," interrupted the other. "I am a Boxer, but my heart is the same. Do you doubt it? Have I not already done you a service to-night?"

"Then it was you," cried the lad, "who crept up behind us in the temple?"

"Yes; I cut your arms free."

Who was Ping Tang the Boxer, and how was it possible for him to meet the young American on more than friendly terms? In a few low words, intended only for his companions' ears, Alec explained the situation.

"We're in luck," he said. "This is an old friend of mine. I knew him when I was living for a time in Peking about three years ago, before I went to school in England, and it fell in my way to do him a small favour. I haven't seen him since, until now. His mother was a native convert, and he was educated partly at a mission-school; that's why he talks such good English."

"And you think he is all right?" asked Dan.

"I am sure he is," Alec declared. "What

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he did in the temple proves that. Yes, we can trust him."

At this point Ping Tang, who was a tall, slim young Chinaman of about the same age as the lads, led the party a few feet to one side, into a dark angle formed by two walls.

"None can see us here, unless they look closely," he said. "We must leave very soon, for there is always danger. But before we speak of those things, Alec, I want to tell you that I do not forget, and that I am still grateful. When my mother and I were starving and in great trouble, after my father took us away from the people at the mission-school, you gave us money and food. You did all in your power. Now it is my turn. It is against my will that I am a Boxer, and so I will try to save all of you—your friend and Prince Lan's daughter as well as yourself."

"Ping Tang, you're a brick!" exclaimed Alec. "You'll understand, of course, that we want to get to the Legations without delay."

"It is impossible—to-night."

"But can't we join the marines?"

"They have gone by this time," Ping Tang answered.



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"That's bad—I feared as much," said Alec. "They took the temple, though, didn't they?"

"Yes; shortly after your escape was discovered. More Legation soldiers came to help the first party, and they quickly forced an entrance. They showed no mercy to the Boxers, the greater part of whom perished by shot and steel. But Li Sheng and a few others escaped, and I also was able to slip away unseen. It was in the hope of finding you that I took this direction."

Ping Tang went on to put the situation in a clear light. The victorious marines had started back to the Legation quarter, he declared, and they were probably strong enough to get through. It would have been useless for them to remain longer, since they knew not where to look for the Boxers' three prisoners, of whose escape from the temple they were aware. As for Alec and his companions, it would be simple madness for them to attempt to make their way across the southwestern part of the city at such a time, when bloodthirsty foes were sure to be prowling in the wake of the Legation party.

"That's right enough," said Dan. "We

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shouldn't get very far. I'm glad of one thing, anyway. My people will know, when the marines return, that we are not dead yet."

As he spoke a sound of shouting, at no great distance, was borne on the night breeze from the direction of the temple.

"They appear to be searching for us," said Alec. "What do you think we had better do?"

"You must trust yourselves to me," Ping Tang replied. "Come, I will hide you safely."

At once, under the guidance of the Chinese lad, the little party crept away from the sheltering nook and headed in a northeasterly direction. Again the hope of reaching the Legations had failed, and the future still loomed dark with perils and difficulties. Loo-Lao's courage was nearly spent, and Dan and Alec were themselves in the lowest spirits. They doubted if their protector could render them any substantial service, though, as it turned out, they underestimated his power to aid them.

"It's a pity that Li Sheng escaped from the temple," said Alec.

"Yes, it is," Dan assented. "He won't

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give up searching for us as long as he thinks we are outside the Legation quarter."

The fugitives made rapid progress, and the pervading silence encouraged them in the belief that they had shaken off the ruffians who were in pursuit. Leaving on their right a burnt area that included the ruins of the Catholic Eastern Cathedral, they presently came, by a neighbourhood of lonely streets, to the bank of a narrow canal. Some distance to the north a bridge loomed dull-white out of the gloom, and across the placid water, beyond the opposite-lying houses, the high wall of the Imperial City rose against the horizon. Ping Tang stopped for a moment to hide his Boxer sash and paper emblems under a flat stone, then led the way towards the bridge.

"We have not far to go," he said, pointing vaguely over the canal. "I am taking you to my mother, who is in a hiding-place that I have known of for a long time. We both fled there on the night when the massacre of the native Christians began, and the next morning, when I ventured out, I was caught by the Boxers. They threatened to kill me unless I became one of them and

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took the oath, and for my mother's sake I consented. Before this my father, who hated us bitterly, had joined the Boxers; but he was shot in Legation-Street when the foreign quarter was attacked."

"And you have seen your mother since?" asked Alec.

"Yes, I had an opportunity of visiting her last night. She is well and safe, and she has plenty of food."

"You are a good sort, Ping Tang," said Alec. "Under the circumstances I don't blame you for joining the Boxers. But you ought not to take us to your mother's hiding-place. You run a great risk of betraying her."

"There is nowhere else to take you," Ping Tang answered. "And there is no danger, as you will see. My mother will gladly give you shelter, and you can stop as long as you like. As for me, I shall go back to the Boxers, so that I may learn what is happening in the city. I will come to see you from time to time, and I will tell you whenever I think there is a chance of your getting to the Legations."

This was cheering news to the fugitives,

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who had counted on nothing more than a shelter over night in some empty house or lonely garden. But their relief and gratification were short-lived. When they had come within one hundred yards of the bridge they nearly stumbled over a man who was lying, probably asleep, in their path. With a yell the startled fellow jumped up and took to his heels, and a second later, from the rear, a shrill clamour of voices rang on the quiet night. The meaning was obvious. Without doubt some of the escaped Boxers from the Bhuddist temple, who were hot on the trail of their late prisoners, had heard and understood the wakened sleeper's outcry.

"They are close behind us," exclaimed Ping Tang. "We can't reach the bridge now. Come, this is our only chance."

Followed by his companions, he leapt down the low sandy bank to the edge of the canal. Here lay the dead body of a man, one hand clutching the end of a raft, rudely constructed of three planks tied together, that was loosely aground. Evidently the poor fellow had been killed during the massacre, while attempting to get away from the merciless butchers.

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"This raft will do nicely for the princess," said Dan. "Quick! We haven't a second to lose."

The stiffened fingers relaxed their grip as the raft was pushed free of the shore. Loo-Lao stretched herself flat upon it, and the frail craft began to move slowly but surely across the surface of the canal, the three lads swimming behind it and shoving it along by lightly touching the almost submerged planks.

It was a hazardous, uncertain expedient, but the passage was accomplished in safety, though not an instant too soon. The clamour swelled louder and nearer, and just as the raft reached the opposite bank a group of dusky figures appeared on the other shore. There was a red flash and a sharp report, and a bullet sang viciously by Dan's ear.

"That was Li Sheng," he exclaimed. "He is the only one who has a pistol."

## IX

### *The Secret of the Wall*

WHETHER the Boxers would swim the canal, or go round by the bridge, was a question that the fugitives did not wait to determine. They hurriedly scaled the bank and dived into a dark and narrow little street. When they paused to listen and to gain breath, after running a quarter of a mile, the shouting of the Boxers sounded far behind them. The lads wrung their clothes as dry as possible, that no dripping should betray the direction of their flight, and then Ping Tang led them rapidly on again.

"We are very close now," he said.

Fortunately the general exodus from Peking, and the reign of terror instituted by the Boxers, had left this quarter of the city almost as deserted as the parts lying nearer to the burnt areas. Many people were doubt-

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less lurking in the vicinity, but they kept out of the way and did not show themselves. Another hundred yards, and the gloomy, lightless buildings terminated abruptly.

"Where are we going?" asked Alec, as he surveyed the deep, dry ditch at his feet, and then lifted his eyes to the crest of the Imperial City's lofty wall.

"It's a sort of a land's end," muttered Dan.

Ping Tang made no comment or reply. With a furtive glance in all directions he darted across the bed of the ditch and mounted to the top of the sloping bank. Here was a narrow strip of level earth, so hard and stony that no footprint could leave any impression on it; and between this and the base of the city wall grew a thick fringe of thorny, stunted bushes, reaching for a distance of ten or twelve yards.

"Follow me," said Ping Tang.

One by one his companions came after him. Starting at the nearest end, he crawled along on hands and knees between the bushes and the wall, where the space was just sufficient to admit him. He advanced for a dozen feet, stopped, and made a low,



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peculiar whistle. Then he bore his weight against a large block of masonry that was set in with the brickwork, and slowly, with a creaking noise, the stone swung inward.

"By Jove!" gasped Alec. "What's this?"

A black opening, three feet square, was revealed. At Ping Tang's bidding the others crept in singly, leaving room for him to follow. He sent the slab shut with apparent ease, and the little group were now in darkness, except for a faint crack of yellow light some distance ahead. They could stand upright and move their limbs freely. The air felt moist and cool.

"Is that you, my son?" a squeaky voice demanded, in Chinese.

"Yes, mother, it is I," Ping Tang replied.

He went forward and lifted a curtain that hung on the right, and his companions, who had groped their way behind him, looked with surprise into a small and not ill-pleasing chamber, the walls, floor, and ceiling of which were formed of cemented masonry. By the light of a flickering candle could be seen bedding, earthenware vessels, and a couple of stools. And crouching in a corner

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was a bent old woman with a face like a wrinkled yellow apple.

The old woman was Nan Ho, the mother of Ping Tang, and when she learned who the strangers were, and what her son had promised to do for them, she gave the little princess and the foreign lads a hearty welcome and assured them that herself and her poor abode were at their service. She brought food and drink to her guests, and as they satisfied their hunger they congratulated themselves on the happy fortune that had thrown them in Ping Tang's way. They felt a sense of security that was as novel as it was pleasing. The worst was over, they believed, and after storm and stress they had come into a haven of refuge. They were sanguine of ultimately getting back to the Legations, now that there was no immediate necessity for doing so.

"This is a very nice place," Loo-Lao remarked approvingly, "The Boxers won't find us here." Tears filled her eyes as she spoke of her father, but her grief was turned to joy when Ping Tang declared he had heard that day that Prince Lan was alive and a prisoner. "Then he must be in the Forbid-

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den City, in the power of the wicked Empress-Dowager," the girl exclaimed. "Oh, if I could only send a message to the Emperor!"

"That is impossible, I'm afraid," said Dan, "and anyway, what good could it do?"

"I have influence," was the simple reply.

The lads wondered. It was not likely, they reasoned, that Loo-Lao could have any influence with Kuang Hsu, the Son of Heaven. But the future was to prove them wrong.

That night the fugitives slept peacefully. Old Nan Ho had taken the little princess under her motherly wing, and there was a separate room for their own use, entered by a low archway at the rear of the outer apartment. The two chambers, with the passage leading to them, had been artfully constructed—for what purpose could only be conjectured—when the massive wall was built around the Imperial City. That was ages ago. Centuries had passed since, and it might be taken for granted that no living person had known of the secret lying behind the movable slab of stone—which worked on a hidden hinge—until Ping Tang dis-

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covered it by accident, while concealing himself in the thorn-bushes from his boyish playmates. He had done well in making no confidants, and now his silence was bearing fruit.

With the dawn of another day came a disappointment, a haunting dread that was not easily dispelled; for enemies were near at hand, and from the end of the passage men could be heard talking, going to and fro, and even beating about among the bushes. And when darkness fell again, and Ping Tang ventured to creep out of the wall, he returned with an ominous report. Boxers were still lurking in the neighbourhood, and he had crept near enough to some of them to listen to their conversation.

"They believe that we are concealed somewhere hereabouts," he told his companions, "and though they have failed to find any trace of us, Li Sheng has ordered them to continue to keep a strict watch. As for myself, it is not even suspected that I was with you, so I shall not be questioned too closely when the time comes for me to go back to the rebels."

That time was monotonously slow in ar-

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living. For the sake of his friends Ping Tang was resolved to run no risks, and the passage of the weary days found him sharing the secret hiding-place in the hollow wall, thanks to the unrelaxing vigilance of the Tiger. Though they had an ample supply of food and water, and no imminent peril threatened them, it was an anxious, trying period for the little party. They were ignorant of what might be happening in other parts of the city, and they knew not if the Legations had fallen or were holding out, for they could not hear the spasmodic rifle and artillery firing that marked the progress of the siege, and the presence of several Boxers who patrolled the ditch at short intervals rendered it necessary to keep the hinged slab closed day and night.

But all things must have an end. The sluggish days grew to more than a week, and it was the evening of the 25th of June when Ping Tang, having crept forth to reconnoitre, quickly returned with the cheerful news that the cordon was broken; Li Sheng, baffled and disgusted, had withdrawn his spies. Again the brave Chinese lad departed, this time with the intention of rejoining the

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Boxers and gleaning information to bring back. Dan and Alec and the Princess Loo-Lao, anxious as they were for tidings of their relatives, hated to see their young protector go, although he assured them that he could meet with no harm among the rebels. But undreamed of difficulties were to clog and hamper Ping Tang's purpose, and days of harrowing waiting and suspense were to fall to the lot of the concealed fugitives.

It was on the 16th of June, the reader will remember, that Alec Drury and his companions took refuge in the hollow wall of the Imperial City, after a succession of narrow escapes that more strongly resemble fiction than truth; and the same evening, when the plucky little fighting-column returned from the slaughter at the Bhuddist temple, Mr. Killigrew learned what meagre and unsatisfactory news the marines could give him about his son. It was out of the question to do anything for the young fugitives, madness to hope that they would ever be seen alive again. These were hard and bitter facts, but they had to be faced. The crisis was at hand, and men's souls were to be tried as they had rarely been tried before.

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During the night of the 16th, while the flames slowly died away, an attack in force was momentarily expected ; but it did not come then, or on the three following days, though the Legation quarter was closely invested. On the 19th was received word of the taking of the Taku forts by the allied fleets, and in the afternoon the Chinese government sent an ultimatum to the foreign Ministers, commanding them to leave Peking within twenty-four hours. A firm refusal was returned the next day, and the treacherous intentions that lurked behind the ultimatum were proved by the dastardly murder the same morning, at the hands of a uniformed banner soldier, of the German Minister, Baron von Ketteler, who imprudently went forth to keep an appointment at the Yamen. At the hour of 4 P. M. that afternoon, by a preconcerted signal, a heavy fire was opened upon the Legation outposts. A French marine fell with a bullet through his brain. The siege had begun in earnest.

The tale of the heroic defence, of the weeks of stubborn resistance against odds that have no parallel save in the history of Lucknow

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and Cawnpore, has been told many times ; it need not be set down at length in these pages. When actual hostilities opened, and the Chinese government dropped the mask and flaunted its murderous intentions, the Ministers hurriedly completed the preparations on which they were engaged. The Austrian and Belgian Legations and the American and Methodist mission buildings were abandoned. The British Legation was regarded as the strongest and safest point, and into its spacious compound thronged women and children, missionaries, most of the Ministers, and all the unofficial foreigners of Peking. Passages were cut from house to house. Silks and satins, curtains and embroideries were made into thousands of sand-bags. The besieged area, which comprised all of the Legations but two, quickly gathered strength. And it needed to do so, for it was exposed to rifle and artillery fire on all sides—from house-tops and city walls, the Imperial Carriage Park and the Mongol Market, and from other places of vantage.

As the terrible days wore on, each marked by the death of one or more brave fellows who could be ill-spared, the enemy pressed



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their earthworks nearer and nearer. Many a valourous deed was performed by volunteers, civilians, and marines. It was a record of gallant sorties and attacks, of positions taken, and lost, and taken again, of invaders driven from breaches they had made in walls and fortifications. A Krupp gun, mounted on the Chien Men Gate opposite the Forbidden City, added to the horror and danger. Adjacent buildings were set on fire, threatening to destroy the Legations, and only after hours of desperate labour, when buckets of water were passed along amid a hail of bullets, was the peril averted. On the 29th the shell fire was terrific, and great damage was done. Early in the morning of the 3rd of July a small fort, which the Chinese were erecting close to the American lines, was stormed and taken with severe loss to the enemy. The next day a desperate attempt was made to reduce the British Legation, and from the walls of the Imperial City, where three batteries had been erected, the Empress Dowager and her counsellors watched the bombardment. Fast grew the roll of the dead—Professor James, the midshipman Herbert, the heroic Goelitz, M.

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Wagner, the Japanese attaché Kojima, David Oliphant, and others too numerous to mention.

Thus the siege dragged on, but brave hearts never wearied and dauntless courage never flagged, though from morning till night the shells burst and pounded, musketry rattled and volleyed filling the air with hissing bullets, fire-balls made of petroleum and arrows freighted with burning cloth flew overhead, and the devilish cries of the investing hordes blended with the Chinese bugles that hoarsely sang "Murr-der! Murr-der!" The cordon drew tighter and tighter, and isolation was complete. The Legation, cut off from communication with the world outside Pekin, ignorant of what was happening at Tientsin and along the railway line to the capital, wondered why relief did not come. And as horror was piled on horror, and hope grew less and less, a sorrowing husband and wife, the one sticking nobly to his post of duty, and the other confined to her bed with a fever, mourned the loss of an only child; for Dan Killigrew's parents did not doubt that he was dead.

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The eleventh of July was a day of many casualties, including those incurred by a reckless attempt to capture a Chinese banner. Towards evening Mr. Eustace Killigrew had occasion to take a message to the French Legation, and when he was leaving the building a shrill, swelling tumult fell on his ears. As he stepped to one side of the gateway a body of French troops entered the compound, shouting threats and curses at a number of Chinese prisoners, with fettered hands, whom they were hustling along.

"Where did you get these fellows?" the American secretary asked of the officer in command, as the party came to a halt.

"Found them hiding in a temple just outside our lines," was the reply. "A native Christian gave us the information."

"And what will you do with them?"

"Question them first, monsieur, and then put them to the bayonet, to save cartridges."

The captives numbered eighteen, of whom all but one were Imperial soldiers. The exception was a young Chinaman who wore a Boxer's red sash, and who appeared to be half stupefied by a severe blow that had

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raised a purple lump over one of his temples. But directly he heard the decree of death pronounced by the officer, his eyes dilated, as if he suddenly realized his position. Jerking his pinioned arms, he made a couple of reeling steps towards the secretary.

"Save me!" he exclaimed. "I am not a Boxer—this is only a disguise. Don't you know me, Mr. Killigrew?"

"Who are you?"

"I am Alec Drury!"

"By Heavens—yes, it is young Drury's voice!" cried Eustace Killigrew. "Are you alone? Where is my son? Speak, for pity's sake!"

There was no answer, for the lad had fallen senseless to the ground.

## X

*The Last Hope*

WHEN the purple dusk of evening shrouded the besieged area, and silenced the screaming shells and the sniping rifles of the enemy, men with picks and spades were digging a deep, long trench near the French Legation. Within the blood-soaked compound, awaiting burial, lay a ghastly, angular pyramid of dead bodies, all that was left of the seventeen Chinese soldiers caught that afternoon in the temple. They had been ruthlessly slaughtered with the bayonet, and not a voice could say that their fate was not richly deserved.

In a small room at the rear of the British Legation, where Mr. Killigrew and a couple of marines had hurriedly carried him on a stretcher, Alec Drury struggled back to consciousness. He had been put on a couch,

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with a pillow under his head, and when his swollen temple was bathed with a sponge the oozing water revealed the presence of the yellow stain that was skilfully rubbed into his skin. He quickly pulled round, and opening his eyes he recognized the familiar faces of Mr. Killigrew, Doctor Baird, and the faithful Kin Soon.

"The mine! The mine!" were his first eager words. "Has it been exploded yet?"

"What mine, my boy?" asked Eustace Killigrew, with a peculiar glance at the surgeon.

The latter shook his head. "No; the lad is all right," he said gravely.

"Of course I am," exclaimed Alec. "I mean the mine that the Boxers are digging beneath the French Legation. Ping Tang found out about it, and I determined to get through the enemy's lines to warn you. I should have been here earlier but for those fellows at the temple—"

"This must be seen to at once," interrupted the secretary. "But first tell me—my son? I can bear the worst. If he is dead—"

"But he isn't," Alec said triumphantly.

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"Dan was alive and well when I left him, and he is in a safe place where no harm can come to him."

The words had to be repeated before Eustace Killigrew would believe them. He was nearly overcome with emotion, and tears of joy and gratitude dimmed his eyes.

"Thank God!" he said hoarsely. "This news will do my wife more good than all the doctors and drugs in the world. It will break the course of the fever."

Having recovered his composure, and put a few questions to Alec, he hurried away to give some instructions relating to the supposed mine. He was back in less than ten minutes.

"Now, my boy," he said, "to hear your story."

Alec, who had meanwhile partaken of some food and been further strengthened by a glass of weak brandy and water, started without delay on the narrative. In a clear voice, lucidly and graphically, he related the thrilling and almost incredible experiences that had befallen himself and Dan from the time they rescued the Princess Loo-Lao from her kidnappers until the departure of

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Ping Tang, on the evening of the twenty-fifth of June, from the hiding-place in the wall of the Imperial City.

"We expected him back very shortly," he continued, "but we waited and waited in vain, and we had quite given him up when he came a couple of days ago. That was about midnight of the ninth. He was awfully weak and crippled from a bullet wound in the thigh, which he got the morning after he left. Of course that kept him on his back for more than a week, and as soon as he was able to walk at all he gave his comrades the slip. He told us about the mine that the enemy were digging under the grounds of the French Legation, and he also said that he knew of a way by which we might get through the lines; he had brought clothes and other things with him, so as to rig out the three of us in Boxer disguise. But the princess was ill with a slight touch of fever, and Dan couldn't walk because he had sprained an ankle while drawing water from a well near the wall—our supply was exhausted, and we had to venture out for more. As for Ping Tang, his wound was open again, and he wasn't fit for anything but bed. That's



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why I came alone. I knew how important it was to warn you about the mine, and I hoped that if I succeeded in getting into the Legations it might be possible to send a relief-party across the city to the wall."

"And you actually did succeed!" exclaimed Eustace Killigrew. "Marvelous! I don't see how it was done."

"I followed Ping Tang's instructions, that was all," Alec replied modestly. "He fixed me up like a Boxer, and I started after dark last night. When I got among the enemy I was stopped and questioned several times, but I managed to give a good account of myself. Next I fell in with that lot of Chinese soldiers, and they made me join them and took me along to the temple near the lines, where they intended to hide until they had a chance to rush our sentries. I couldn't get away, and so I was caught with the rest this afternoon. A French marine knocked me down with his rifle, and I was half-stunned when they marched me into the compound. Then I saw you, Mr. Killigrew, and cried out, and all I remember after that is a dizzy pain in my head that blinded me."

It may be imagined with what unbounded

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surprise and admiration the lad's hearers listened to the foregoing narration, which surpassed and threw quite in the shade all the thrilling and perilous incidents that marked the progress of the siege. Kin Soon was lavish with his praise, and he swore by all the stone gods of China to wreak a dire vengeance on the Tiger—if he ever got the chance.

"You must not talk any more at present, my young hero," said Doctor Baird. "What you need now is a good long sleep, and I prescribe it for you."

"One or two questions first, doctor," demurred Mr. Killigrew. "Tell me, my boy, are Dan and his companions absolutely safe in their hiding-place?"

"They are, sir; take my word for that. Nobody else knows the secret of the wall, and they won't run any risk of betraying it by venturing out."

"And they have food and water for how long?"

"For two or three weeks, sir, I should say," Alec replied. "But what about the rescue-party?" he added. "And is there any news of my father?"

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"None," Mr. Killigrew answered; "but I trust that the Viceroy of Shan See is protecting him. As for the other question, we will postpone that till to-morrow."

He spoke with a seriousness that did not escape the lad, who knew the meaning of it the next morning, after he had benefited by a refreshing night's rest; for the secretary then showed him clearly that nothing could be done to aid the concealed fugitives.

"I was afraid so," said Alec. "The rescue-party was my idea; Ping Tang did not think much of it. Of course my main object in coming was to warn you about the mine, and to let you know that your son was safe. I shall go back to Dan and the others the first chance, and stick it out with them until the siege is over and we can be relieved."

"That also is impossible, I fear," Eustace Killigrew replied. "You can't get back—it is one thing to enter the Legation quarter, another to leave it. We must wait and hope; your report is at least encouraging, and I trust that another fortnight will see the army of the Powers before the gates of Peking. My wife, you will be glad to hear, has taken a decided turn for the better."

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As for the mine, it is not possible to locate it, nor is there any sign of digging operations in that direction. All we can do is to be vigilant and watchful. But I hope that your Chinese friend has misinformed you."

"I hope so, too," Alec assented, "but he was very positive."

Ping Tang was *not* mistaken. Towards the close of the afternoon of the thirteenth bugles sounded alarmingly from the camps surrounding the French Legation, and a moment later two terrific explosions followed in quick succession—two dull roars that mingled with the exultant cries of the enemy and the rattle of musketry, and hurled bricks and *débris* high in air. Of five men who were standing over the spot where the mines exploded, three were engulfed and never seen again; the other two escaped miraculously. An entrance was burst into the Legation, and the small garrison had to fall back to an inner line of defence, which they were able to hold. The Chinese fired the abandoned buildings and occupied the ruins, and the next morning the Imperial banner waved over what had been the residence of the French Minister.

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Simultaneously with the eruption of the mines a desperate attack was made upon the German Legation by a body of Chinese soldiers, who broke into the Club and gained the tennis-ground before they were met and repulsed, at the point of the bayonet, by Count Soden and his handful of men.

The dead left behind by the enemy were armed with the latest pattern of Mauser rifles, and their uniforms showed that they belonged to the troops of General Yung Lu. Until darkness shells were rained incessantly into the besieged area from all sides, and several buildings near Canal Street took fire, though fortunately a heavy shower extinguished the flames during the night. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth, as long as the daylight lasted, the crashing of the big guns and the rattle of musketry rarely slackened, and among those who lost their lives at this period of the siege were Captain Strouts, the senior British officer, and a young student named Warren. They were buried on the afternoon of the sixteenth, while shells and bullets hissed over the open grave.

The blow he had received on the head did

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not incapacitate Alec for duty, and those final trying days of active hostilities found him doing his share with the rest of the defenders, now at one post, now at another. The constant excitement, the strain and suspense of every hour, gave him little time to think of his absent father, or of the friends he had left hidden in the wall of the Imperial City. Immediately after his arrival he had washed the yellow stain from his face and hands and discarded his native dress. An incident which occurred on the 15th satisfied him that for the present it would be folly to entertain any hope of rejoining Dan and his companions; for on that day a severed head, belonging to a messenger who had slipped out the previous night with a letter for the expected relief-force, was thrown into the Japanese lines.

From the 17th of July the siege took on a new aspect, and an armistice began—if it can be so called. Sniping continued whenever an opportunity offered, but the organized attacks ceased and the big Krupp guns were silent. Neither side, however, relaxed vigilance or preparation. The Legation's defenses were strengthened more

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and more, and the enemy pushed their barricades and earthworks steadily closer. No food could get in. The garrison were on short rations, and there were many deaths of children and aged persons among the 2,750 native Christians. Frequent notes, which amounted to nothing, were exchanged between the Tsung-li-Yamen and the Ministers ; the Chinese government, with astounding effrontery, still pretended to be friendly.

The first cheering news was brought by a Japanese messenger, who had successfully passed through the enemy's lines and returned. From this source it was learned that the allied forces had taken Tientsin on the 14th of July, and that they were to march immediately on Pekin. So the month wore on. A letter was received on the 28th from the British consul at Tientsin, stating that plenty of troops were on the way. The Yamen, altering its arrogant tone, officially announced to the Ministers the assassination of the King of Italy and the death of the Duke of Edinburgh. Yet sniping went on ceaselessly as the days passed, and brave men were being killed and wounded by the bullets of Chinese sharpshooters. The

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enemy built two new and powerful forts on the city wall, and erected a brick barricade across the North Bridge.

The garden of Prince Fu's palace—known as the Su Wang Fu—was one of the most important positions held by the defenders, since it lay opposite to the British Legation. It had withstood many desperate attacks and a furious shell-fire during the siege, and from time to time, as its strategic value increased, the Italians and Japanese who occupied it had been reinforced from the various Legations. Here, late in the afternoon of the 10th of August, exposed to a drizzling rain, a number of men were employed in digging a trench a few yards inside of the outer line of defence. The spot chosen was one that offered exceptional advantages for the enemy to drive a mine, and the object of the labour was to discover and baffle any such possible design.

Scarcely twenty yards separated the two positions, and the Chinese dragon-soldiers and the foreign marines, as they stood at the loopholes behind their respective barricades, could almost look into the muzzles of one another's rifles. Not a shot had been ex-



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changed that day; grim and silent was the ugly Krupp gun, mounted only fifty yards distant, which before the armistice had accurately raked the post with shell and shrapnel. In the trench, under the supervision of Mr. Caetani, of the Italian Legation, the men toiled shoulder-deep, plying pick and spade, cutting their way along foot by foot. Alec Drury and his faithful shadow, Kin Soon, were well to the front of the line, and next to them were William Cocket and Nick Killehoff, who were as chummy as ever, and were seldom seen apart. Among the others were Austrians, British, and Customs and student volunteers; when special work was to be done men were selected without regard to nationality.

"I'd rather be lootin' than doin' this 'ere," grumbled the London cockney, "but I don't see much chance of *that*."

"Don't worry," said Alec. "There's a good time coming, by and by."

"And when it does come," remarked the Russian, shaking a fist in the direction of the Imperial Palace, "we will make ourselves even with these yellow dogs."

"We will, rather," vehemently assented

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Cocket. "What do *you* think?" His spade hung poised in air for an instant. "'Ullo, what's the row about now?" he added.

All stopped to listen, wondering what had happened to call forth the prolonged, hearty cheering that floated from a point beyond the British Legation. It was something out of the common, certainly.

"May I go and inquire, sir?" Alec asked of Mr. Caetani.

Permission was given, and the young American climbed out of the trench and sped on his errand. He was back in five minutes.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" he cried, waving his cap. "A messenger has just come in through the enemy's lines, bringing letters from General Gasalee and General Fukushima. A strong relief-force is within a few marches of Pekin—General Gasalee says that he expects to arrive by the thirteenth or fourteenth."

The good news spread throughout the Fu, from barricade to barricade, and much noisy enthusiasm was manifested.

"Any use to keep on with this 'ere?" inquired Bill Cocket, when the wave of cheering had spent itself.

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"It is more important than ever," replied Mr. Caetani, "to make sure that no mines are being excavated under our feet. The Chinese know more about the relief force than we do, and they will make desperate efforts to reduce the Legations in the little time that is left to them. The crisis of the siege is not yet passed. Let the work proceed."

The wisdom of the Italian attaché's words—which were to prove prophetic—was appreciated by the men, who fell to with renewed energy. Alec, leaping back to his place in the trench, sent the loose earth flying as he drove his pick. Relief in sight at last! How the joyous tidings thrilled him!

"Two or three days more will see the end," he told himself, "and then I shall surely get some word from my father. I wish Dan and the others knew how nearly their troubles were over. But they won't have long to wait."

A moment later, without the least warning, a terrific explosion occurred half a dozen yards to the right of the digging operations, towards the British Legation. A column of

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smoke and rubbish roared high in the air, and at the same instant a black chasm yawned at the very feet of the workers who were extending the end of the trench. Three men slid into it, and two had time to scramble quickly out again before a subsidence of the shattered earth buried the hole from sight.

Fortunately the mine did no damage to life, for nobody had been over the spot at the time; but fright and panic followed the explosion, and as the *débris* showered down and covered a wide area, and the ground settled into a shallow crater with crumbling, quivering sides, a hoarse uproar mingled with the savage yells of the Chinese soldiers. A bugle blared the alarm across the Fu, and a couples of rifles went off. However, as it was seen that the enemy were not ready to push their doubtful advantage and make an attack, the excitement abated.

"Where's young Drury?" exclaimed Cocket, looking anxiously about him. "'E was workin' alongside of you, Nick."

The Russian dug the pulverized soil from his eyes with one hand, and with the other pointed to the sunken end of the trench.

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"The lad's down yonder—clean swallowed up," he answered hoarsely.

With a wild cry Kin Soon sprang into the cutting and seized a pick. "Save him!" he begged. "Save my young master!"

But the appeal brought no response, for it was a useless thing that the Chinaman asked his comrades to do.

"We are lost. There is no hope for us. That spying dog will fetch the Boxers here, and they won't have to search long to find the movable stone. Alas, that I should have brought this peril upon you! And yet the sword scarcely hangs closer over us than does death by starvation."

He who spoke was Ping Tang. The place was the gloomy, ill-lit chamber within the wall of the Imperial City, and the time was just after dark on the evening of the tenth of August, the same day that had witnessed the explosion in the grounds of the Su Wang Fu. The little group were huddled on the floor, Ping Tang uttering self-reproaches and old Nan Ho wringing her hands with grief and terror, while Dan Killigrew and the Princess Loo-Lao stared with set

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faces at the flickering candle. All were pallid and thin, for they had been existing on quarter rations for the past ten days, and even that must be reduced on the morrow, if they would sustain life a little longer. But it was a more dreaded peril than starvation that menaced them now, and was sorely trying their courage. For Ping Tang, after going forth that evening to search for food in the adjacent parts of the city, had returned empty-handed and with an alarming story to tell. He had been seen—seen by the dusky figure of a man who must have followed him back, and who had glided stealthily away as the lad peered out at him from the shelter of the thorn-bushes. Doubtless the fellow was a spy of the Tiger's, and he would report to his master with all haste.

So there were desperate hearts in the stone-walled hiding-place, and hope was ebbing low. This they were unprepared for, though they had not been free from anxiety since Alec had left them, a whole month ago. That the brave lad had met his death in the attempt, they did not doubt. No tidings of any kind had reached them. The

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sound of distant firing, heard sometimes when they crept to the end of the passage and opened the slab a couple of inches, had told them that the siege was still going on; but that was all. For Ping Tang had been lying seriously ill of a fever brought on by the bullet-wound, and had not been able to go outdoors until to-day, when his venture out from the wall met with the unfortunate result already mentioned. As for the rest, the princess had quite recovered, and Dan could without a limp walk on his sprained ankle. Old Nan Ho had spent the days contentedly, desiring nothing more than the companionship of her son.

"If there is anything to be done, it must be done at once," said Dan, after a brief interval of silence. "If we get away from here before the Boxers come, could we find another hiding-place?"

Ping Tang shook his head. "I know of none," he replied. "We should all be captured."

"Hurrah, I've just thought of something!" exclaimed Dan. "Those disguises you brought with you a month ago, when we couldn't make use of them. If there is time

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to rig ourselves out, we ought to stand a pretty fair chance of getting through to the Legations."

"Wait !"

That single word Ping Tang spoke ominously. He slipped from the room, was gone five minutes, and returned with deeper despair than ever showing plain on his yellow face.

"There is no hope ; the disguises are useless," he said. "I opened the slab a couple of inches and listened. I heard footsteps creeping slowly by, to and fro, just beyond the thorn-bushes. Two men must have seen me, and while one has gone to seek for Li Sheng, the other remains here to watch."

Silence followed this disheartening announcement ; the end was now inevitable.

"Promise me, my son," begged old Nan Ho, "that you will plunge a knife into my heart rather than let the Boxers take me alive."

"Perhaps we shall yet escape them, good mother," said the Princess Loo-Lao, quite calmly. "Since all else has failed, you must trust yourself to me. I have long had a plan in mind, and the time has come



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to try it, now when our lives hang by a thread."

"Nothing can help us," Dan said bitterly.

Loo-Lao ignored the remark. "How far will the spy have to go in search of Li Sheng?" she asked.

"To one of the camps outside the Legation quarter," Ping Tang answered,

"Then it may be two hours before the Boxers arrive?"

"That is likely," was the reply.

"And could you slip away from the man who is watching the wall, and carry a message for me?"

"It is possible," assented Ping Tang.

"Well, if you can do that there is more than a hope for us."

"What do you mean, Princess?" Dan asked incredulously. "What can help us now?"

"This," replied the girl; and putting a hand to her bosom she produced a heavy gold ring, curiously carved, that was strung on a fine chain worn round her neck.

## XI

### *Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire*

LOO-LAO offered no further explanation to her companions, who seemed not to know whether to take her seriously or not. Detaching the golden circlet from the chain, she handed it to Ping Tang and urged him to guard it as he would his life.

"Don't stop to ask questions," she said imperiously, "but go—go at once and do my bidding. Take this to the Imperial Palace, and seek among the sentries at the gate for one who will have a white dragon embroidered in silk on his left sleeve. That is the sign by which the soldiers of the Emperor's own bodyguard are distinguished. To such a man, and to none other, show the ring and demand a private audience with the Son of Heaven. This will be granted, and when you are brought to the Emperor's

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presence tell him where I am and what peril I am in, and say it is my wish and prayer that he should quickly send a company of his dragon-soldiers to save both myself and those who have been such good friends to me from the wicked designs of the Boxers. Tell him all—everything that he may seek to know. And let him understand how short is the time."

Ping Tang, having received these instructions, looked closely at the carving on the ring. An expression of astonishment and reverence swept across his face.

"I am ready," he declared. "If I fail it will be because I am either dead or a prisoner."

"Do your best, old fellow," said Dan. "And look here—you'll want something to defend yourself with, in case you get into a scrimmage. Take my sword."

Ping Tang accepted the weapon and tried its edge.

"Sure you can give that chap outside the slip?" Dan added.

"I am not afraid of him," was the reply. "The rest will be the hardest."

"Well, keep your eyes open for Boxers ;

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they've got it in for you since you deserted them a month ago. I'll see you off."

The two lads crept to the end of the passage. Ping Tang opened the slab a few inches, listened for a moment, and then squeezed cautiously through and let himself down to the narrow space between the wall and the hedge of thorn-bushes. It was a dark night, though the stars were shining overhead. A deep silence brooded over the great bloodthirsty city. Dan closed the block of stone and waited. A minute passed, and then a single sharp cry was followed by the rapid patter of footsteps. The noise soon faded from hearing, and all became quiet again. With a thankful heart Dan groped his way back to the dimly-lit chamber.

Old Nan Ho was crouching in a far corner, mumbling incoherently to herself. She paid no heed to the lad, but Loo-Lao came eagerly to his side.

"Is it all right?" she whispered.

"Yes; so far so good," Dan replied. "Ping Tang has given the spy the slip." The girl sat down on a low stool, and he stretched himself at her feet. "Princess, will the Emperor really help us?" he asked.

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"That depends," Loo-Lao answered with a sigh. "He is sure to send his dragon-soldiers if he gets my message and can act of his own free will. His Majesty Kuang Hsu has always been my friend and my father's, and both of them are well disposed to foreigners and in favour of Western progress. But the Empress-Dowager would have the country for the Chinese alone. She is a wicked woman and all-powerful, and it was by her orders, I am certain, that my father was stolen away. The Emperor perhaps knows nothing of it. My father has much influence, and having made him a prisoner, both the Boxers and the Empress-Dowager wished to get a still stronger hold upon him, so that they might bend him to their will. It was for that reason, I think now, that they tried to take me also, first the Boxers and then the Imperial soldiers."

"In that case," said Dan, "your father's life is safe."

"Yes; they would not dare to kill him," assented the girl. "He must be locked up in the Forbidden City."

"You have made several things clear that I did not understand before," Dan went on.

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"But tell me, Princess, what about that ring?"

Loo-Lao blushed and averted her eyes. "It was given to me by the Emperor himself," she answered in a low voice.

"With his own hands?"

"Yes; and he promised at the time—it was but a few months ago—to grant any request I might make in the future."

"I see," exclaimed Dan. "And you sent the ring to him to-night as a proof and a reminder. I'm beginning to think there's a chance of our pulling through this scrape, after all."

"If the Son of Heaven can save us, he will do it," declared the girl.

A thoughtful silence fell between the two.

"There is something back of all this," the lad shrewdly told himself. "I shouldn't wonder if the Emperor had taken a fancy to a certain little princess I know of, and had tackled the first stage of the negotiations with Prince Lan. Well, the Sublime Son of Heaven has good taste—and I don't know where he could make a better choice. Here's luck to him, and hoping he'll shake off

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the cantankerous old woman who is doing her best to drive him and the country to ruin!"

The personal affairs of Loo-Lao and Kuang Hsu, and the pleasing suggestion of an Oriental love romance, quickly slipped the young American's mind, and were succeeded by reflections of a gloomy and depressing nature. The next hour was the most trying, the hardest to endure, of any that Dan and the princess had spent since they came to share Nan Ho's refuge. They started at every slight sound, dreading the arrival of the Tiger and his Boxers. They endeavoured to hope for the best, but dismal forebodings could not be banished. Intervention and rescue hung on so slender a thread. Ping Tang might easily have been caught on his way to the Imperial Palace, or he might not find a soldier with a white dragon on his sleeve among those who guarded that mysterious portal. Nor was it by any means certain, should the Emperor receive the ring and the message, that it would be in his power to send help.

"If the dragon-soldiers *do* come," asked the lad, "where will they take us?"

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"The Son of Heaven will instruct them wisely," was Loo-Lao's confident answer.

The minutes dragged slowly by, each one fraught with a little eternity of suspense. Old Nan Ho, half dazed with nervous terror, still crouched and mumbled in her corner.

"Hark!" she cried, starting suddenly up. "My son has returned."

The sound of muffled blows penetrated from a distance to the chamber, and when Dan and the girl ran out to the passage they could hear the quick, hard raps of numerous weapons against the wall. The worst had come, they knew, and as they stood there helpless with fright the great block of stone swung inward on its secret hinge. Framed in the doorway, with the light of torches flashing upon him, appeared Li Sheng; and over his shoulders peered the devilish, exultant faces of half a dozen ruffians in Boxer uniform.

We must go back for a time to Alec, whose situation, though quite bad enough, was not so desperate as his companions believed it to be; for while there is life there



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is hope, and the lad was not dead yet. He was the first to drop into the chasm that opened immediately after the explosion in the Su Wang Fu; and as he slid down for several yards before he came to a stop, he lacked the opportunity by which Cocket and Killemoff saved themselves. He saw the two men struggling madly above him, saw them squeeze through into the trench, and then, with a rumbling noise and a shower of earth, the gap closed tight and he was plunged in total darkness.

Try to imagine being suddenly buried alive, and you will have some idea of Alec's feelings. The sensation was horrible, and his tortured mind at once began to picture the agonies of a slow death by suffocation. But when he found that he could breathe with comparative ease, and that the supply of air was not likely to be exhausted for some little time, he plucked up courage wonderfully. What was to be done? He lay in a crouching attitude, afraid to stir for fear of bringing down the quaking soil overhead; this was close enough now to be touched, and it was the same to right and left. The

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silence of the grave was about him. He could hear nothing, though he knew that the grounds of the Su Wang Fu must be ringing with noisy clamour, and by that he judged how compact and deep was the mass of earth that separated him from the outer world. Harking back to what had preceded the disaster, he was satisfied that the enemy had blown up a mine; and as he remembered where the explosion occurred his thoughts ran in a lucid channel.

"It's clear enough," he told himself. "The tunnel was not far in front of where we were digging, and it caved in at one side, next to the trench, when the mine went off. I can't expect to be rescued by our fellows, for even if it was possible to dig down to me—which I don't believe—they'll be too busy fighting to bother about that now. The Chinese will either try to rush the barricades, or they will swarm out through the hole they have blown—if there is an opening for them. So I must look after myself if I want to see daylight again. And there's only one chance of that. I didn't slide entirely to the bottom of this cleft, or whatever

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it is, and if it hasn't closed up yet it ought to lead me to the floor of the tunnel. Anyway, here goes."

That his position would be little less precarious if he succeeded in reaching the shaft of the mine was a fact to which Alec was not blind, but the perils to be encountered there seemed trifling when weighed against the danger of suffocation.

"I would rather fight a dozen Boxers than stick here any longer, in this living tomb," he reflected. "When I get clear of it—if I ever do—it will be time enough then to plan the next step."

The pick with which the lad had been working was still clenched in one hand, and was likely to be of future service. So he kept tight hold of it, and having managed to turn round in the cramped space at his disposal, with much trepidation he began the descent. Inch by inch, feet first, he cautiously slid along. Loose earth rained incessantly upon him, and he dreaded a crushing avalanche at any moment. But all went well until he had advanced three or four yards along the sloping fissure, which he fancied was growing wider instead of nar-

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rower. Then, of a sudden, he was overwhelmed by a mass of soil.

Was this to be the end of it all? A ghastly fear gripped the young American and brought a choking cry to his lips. He lashed wildly out with all his limbs, struggled to his knees, and then, rising higher and shaking off the crushing weight, his head and shoulders emerged into empty space. He released his arms, and gulped air into his lungs. He was trembling like a leaf, and the perspiration was trickling down his cheeks.

"Thank God!" he murmured.

But what next? Could he go on any farther, or was he completely entombed? He must learn his fate quickly, and he dreaded the worst as he lifted the pick overhead. It came in contact with nothing, and his hopes revived. He floundered through and over the heap of earth, foot by foot, now supported on its irregular surface, now sinking waist-deep. A crumbling, sloping wall rose before him, but it was soft to the touch, and it easily yielded when he cut into it with his tool. For a yard or more he hewed a way forward, raining hard blows. Then a hor-

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rible thought occurred to him. Was he bearing in the proper direction, or had he lost his course?

"As likely as not I've got turned round," he admitted to himself, "and am working back towards the trench. What shall I do?"

He was finding it difficult to breathe, and he knew that he must either promptly escape from his living tomb or be suffocated. The latter seemed inevitable, and his remnant of hope ebbed to the bitterness of despair. But as he hesitated, still loath to be reconciled to the prospect of such a terrible death, he suddenly felt the ground settling and quivering beneath him. The next instant he was dropping slowly downward, slipping and sliding while he tried to keep an upright position amid the avalanche of clods that pelted every part of his body and roared in his ears. He stopped with a jar that nearly threw him over. Dazed and bruised, his brain in a dizzy whirl, he kicked himself free of the loose earth that was still falling, and made three or four staggering steps. He stood on a solid foundation, and space was on all sides of him. As he felt the current of damp air

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cooling his fevered temples, and detected a pungent odour of burnt powder, he realized that at least he was not to die of suffocation, whatever else might be in store for him.

"This *is* luck!" he muttered. "I never expected to get out of that. But here I am, and none the worse for it. I've tumbled into the mine-shaft, of course."

Alec's supposition proved to be correct, after he had struck one of two wax vestas that he found by diligent searching at the bottom of a pocket. The tiny yellow flame revealed a passage six feet wide and about the same in height. It stretched darkly in both directions, and was shored up with stout timbers and cross-beams, against which wreaths of bluish smoke were lazily drifting. The mass of earth piled behind the lad, and a gaping hole in the wall above it, showed the effects of the explosion; the soil, shattered by the concussion, had caved in between the trench and the tunnel.

It was very quiet down here under the ground. Except for a distant humming noise, the nature of which could not be distinguished, nothing was to be heard. But

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the silence did not last long. The match had just burnt out, and Alec was on the point of starting off to the left to ascertain what chance there was of climbing up to the Su Wang Fu, when he was startled by the sound of voices. A party of Chinese, carrying torches, had entered the shaft from the right-hand end.

Suddenly threatened by this new peril—which was not unexpected—the lad's position was precarious in the extreme. The emergency found him ready. He could not be sure that the mine had left any opening, and indeed the unbroken darkness which prevailed in that direction was opposed to such a theory. So he concluded to hide for the present in the hole from which he had lately been shot out, but at the first attempt to climb over the loose earth a fresh shower fell upon him from above. He was almost entirely buried for a moment, and when he had extricated himself he saw that his plan was no longer possible; the crack had completely vanished.

"I'm in for it now," he reflected. "The mine is my last chance."

If that too should fail him? His blood

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turned cold at the thought. The enemy were rapidly approaching, and their torches flashed nearly to his feet as he ran swiftly along the wall, the trusty pick swung over his shoulder.

"I'll make a fight for it," he vowed, "if it comes to the worst."

The next instant he stumbled and fell, and having scrambled to his legs he saw that he could go no farther. The last hope had failed him, as he had feared. He was at the spot where the mine had been exploded, but instead of an outlet above there was only a jagged mass of earth and timbers blocking the passage from floor to roof. The dim reflection of the torches showed a mangled corpse lying at the base of the pile, and a lean yellow arm protruding from the *débris*.

What had happened—as came to be known afterwards—was this. The mine had blown up quite by accident, a full day earlier than was intended, and three of the soldiers employed at the nefarious work lost their lives. The rest fled in panic, and some time elapsed before they could muster sufficient courage to venture back to learn the extent of the calamity.



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But the cause and result of the explosion had no interest for Alec, nor did his eyes rest for more than a second or two on the scene of ruin and death. It was enough for him to know that his own end was near and inevitable. He was hopelessly trapped, at the mercy of savage foes who would slay and spare not. To sell his life as dearly as possible—that was all that remained. His face blanched and his heart thumped loudly against his ribs, but his hand was as steady as a rock. Summoning all his fortitude, he waited.

The party who had entered the tunnel numbered eight or nine men, two of them Imperial soldiers and the rest Boxers. They stopped for half a minute at the break in the wall; and here they must have discovered the footsteps in the loose earth, for they at once pressed on at a quicker pace, talking in shrill and eager tones. Closer and closer they drew, filling the passage from side to side. Then the tremulous, dancing light of the torches, shooting forward, revealed the lad crouching at the base of the *débris*, behind a projecting timber. A fiendish outcry rose :

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“Look, look, a foreign devil! He has dropped from above. Off with his head!”

## XII.

### *Li Sheng Holds Trumps*

A LEC straightened himself to his full stature, and stood with flashing eyes and determined bearing, the steel-pointed pick lifted menacingly.

"Come on, you yellow dogs!" he shouted hoarsely.

None of the party carried firearms, and the three torch-bearers were without any weapons whatever. The others whipped out their swords and tried to close with the lad from right and left, but the formidable pick, as it described a hissing half-circle in the air, dampened their ardour and held them in check. They dodged about warily, watching their chance, and they were in the act of making a combined rush when their leader, a stalwart Boxer whose face was hideously disfigured by scars, suddenly struck down the nearest

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blades and called to his comrades to desist.

"Stop, we are fools if we slay this foreign devil," he exclaimed eagerly, "I know him well—he is one of those who are supposed to be hiding in the Tartar City with the daughter of Prince Lan. There is a reward on his head. If we take him to Li Sheng it will be money in our pockets."

"Spare his life, then," the others agreed, without a dissenting voice. "You speak words of wisdom, Mow Chang. But the reward we obtain from Li Sheng must be divided."

"We will share the gold equally, by the tombs of my ancestors I swear it," Mow Chang replied. Turning to Alec, he added: "Throw your weapon away and give yourself up peaceably. You shall not be harmed."

But the lad was in no mind to accept the offer. Knowing only too well that death by torture would be his fate if he fell into the hands of the Tiger, he promptly decided to remain where he was and fight to the last.

"I won't be taken alive," he cried boldly. "Touch me if you dare!"

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He had the advantage, and he hoped by offering a desperate resistance, by killing one or two of the Boxers, to so enrage the others that at the final struggle they would plunge their swords into his body. But this hope was destined to fail him. There was a brief hesitation, a vain renewal of the demand to surrender. Then, at a prearranged signal, Mow Chang and his companions threw themselves towards the lad, reckless of the danger they were incurring. The pick swung out vengefully, and the foremost ruffian, pierced between the neck and shoulder, fell with blood spouting from a ghastly wound. Two of his assailants, with the agility of panthers, leapt upon Alec from right and left, and one of them he felled by a blow with the flat of the weapon, crushing the fellow's skull like an egg-shell. The next instant the pick was torn from his grasp, and he was down with four men on top of him.

They took him alive and unharmed, though not without a furious struggle in which the lad made good use of his hands and feet. The lust of gold was stronger than the desire for vengeance. Leaving

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their two slain comrades to lie where they had fallen, Mow Chang and his fellow-ruffians filed back through the mine-shaft, muttering threats and curses as they forced their prisoner along. They stopped midway to hold a whispered conversation, the purport of which was, so far as the lad could gather, that precautions must be taken to hide their designs and prevent any interference while passing through the lines of the Imperial soldiers.

"We will let it appear," Mow Chang said shrewdly, "that we are carrying the body of one of our own men."

He instructed one of the torch-bearers, who hurried to the rear and quickly returned with two blood-stained tunics robbed from the dead. The lad was bound hand and foot and gagged, and when four men had picked him up lightly, and he had been covered from head to foot with the drenched garments, Mow Chang led the way on.

Helplessly fettered and unable to make a sound or to see anything, tortured by the knowledge that he would soon be delivered over to the Tiger's merciless clutches, Alec's feelings may be easier imagined than de-

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scribed. He was borne up a steeply-sloping path, jolted roughly from side to side, and then the change of air and the throbbing noise that came to his ears, told him he had emerged from the tunnel.

There were no pauses worth mentioning after that, though frequently the little party had to stop for a moment to satisfy the curiosity of some person in authority, to whose questions Mow Chang always had an answer ready. Of time or distance the lad could make no definite reckoning, but he knew that he was well beyond the lines of the besiegers when, at length, his captors stopped and put him on his feet. As the stained tunics dropped to the ground, he saw that he was at the entrance to a Taoist temple that was familiar to him by sight, and was situated several hundred yards from the North Bridge. The gag was taken from his mouth, his arms were untied, and he was straightway dragged through the door and into the dreaded presence of Li Sheng.

Here the Tiger evidently had his headquarters. The paper lanterns that lighted the building showed him seated cross-legged on the floor, with attendants around him,

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devouring his supper by the aid of chopsticks. When he saw the prisoner he jumped up with an exclamation of astonishment, and his face beamed with devilish gratification as he listened to Mow Chang's brief explanation. He still bore plain marks of his wounds.

"So you are in my power again!" he said. "This time you assuredly shall not escape. But where are your companions—the other foreign devil and the daughter of Prince Lan?"

"Find out if you can," was the lad's bold reply.

"Answer me truthfully, or I will have your tongue sliced to bits and your eyes dug from their sockets."

"I have nothing to tell you," said Alec.

"You defy me now," exclaimed the rufian, "but you will speak readily enough when you come to the torture."

At this point there was an interruption. A lean, dusty Chinaman, wearing a Boxer sash, burst into the temple, drew Li Sheng to one side, and whispered earnestly to him for several minutes.

"You bring me good news indeed," the



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Tiger cried joyfully; and points of fire seemed to flash from his wicked eyes. "I will attend to this at once," he added. "Mow Chang, you and your trusty men shall earn a double reward to-night. Follow me with all haste."

"And the young foreign devil?" asked Mow Chang.

"He goes with us," was the reply.

"Where?"

The question fell involuntarily from Alec's lips, as a terrible suspicion entered his mind.

"To discover the secret that lies hidden within the wall of the Imperial City," Li Sheng answered, with a mocking laugh. "Come!"

The reader already knows something of the result of Li Sheng's expedition. The party having been guided across the Tartar City by the lean Chinaman who brought the news, it was a simple matter for them to locate the hollow space within the wall by sounding it with their weapons. The block of stone yielded to the first pressure, and the blazing torches, flashing back into the

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darkness, revealed to the impatient searchers those whom they sought.

"We have found them!" rose the shrill, exultant cry. "Here they are, hidden away like rats!"

The Tiger's spy had been fleetier than Ping Tang; the last hope had crumbled. Though menaced by a terrible death, Dan's courage did not fail him at this supreme moment. He thought of others before himself, and thrusting his companion behind him he said to her hurriedly:

"I will try to gain a little time. *Your* life is not in danger, but they will surely kill Nan Ho. Quick, hide her in the back room, and perhaps she will be overlooked."

Loo-Lao glided obediently through the doorway, and Dan, pale but resolute, barred the narrow passage and faced the Boxers unflinchingly. Seeing that he was unarmed they rushed upon him fearlessly, and after a brief struggle, which he protracted as long as possible, he was overpowered without any violence being offered him. His wrists were pulled round to his back and tied with a rope, and then he was dragged forth into the cool night air.

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Mow Chang and Li Sheng, accompanied by a couple of torch-bearers, entered the first of the stone chambers. Hitherto the knowledge that her life would be spared had sustained and encouraged the princess, but now, at sight of the four hideous ruffians, her calmness deserted her, and with a piercing cry she sank to the floor. At a sign from his chief Mow Chang picked the girl up in his arms. The Tiger, pushing on to the small apartment in the rear, saw what appeared to be a bundle of old clothes lying in one corner, but happily did not dream that it concealed the trembling and shrunken form of Nan Ho. He peered about for a moment, pricked the bundle with his sword, and swaggered back to the other room.

"You need not fear; no harm shall come to you," he said roughly to the weeping girl. "We have got them all," he added to his followers. "There were only the two. Come."

The lights receded as the footsteps trampled along the corridor. The slab of stone swung shut with a hollow clang, and the secret hiding-place was left to darkness and solitude, except for the terrified old woman,

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who did not dare to stir. Down in the dry bed of the ditch waited seven or eight Boxers, including several who had been picked up during the rapid march across the city. Their torches threw wavering patches of light on the weather-beaten surface of the towering wall, and dimly revealed on the opposite side, where the line of houses began, a group of timid people whom curiosity had drawn to the spot. They withdrew in sudden alarm as Li Sheng and his companions, bringing the two prisoners, descended the sloping bank and joined the rest of the party.

"Dan! Dan!" an eager voice exclaimed.

The lad started at the sound of his name, looked closely at the slim figure guarded by Boxers, and saw who it was that had spoken.

"Alec, you here!" he cried.

Loo-Lao also recognized the third prisoner, and for a brief interval both she and Dan were dumb with surprise. They could scarcely grasp the truth, could with difficulty realize that it was indeed their old comrade who stood before them; for they had never doubted his death.

"I'm not a ghost, old chap," declared Alec, "though you seem to think so."

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"I—I was sure the Boxers had killed you—that night you left," Dan stammered.

"No; I've been shut up in the Legations—couldn't get out," Alec replied.

"And my parents?"

"They are both well. I say, Dan, you don't believe it was I who—"

"Who betrayed us?" Dan interrupted. "Of course not; I know better than that. One of the Tiger's spies discovered our hiding-place."

Li Sheng and Mow Chang were talking in low tones, and the others were watching them expectantly; so for the moment nobody interfered with the conversation between the prisoners.

"We're done for this time, you and I," Dan went on, in a voice that shook a little. "And it won't be long. The Tiger is too keen on wiping out old scores."

"Yes, we've got to face the worst," Alec assented bitterly. "Of course there isn't a scrap of hope for us to cling to. But tell me, where are Ping Tang and his mother?"

"Do these fellows understand English?" Dan asked cautiously.

"I don't believe it."

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"That's all right, then. Nan Ho is safe, and Ping Tang slipped off more than an hour ago. He went to fetch help."

"Help? From where?"

The question was not answered, for just then Li Sheng turned and approached the group.

"It is settled," he announced loudly. "We take the foreign devils to yonder temple, the same from which they escaped before. And there we will sacrifice them on the altar of the Joyful Bhudda. As for the girl, I have entrusted her to the care of Mow Chang, who will be responsible for her safe-keeping."

There was a murmur of delighted approval from the Boxers, followed by a cry of horror from Loo-Lao.

"Be merciful," she begged. "Spare their lives."

"You ask what is impossible," replied the Tiger, with a devilish laugh. "They must both die by torture. Rather than lose my vengeance I would suffer my right arm to be cut off. We will start directly," he added to the torch-bearers, "but first drive away yonder rabble. We want no meddlers to dog our footsteps."

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With that two of the Boxers drew their swords and ran towards the little group of on-lookers, who wasted not a second in taking to flight. A tremor of fear, which he could not repress, made Dan reluctant to glance at his chum. Instead, he looked down the length of the ditch, and as he detected a faint noise in the distance his heart seemed to leap into his throat.

"Is there still a chance for us?" he wondered; and a prayer rose involuntarily to his lips.

Twenty yards off, in the direction of the palace, a bastion jutted from the wall of the Imperial City. And of a sudden, from behind this, appeared a dark moving mass. Armed men they were, by the glint of steel, and they were advancing at a quick trot along the bottom of the ditch.

"Who are these?" Li Sheng exclaimed suspiciously.

The princess clapped her hands with joy and smiled through her tears. "They are the dragon-soldiers," she cried. "The Son of Heaven has not forgotten."

Dan uttered a fervent "thank God." The Boxers in charge of him tried to force him

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towards the bank, but he resisted strenuously. "Cheer up, Alec," he shouted, "I believe we are saved—and just in the nick of time."

Li Sheng's features were convulsed with rage, with fear and disappointment. But it was too late to evade by flight what promised to be an awkward predicament, and taking his stand in front of his band of ruffians he waited. Loo-Lao was right. Out of the semi-darkness and into the glow of the torches loomed a dozen men—uniformed Imperial soldiers armed with Mauser rifles, and all wearing the badge of the white dragon on their sleeves. Foremost was a stalwart, long-moustached officer with a drawn sword, and in the rear lurked Ping Tang, a grin of satisfaction on his yellow face.

The officer, who evidently knew Li Sheng, curtly addressed him by name. "It is well that I find you here," he said; "otherwise, had I failed in my errand, your head assuredly would not have long remained between your shoulders."

"What do you wish of me?" the Tiger demanded sullenly.



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"The person of Prince Lan's daughter."

"By whose authority?"

"By the command of the Emperor himself, whom I serve."

"And the Empress-Dowager? Does she sanction this?"

"That is no concern of mine," the officer declared. "You see—"; and he pointed to the dragon-mark on his sleeve.

"I must submit," said Li Sheng. "Take the girl, Captain Fang; and may you be held blameless for the deeds of the Son of Heaven. There is one within the palace who wields a higher power than does Kuang Hsu. But what of these two other prisoners whom I hold?" he added.

There was a brief silence. Alec and Dan, waiting in breathless suspense, could hear the beating of their hearts. Captain Fang hesitated for a moment, pondering the question with knitted brow.

"It is different with the other two," he said finally, "They are foreign devils."

"And they have done much harm, for which it is only fitting they should suffer," exclaimed Li Sheng, his eyes kindling with a gleam of triumph. "Leave them to me."

### XIII

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CAPTAIN Fang made a rapid, furtive gesture of assent. "Give me the girl," he said, "and we will be off."

The captives, their new-born hopes thus dashed to the ground, looked at each other with white, despairing faces. But Li Sheng and Captain Fang, in working their cunning deal, had not reckoned with the princess. The sacrifices that Dan and Alec had made in the past were now to be repaid. Freeing herself from Mow Chang's grasp, Loo-Lao darted forward and stood protectingly before the lads.

"Take them with you," she cried, addressing the Imperial officer. "Do not leave them in the hands of these wicked men, to be tortured to death. Did not the Emperor receive my message? Tell me, surely he gave you a written authority?"

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Captain Fang reluctantly displayed a paper with a purple seal attached. He was visibly ill at ease.

"What were your orders?" demanded the agitated girl. "Speak!"

"To bring you safely to the palace," was the reply.

"But that is not all. You are concealing something. You were told to rescue my friends as well as myself. Is not that true?"

"It is the truth," Captain Fang admitted. "Such were the instructions given to me by the Son of Heaven."

"Then obey."

At this point Li Sheng, whose features were working with rage and disappointment, signalled to his companions. They seized hold of the lads and attempted to drag them away.

"Stop!" cried Loo-Lao. She turned to the officer with flashing eyes. "You dare not take me alone to the presence of the Emperor, nor would I consent to go with you," she exclaimed. "These two are my friends and protectors—I owe them more than I can ever repay. They must accompany me."

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"But they are foreign devils," demurred Captain Fang.

"I command you to save them. Refuse, and you will lose your head. From my own lips the Emperor shall learn of your disobedience."

This was not an empty threat, as Captain Fang knew well. He no longer wavered from the path of duty, though that was opposed to inclination.

"What must be, must," he acquiesced. "The foreign devils shall go to be judged by the Son of Heaven."

A furious cry burst from the Tiger, as he saw his intended victims slipping out of his clutches. In his passion he gnashed his teeth and nearly foamed at the lips.

"I'll not be cheated thus," he screamed, brandishing his arms in the officer's face. "The foreign devils belong to me."

"You could have them and welcome," said Captain Fang, "but I am helpless in the matter. You heard—" and he jerked a hand toward the Princess.

Li Sheng swore till he was fairly black in the face.

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"To the temple with the prisoners," he cried chokingly. "Remove them."

"Touch them not!" shouted Captain Fang.

With that he nodded to his soldiers, who quickly advanced a few paces and levelled their rifles. Such a determined attitude cowed the Boxers, and showed them the folly of resistance. With angry threats and curses they fell back, leaving Alec and Dan, with the girl, in a little group by themselves. Li Sheng, maddened beyond control, made a move to attack the lads with a drawn sword.

"Stand aside, or I'll blow your brains out," vowed Captain Fang, as he presented a pistol to the ruffian's head.

The blade was lowered, and the Tiger, suddenly appearing to be resigned to the inevitable, quietly joined his grumbling comrades. The dragon-soldiers of Kuang Hsu closed about the rescued prisoners, and Ping Tang, who was hanging on the outskirts, caught Dan's eye and gave him an anxious, questioning glance that said as plainly as words could have done :

"What of my mother?"

With equal clearness Dan's answering

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nod, and the slight shrug of his shoulders towards the wall of the Imperial City, conveyed to the Chinese lad the welcome news that old Nan Ho was safe and in hiding. A moment later, when the soldiers were on the point of starting, Ping Tang was nowhere to be seen. He had watched his chance and crept away into the sheltering darkness. Now that those for whom he had done so much no longer needed his services, his sole thought was for his aged mother.

"Forward, march!"

The Chinese equivalent of that command fell from Captain Fang's lips. He let his men tramp by, and then, loitering behind them for an instant, he called to Li Sheng, in a conciliatory tone :

"There is no help for it, my friend. I am under orders."

The Tiger laughed, and it sounded like a genuine wild-beast's snarl. "Look you, this is not the end," he said derisively, with an oath. "You are only a puppet that dances when the string is pulled—a pawn that moves at the will of him who owns you. But it is a dangerous game you play, and I, though now a loser, will win back what I

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have lost before two more suns have set. You acknowledge the Son of Heaven, I the Empress-Dowager. And she is all-powerful—remember that."

Again Li Sheng laughed, and the refrain of it seemed to linger as he and his evil crew, having flung away all but one of their torches, sullenly climbed the bank. Captain Fang, pondering uneasily on the boastful words he had just heard, pushed to the head of his little company of dragon-soldiers, who rapidly proceeded, with military step and precision, along the bed of the ditch in a southerly direction.

What was now to become of the rescued prisoners, and where had Kuang Hsu directed them to be taken?

When the intense relief and joy of their narrow escape from Li Sheng had given way to a more sober mood, and the two lads turned their thoughts to the future, the above questions naturally caused them a sense of discomfort. Their uneasiness grew with reflection; it was too early as yet to congratulate themselves on being out of their troubles. They felt some anxiety for

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the Princess Loo-Lao as well, for they knew that the Emperor, whatever might be his desires and intentions, was to a great extent under the thumb of his unscrupulous aunt, who had no love for Prince Lan's daughter and still less for any foreigners. Nor were they satisfied that Li Sheng was powerless to do them any further injury, and this with good reason. Their dread of him would have been materially increased had they overheard his parting words to Captain Fang.

"I'm afraid there are difficulties ahead," Dan said gloomily, when the matter had been discussed.

"It looks a bit that way," Alec assented. "If the Emperor expects to keep what he has done a secret from the Empress-Dowager, he will probably find himself mistaken; for it is quite on the cards that the Tiger will spoil that little game."

"But if we are safely hidden we shall be out of his reach. Where do you suppose they are taking us?"

"Not to the Imperial Palace, anyway," replied Alec. "That much is pretty certain."



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"To the Legations, then?"

"No; they would never be able to get us through the enemy's lines."

But several minutes later, to the amazement of both lads, the party swerved sharp to the right and halted at one of the massive gates in the wall. They were promptly admitted by sentries who asked no questions, and then followed a quick march across a quarter of a mile of the Imperial City, by a dark and apparently deserted avenue. Next came a second and more startling surprise, and one that proved the falsity of Alec's assertion. For under the lofty portals of the East Gate of the Forbidden City, which was opened to them by men wearing the white dragon on their sleeves, strode Captain Fang, his soldiers, and the three prisoners.

"By heavens, we're actually inside the Imperial Palace!" gasped Dan.

"I wonder if we'll ever get out again," said Alec. "We won't if the Empress-Dowager can help it. But so far they seem to be taking every precaution to keep her in the dark."

There was no mistaking the fact, inexpli-

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cable and marvelous as it seemed. The party had indeed left the Imperial City behind and were now treading the sacred and forbidden confines of the abode of the Son of Heaven and his long line of illustrious ancestors. For the moment the lads—who were a few paces in front of Loo-Lao—forgot their doubts and fears, and were quite carried away by thrilling curiosity and excitement. They stared about them with dilated eyes, and the lamps that burned here and there allowed them to see more than might have been expected.

It was a brief passage, but every step of it was fraught with interest. First came a long alley with stone steps at the end of it leading up to a triple gateway, then another alley and a wooden door, and after that half a dozen courts and squares, where stunted trees and rank weeds grew out of the flagging, and gigantic bronze tortoises and storks, marble elephants and dragons and decayed sedan-chairs, were planted in picturesque confusion. The group halted as an elderly Chinaman met Captain Fang and addressed him in a low voice. He was accompanied by a soldier carrying a lantern,

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and the light flashed brightly on the surrounding walls of terra-cotta, crowned with blue and yellow tiles.

"Farewell. I shall not forget you," said the Princess Loo-Lao, extending her hand to Dan and Alec.

She was gone almost before they could find voice to reply, hurried away by three of the dragon-soldiers. The rest of the party, passing on through two more courts at the heels of the old Chinaman, mounted a dozen marble steps to the threshold of a long, low-roofed building, and entered a dingy chamber that contained a gilded throne flanked by great vases of cloisonné ware. A narrow passage opened from the rear, and at the far end of this was a small room destined for the reception of the two lads. They were thrust inside, and Captain Fang spoke a few earnest and significant words to them.

"Your presence here must not be known or suspected," he said. "As you value your heads make no noise, and on no account show your faces at the window."

Then the heavy door was closed and barred, and the footsteps of the officer and his companions gradually died away. The

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young prisoners were left to silence and solitude, with leisure to reflect on their strange position—so strange a one, indeed, that they could scarcely realize it.

The time, it will be remembered, was the night of the eleventh of August. Somewhere below the window referred to a light was burning, and its faint reflection penetrated to the room and outlined a couple of couches of European construction. Dan and Alec had much to say to each other, much to tell and explain, and while they talked they occasionally heard voices and passing feet at a distance. The hour was late when they retired, and they slept without waking until far into the morning.

By daylight their prison turned out to be a comfortably furnished apartment, hung with curtains of frayed and dusty satin. It was evidently situated in a part of the palace over which the Emperor had sole jurisdiction and authority, though in one direction, at least, his rights extended very little farther. A cautious peep through the window suggested as much to the lads, and also explained the significant meaning of Captain Fang's parting words. For the view to be

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obtained from this point of vantage comprised two courtyards, one on a lower level than the other ; and down in the furthestmost of them, through which persons were almost constantly going to and fro, were posted fierce-looking soldiers who did *not* wear the white dragon on their sleeves. They doubtless belonged to the body-guard of the Empress-Dowager.

"If *they* see us," said Dan, "it's all up with us."

The prisoners were well cared for, food and drink being brought to them regularly, while outside the door of the room—there was no question of their trying to escape—a sentinel was stationed for their protection. They felt reasonably safe themselves, but anxiety for others kept them in a state of suspense from shortly before midday of the twelfth ; for at that hour the siege of the Legations was renewed with devilish fury. With darkness came a lull, but the dawn of the thirteenth again ushered in the noise of rifle and artillery fire. It continued unremittingly as the day dragged on. Early in the evening, while shells were screeching and bursting over the Legation quarter, Alec

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slipped to the window and looked warily out. He uttered a low cry of alarm that instantly brought his companion to his side.

"Li Sheng, by all that's unlucky!" exclaimed Dan.

Heedless of the risk they incurred by exposing their heads, forgetful of everything but the alarming discovery that seemed to send an icy chill along their spines, Alec and Dan crouched by the window with their eyes riveted on the scene that was passing below them. It was of brief duration. A momentary view was all they obtained, yet it was long enough for them to recognize, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the dreaded person of the Tiger. Preceded by two Chinese soldiers and an officer in a Mandarin hat and peacock plumes, and followed by Mow Chang and three other Boxers, the arch-ruffian swaggered with a fine air of importance through the lower court. The ringing tramp of feet suddenly dropped to a faint shuffle as the party vanished beneath an arched gateway, leaving the palace guards staring curiously after them. Captain Fang, who had himself been a spectator from a latticed balcony near-by,

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felt a very unpleasant sinking in the heart. For he knew that Li Sheng, true to his boastful words, had come to play the last and winning card in the game—a game with two lives at stake, and involving serious consequences for others as well.

Captain Fang had already hurried off to search for his royal master, intent on giving timely warning, when the lads shrank back from the window and looked mutely and miserably at each other's frightened faces.

"That means the worst for us," said Dan. "I was afraid something of the sort would happen. But how do you suppose Li Sheng got inside the Forbidden City?"

"Easy enough," replied Alec. "He sent a message to the Empress-Dowager, and she has granted him an audience."

"And he'll give the whole thing away?"

"Of course. And ten to one we shall be turned over to him—unless we are executed here in the palace."

"But the Emperor? Can't he protect us?"

"His protection isn't worth a fig," Alec said bitterly, "for his handful of dragon-soldiers, devoted as they are to him, are too few in numbers to amount to anything. The

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Empress-Dowager holds the reins, and she wouldn't hesitate for an instant, if it served her purpose, to order the Son of Heaven's arrest."

"Yes, that's about right," Dan assented. "It's no use thinking of escape, I suppose?"

"Not a bit. We've simply got to face the music, and be ready for the worst. They'll be coming for us presently."

An interval of terrible suspense, of the sort of anxiety that tries the stoutest courage, dragged slowly by. To fall again into the Tiger's clutches, to be led to the sacrificial altar of Bhudda—the thought was keenest torture. The lads barely tasted the evening meal, and they had no chance to question the man who brought it, so quickly did he thrust the tray through the door and disappear. The occasional creak of a board told that a sentry was still on duty in the corridor.

As the daylight faded a storm came up suddenly—a hard shower accompanied by flashes of lightning and one or two peals of thunder. But neither rain nor darkness had any effect on the siege operations. With undiminished fury the rifles spluttered and



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cracked and the big pieces of artillery roared, hurling their leaden hail into the Legation quarter. At intervals the Chinese bugles blared their rasping notes, and once, during a partial lull, the spitting fire of a machine-gun could be distinguished.

"That belongs to the Austrians," said Dan. "Whew, what a hot time all our fellows must be having over there! But they've got plenty of fight left in them yet, though the enemy have been pounding steadily away at them for two days and a night. I wonder how it will end. What wouldn't I give to see my parents just once more! I hope they'll pull through safely."

"I don't think you need worry about *them*," Alec replied. "The Legations will hold out to the last—they are too strongly defended to be taken. General Gasalee promised to arrive on the 13th or 14th, and the limit expires to-morrow. The Chinese must know that the relief force is very near Peking, or they wouldn't be pressing the siege so hotly."

"To-morrow! Where will we be then?" Dan reflected, a lump rising in his throat. And Alec, at the same moment, was think-

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ing of the father whose fate lay shrouded in doubt and uncertainty in the far-off province of Shan Se.

An hour wore on. The rain ceased and the clouds broke. Over to the southeast of the Forbidden City, where the heroes of the besieged garrison stood with weary limbs in trenches and behind barricades, the fusillade of bullets and shells still continued. In the court lowest from the window trampling feet went to and fro, as messengers arrived and departed. But nobody came near the prisoners; for some reason the dreaded summons was delayed.

"By Jove, perhaps Kuang Hsu has checkmated the Tiger!" Dan hopefully suggested.

"I'm afraid not," said Alec. "It's more likely that the Empress-Dowager is too busy with her counsellors to give the Tiger an audience at once."

Another quarter of an hour passed, and then a slight sound in the distance quickly grew to the tread of feet along the corridor. Voices were heard as the sentry challenged and was answered.

"Here they are," Dan said huskily.

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A wooden bolt creaked in its socket, the door swung open, and on the threshold appeared a tall figure. By the dim light that penetrated the room from the courtyard it was not difficult to recognize Captain Fang, and his unexpected presence animated the lads with a ray of hope.

"Hush ; be very quiet," the officer began, in a low tone. "I have come to save you, if that be possible."

"Then the Emperor—" exclaimed Alec.

"The Son of Heaven is confined to his apartments. Li Sheng arrived a short while ago—is here now. The Empress-Dowager received him, and he told her how the Princess Loo-Lao and two young foreign devils had been smuggled into the Palace. Her rage was terrible to witness. She immediately put the Emperor under arrest, and ordered that the two foreign devils should be found and delivered to Li Sheng and his companions."

"Is our hiding-place known ?" asked Alec.

"Not yet ; but the search has begun, and at any moment the Boxers and the soldiers of the Empress-Dowager may be here. Come. Follow me in silence."

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"Tell me one thing more. The Princess—"

"She is quite safe, but she will be held as a hostage for the future conduct of her father. Prince Lan, it has just been learned, gained his liberty a week ago and fled from the province of Shan Se, where he has been in the keeping of the Viceroy."

This was an interesting piece of news, for the Viceroy of Shan Se had been a firm friend of Captain Drury's, and on that foundation was based what hopes Alec had entertained of his father's safety. But was any reliance to be put on the friendship and protection of a Chinese official who was evidently trusted by the Empress-Dowager? The question woke ominous fears in Alec's heart, and added to his depression, as he and Dan glided along the corridor at the heels of their guide.

The sentry, a young dragon-soldier, brought up the rear. Captain Fang led the way to the throne-room, and from here, by means of a door that opened onto a balcony, the four dropped one by one to a dark courtyard overgrown with grass and stunted trees. The officer unlocked a narrow gate, and a

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walled passage was seen beyond. The gate swung noiselessly shut, and the little party proceeded. They heard sounds close behind, but could not distinguish the nature of them, owing to the distant booming of cannon and the spluttering of rifles. So far as the lads could tell, they judged that they were going in an opposite direction to the Legation quarter.

"Do you expect to get us out through one of the gates?" Dan ventured to ask.

"That is impossible," Captain Fang replied. "The gates are watched; the Empress-Dowager lost no time in sending soldiers to all of them."

"Then how can we escape?" Alec inquired anxiously.

"It is doubtful if you can," was the curt answer, "though I shall do all in my power to carry out the plan that his Majesty the Emperor found means to communicate to me. It may succeed, but only by courage and daring, and by surmounting peril and difficulty. The Son of Heaven greatly desires that your lives should be spared."

That Captain Fang himself wished the reverse, or at least cherished no friendly

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feelings towards the fugitives, was evident from the tone in which he spoke ; but the lads felt that he was to be trusted, and that he would keep his word and do all he could for them.

The soldier hung back a few yards, for the obvious purpose of guarding the rear and being able to give timely warning. The officer led the way on rapidly, refusing to answer any more questions, and for more than half an hour the little group threaded a part of the Forbidden City that bristled with danger, though fortunately they managed to elude observation. No definite noise of pursuit could be heard behind, but the lads well knew, nevertheless, that the Tiger and his bloodthirsty companions were actively searching.

It was as bewildering and confusing as a rabbit warren, this mazy quarter of the Son of Heaven's sacred abode, and strange and fascinating things were to be seen at every step. Captain Fang, with a knowledge born of familiarity, turned and twisted, burrowed and mounted, traversing courts and passages, circling lofty buildings of wonderful architecture, creeping through cool grottoes and

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down avenues lined with superb stone figures, climbing broad steps of polished marble, unlocking carved gates and doors that no man guarded, now pausing to listen warily, now darting confidently on. And unerringly the dragon-soldier followed, keeping watch at the rear.

"If we pull through this all right," said Dan, "nobody will believe us when we tell our experience."

"Very likely," assented Alec. "Never before, I should think, have foreigners been inside the Forbidden City of Peking."

The way was upward now—steadily up by weary steps that led between shady trees and plants and carved figures. Then a level eminence where stood a tall, many-balconied tower of pure copper; a sharp turn to the left, and next a glimpse of fairyland, as it seemed to them, burst suddenly upon the lads' vision—a sloping path that wound downwards by flights of glittering marble terraces, through flowers and trees, to a great sheet of water that matched and reflected the steel-blue of the night sky and the flashing radiance of the stars. This was the lake within the famous and beautiful gardens of the Imperial

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Palace. Vague objects thickly dotted its glassy surface, and far across on the opposite side, against the horizon, the western wall of the Forbidden City loomed dark and dim. It was a scene of enchantment, and very strange by contrast sounded the rattle of firearms and the crash of cannon that told of barbarian savagery and the lust of massacre.

"Glorious, isn't it?" whispered Dan. "By Jove! I say, do you suppose the lake has an outlet under the walls?"

"It's doubtful," Alec replied. "I never heard of one."

"Then how by all that's marvellous are we going to escape?"



#### XIV

### *In a Tight Place*

THE answer to the above important question was speedily forthcoming. Down through the flowery shrubbery, among pagodas, temples, and quaint little summer-houses with brilliant tiled roofs, Captain Fang led his companions. At the bottom was a raised wall clustered with tea-houses, and wide marble steps dropped to a spacious landing-place nearly level with the water. Here were moored a dozen boats of various description—some junk-shaped with tiny cabins and gay awnings, some with crimson and purple sails, and some fashioned like Venetian gondolas. One of the number, a small, round-bellied craft, fitted with a pair of oars, Captain Fang detached from its ring.

"This will serve your purpose," he said to the lads, "and it will not be missed, since I

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alone know how many boats are kept here." He gave a revolver each to Dan and Alec, and then produced from under the folds of his clothing two tightly-rolled parcels. "Tie these about your bodies," he directed. "They contain caps and loose blue blouses such as are ordinarily worn ; you will not require them yet, if indeed you have use for them at all. The weapons are loaded, but you are on no account to discharge them while you are within the limits of the Forbidden City ; such are the Emperor's orders."

The dragon-soldier, an alert figure of watchfulness, had stopped half-way down the terraced path. Captain Fang's eyes were raised to him for a moment, and then he turned and pointed across the lake.

"You perceive yonder speck of yellow light?" he went on. "It shines from one of the high towers that stand on either side of the main western gate of the Forbidden City. Pull over to the far side of the water, hide the boat carefully, and conceal yourselves in the deepest part of the gardens. When two hours have passed seek at the base of the wall one hundred yards to the right of the tower where the light shines.

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You will find a knotted rope dangling down, and by the aid of that you must climb singly to the summit of the wall and lower yourselves on the outer side. At the bottom is a moat to be crossed, and then you will be within the Imperial City. The gates will be open, and you should be able to slip out through one of them by means of the disguises with which I have provided you. If you accomplish that, and safely reach the Tartar City, bear to the north of it and make a wide detour that will bring you to the east of the Legations. From that side, and from that alone, is there any chance of your creeping through the Chinese lines. Do you understand what I have told you?"

"Yes, perfectly," replied Alec. "It is very plain. But the wall? Will we be able to climb that?"

The question was never answered. A low, clear whistle came floating down the path, and the next instant, from the other side of the hill, a swelling clamour of voices was distinctly heard.

"They are searching for you in this direction," exclaimed Captain Fang. "Quick, be off!" Make haste to get among the is-

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lands, which will prevent your being seen from the shore."

With that the officer darted up the steps and vanished among the tea-houses, while at the same time the dragon-soldier made a hasty exit into the shrubbery. The shouting seemed to have drawn much nearer, and it was apparent that the searchers were scattered over a considerable area.

"Things are getting unpleasantly hot," said Alec, as he jumped into the boat and picked up the oars. "Come along, old chap."

"We're all right now, unless they follow us by water or cut around," remarked Dan, when the little craft was receding from the landing-stairs. "But what worries me the most is that wall; I confess I don't like the look of it. Even with a knotted rope—"

"The surface is sure to be rough and full of cracks," interrupted Alec. "We'll find a way to get over it, never fear."

On reflection the whole of the undertaking seemed to bristle with formidable perils, of which the wall of the Forbidden City was not the least; but the lads wisely made up their minds not to worry more than was

## *In a Tight Place*

necessary, and to take each difficulty as it came. There was room for hope and courage, for they were infinitely better off than they had been a short hour ago, when they were momentarily expecting to be dragged from their prison-chamber and delivered into the hands of Li Sheng and his fellow-ruffians.

The boat, driven by quick, noiseless strokes of the oars, glided on and on over the calm, deep surface of the lake. They were soon in among the islands—exquisitely beautiful spots embowered in foliage, and each containing a grotto, a temple, or a quaint little villa. The wake of rippling water danced farther and farther behind, and presently the fugitives, looking back from a considerable distance, saw lights moving at the landing-stage they had recently left. But there was happily no occasion for present anxiety. After a few minutes the Tiger and his fellow-searchers, instead of taking to oars, turned away from the shore. The torches flashed among the trees and then disappeared.

“That’s all right,” said Alec. “We’ve put them off the track.”

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It was not long now until the boat touched the opposite side of the lake, and having dragged it to a reedy hiding-place where it was not likely to be discovered, the lads went on for a short distance and concealed themselves in a deep grove.

Here, thinking of what was before them and listening to the continued bombardment of the Legations, they waited for at least two hours, in accordance with Captain Fang's instructions. And when the limit had expired, as nearly as they could judge, they crept forth on their perilous and uncertain undertaking. Except for the dull rattle of the guns they could hear nothing. The western gate with its lofty towers was directly in front of them, and by steering a diagonal course to the right they emerged from the gardens at the base of the wall. They had calculated well, and it was a great relief to their minds when, after a brief search, they found the knotted rope dangling within reach out of the darkness overhead. Doubtless this was Captain Fang's doing, though how he had managed it could only be surmised.

Viewed at close range the wall of the For-

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bidden City, by reason of its extreme height, was not exactly reassuring to the lads. But fortunately it did not present a sheer surface. It had a slight upward slope, and the bricks of which it was constructed were patched with ragged and decayed places.

"It will take some climbing," said Dan.

"Well, we've got to do it, and the sooner the better," Alec replied. "It may not be so difficult, after all; there seem to be plenty of footholds. I'll be the first. When your turn comes take it cool and save your breath. Here goes."

A moment later Alec was three yards above the ground, a vague object fading into the gloom. He found the task easier in one way than he had expected, but it was trying to wind and strength. Up and up he went, swaying from side to side, taking the knots hand over hand, and planting his feet in the cracks and crevices that were fortunately abundant. Slowly the goal drew nearer. He almost despaired of reaching it, and during the last few yards he was terribly afraid that he must lose his hold and drop. Then, breathless and exhausted, he hauled himself

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over the stone coping and stood erect on the summit of the wall.

Little more than a hundred yards to the south were the dim lights of the two watch-towers, and far off to the southeast could be seen the red flashes of the enemy's guns, as they rained shells into the Legation quarter. To the westward, straight down, glittered the deep sluggish waters of the moat, beyond which a dusky panorama of buildings and pagodas stretched to the boundary walls of the Imperial City. The wall of the Forbidden City was of considerable width, with a carved stone parapet running on either side. These were ornamented with knobby projections, and around one of them the rope was looped.

For a brief second Alec's eyes swept the view, and then, bending over, he gave a low whistle. He grasped the rope and found it taut.

"Coming?" he whispered loudly.

"Yes, I'm on the way," was the audible response from the depths.

Dan's progress was laboriously slow. To the lad above, waiting and watching with fast-beating heart, it seemed a painfully long



## *In a Tight Place*

interval until the dark, swinging object grew visible against the purplish-gray surface of the bricks. It advanced inch by inch, with now and then a full stop that thrilled Alec with terror.

"Can you do it?" he called down.

The reply, if there was one, was stifled by a hoarse shout from somewhere in the gardens of the Imperial Palace, by a rush of footsteps through the trees and shrubbery. Another shout; more voices joined in the devilish clamour.

"Keep your nerve, for Heaven's sake," Alec begged frantically. "Hold tight—don't let go! Faster! faster!"

The shouting increased. The swaying figure came closer, hesitated, then mounted with a rapid spurt. Alec hauled on the rope with all his strength, reached for Dan's arm and caught it, and with a desperate effort pulled him to and over the parapet.

"Brace up—you'll need all your strength," he said sharply.

"Thank God I'm here!" Dan gasped. "I was sure I would tumble. I'll have my breath directly. Li Sheng and the others are below. They must have been lurking

## *The Princess of the Purple Palace*

there on the quiet, without lights, and they saw me when I was half-way up the wall."

Alec scarcely heard the breathless, inarticulate words, nor did he, for the moment, pay any heed to the noise that was ringing from the direction of the nearest watch-tower. The rope—the precious rope—was all he thought of. He seized hold of it, and felt a resistance at the other end. Too late! His heart sank. But no; a desperate jerk, and the man below lost his grip. Up came the knotted coils, yard by yard, tumbling like a snake over the coping. A pistol flashed and roared down at the base of the wall, and a bullet sang viciously by Alec's head.

"I'll bet the Tiger did that," muttered Dan. He glanced to one side and cried out in hoarse alarm: "Look! look! We're in for it now!"

Brief as was the interval since the first shout broke the stillness, it was long enough to render the position of the lads acutely perilous. The disappointed ruffians in the garden were making all speed, bawling at the tops of their voices as they went, to reach the approaches to the watch-towers; and

## *In a Tight Place*

from these points of vantage dark figures were swarming clamourously forth to learn the cause of the commotion. Dan's frightened exclamation had been prompted by the discovery that two men, who had started well in advance of the others, were running along the top of the wall. They were already half-way between the towers and the spot where the fugitives stood.

Alec did not hesitate a second; at once his mind grasped the single slim chance of escape that the situation offered.

"The rope!" he cried, as he slipped the noosed end and tossed it to his companion. "Fasten it on the other side, and lower yourself. Don't wait for me. I must stop these two chaps, or it will be all up with both of us."

Dan made a rush to the opposite parapet, trailing the rope behind him. Alec, revolver in hand, crouched low in the shadow and waited. He knew how much depended on his marksmanship, and his nerves were as steady as iron.

Several seconds passed. The two Chinese soldiers, who had discovered the lads and who were shouting eagerly to those be-

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hind, drew rapidly near, their rifles as yet carried in loose grip. They came within twenty yards—ten—eight. Then Alec's big revolver barked like an angry cur, and the foremost soldier was down in a writhing heap, with a bullet imbedded in some vital part of his anatomy. Crack! again. The other man spun round, dropping his rifle, and clapped his left arm to his right. Then he turned and bolted with a yell of dismay.

The lad jammed the smoking pistol into his belt and ran to the parapet, where the rope was swinging from a knob of stone. Dan, who had been waiting for his friend, immediately began to descend.

"Don't stop," he urged. "The rope is strong enough to bear both of us."

"It will have to be," Alec replied, "for I'm coming now. Look sharp!"

He swung himself into the gulf and vanished beneath the coping. Down the plucky lads went with scarcely the space of a yard between them, heedless of rough bumping and stinging hands—down the precipitous face of the wall knot by knot, twisting and spinning dizzily, and catching what foothold

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they could on the rough brickwork. Above, the edge of the parapet grew dimmer against the starry sky; below, the flooded ditch lay calm and glassy.

On and on. Half of the distance covered—two-thirds. Excited cries rent the air overhead, and the savage Chinese soldiery crowded to the rim of the wall. Firearms were thrust downward. Crack!—crack, crack!—crack! The bullets whistled and hummed.

“Drop!” panted Alec.

Simultaneously both lads let go of the rope, shot through twenty feet of empty space, and plunged with a tremendous splash into the moat. The depth of the water proved their salvation. They went far under, came to the surface unhurt, and struck out for their lives.

Side by side they swam on, amid a perfect hail of lead that raised spurting white jets in a circle around them. But they struggled unscathed through the deadly shower, and climbed the granite embankment at the far side of the moat. The next instant, watched breathlessly by the baffled ruffians on the lofty top of the wall, they had faded like

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shadows into the darkness that shrouded the Imperial City.

"The worst is over," gasped Dan.

"Or still ahead of us," Alec replied.

XV

*How the Day Broke*

NONE of that gallant band of heroes who so steadfastly upheld the honour and prestige of the foreign legations, whether on or off duty, combatant or non-combatant, can ever forget the closing episodes of the siege—a siege that has no parallel in modern times save in the bloody annals of the Great Indian Mutiny. On both of the last nights, there is every reason to believe, a general assault had been planned. Conducted with valour and determination, led by Chinese officers who were sure of their men, it would probably have been a success. But the enemy's cowardly hearts failed them; their courage could not be screwed up to the necessary pitch. They preferred to lie behind the shelter of their loopholes, whence they poured an incessant and well-directed fire into the beleaguered area.

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Sunday night's attack was concentrated on the barricades of the Customs Volunteers and the British Marines in the Mongol Market, and on the Italian and Japanese positions in the Su Wang Fu, which were also to bear the brunt of the final storming operations. Monday passed in comparative quiet, and at half-past seven in the evening the tempest that had been gathering suddenly burst in all its fury, the rain falling in torrents to the accompaniment of crashing peals of thunder and streak after streak of forked lightning. At the same moment were heard the familiar cries of "Sha! Sha!" and the brave and undaunted defenders, thus timely warned of the ordeal before them, sprang hurriedly to the trenches. They were soon drenched to the skin—a close-crowded, shivering line of men standing knee-deep in mud and water. Already a very Inferno of rifle-fire was raging, and the bullets were striking the trees and houses like hail. With the venomous spluttering of the Mausers and the scream of flying shells overhead mingled the reverberating roll of nature's artillery. Hundreds of voices yelled and clamoured, as if European hearts



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were to be terrified by mere noise. Bugle called to bugle, and at a little distance a machine-gun began to bark fiercely. In the Fu, when the attack was at its worst, the resistance of the Italians was aided in Chinese fashion by scores of Christian coolies, who hammered with sticks upon empty petroleum tins.

The continuous fusillade, increasing hour by hour, caused the deepest anxiety, gave birth to most startling apprehensions, as that memorable night of the 13th of August wore on. There were many vulnerable points in the defences; one bold, desperate sortie, and all would speedily be over with the garrison. But by Heaven's mercy nothing in the way of a rush was attempted, and about three o'clock in the morning, as if to prove the truth of the saying that the darkest period is just before the dawn, the booming of heavy guns and the noise of volley-firing were heard in the east. Sounds not to be mistaken, these, and quickly the thrilling word was passed round that the long-expected relief-force had reached the city wall and was shelling the East Gate. Yet men still doubted and feared and women

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prayed while frightened children clung to their skirts, for all were reluctant to credit the good news until the welcome daybreak of the 14th, as it rolled its gray and pink mantle over the wide area of Peking, brought confirmation of the report. And then, from the wall within the Legation quarter, joyous crowds witnessed the shells bursting on and over the Great East Gate, heard the thunder of Gasalee's and Fukushima's big guns echoing nearer and nearer.

Though the end seemed close at hand, relief within measurable distance, more weary hours of waiting were to be endured, as patiently as possible, before the actual raising of the siege. The Chinese, still firing at intervals, remained in their trenches and behind the barricades. With Oriental fatuousness they would not believe that they were to be robbed of the prey which for so many weeks had been ready to fall into their ravenous maws.

But we must take the reader back a little, to see what has become of Dan and Alec. A stroke of fortune, as unexpected as it was grateful, came in the lads' way shortly after

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their narrow escape from the soldiers that swarmed on the wall of the Forbidden City. They first wrung the water from their drenched clothing and donned the native caps and blouses provided by Captain Fang, and then, having bolted across the Imperial City at a speed that outdistanced the hue and cry which rose and spread behind them, they discovered an altercation to be in progress at the nearest gate on the west, where but a single light was burning.

"Hold on a bit," said Dan. "It won't do to mix in that row."

"We've got to; there's no help for it," Alec replied. "The other gates may be closed, and we're in luck to find this one open."

"But they'll stop us—"

"Not likely. We stand a better chance of slipping by in safety and unquestioned than if only a few persons were about. Come along, Dan. We'll face the music as if we were a couple of Boxers, and didn't care a hang for anybody."

With feigned indifference, yet as watchful as hawks, they went forward to meet the peril. What the quarrel was about matters nothing; the important fact was that a large,

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noisy, and interested crowd was looking on, and under these circumstances Alec's confidence and hopes proved to be justified. The two disguised foreign devils attracted little or no observation, and by avoiding the rays of the lantern they were able, with comparative ease, to worm through the assemblage and pass out of the open gateway into the Tartar City.

"By Jove, that was a near thing!" whispered Dan, as they entered a dark and silent street. "My heart was thumping like a hammer. Well, the worst ought to be over now, and I believe we shall reach the Legations all right."

"I hope so," Alec replied. "The hardest part will be to get through the enemy's lines, but we won't think of that until we are compelled to. What a lot of ammunition those yellow devils are wasting," he added.

"They'll waste it in vain," said Dan, though he wondered anxiously, as he spoke, if the sorely-pressed garrison would be able to hold out.

The prospect before the lads was certainly more encouraging than it had been, since there were no more walls or gates to bar

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their progress. They quickly decided which was the best route to take, and for weary hours, keeping a ceaseless vigil, and never quite beyond hearing of the ominous rattle of firearms, they pursued their way, threading the devious mazes of the great hostile city. A dark and perilous detour of miles—in the shape of three sides of a square—through the northern part of Peking, found the fugitives towards morning in the eastern and more familiar district of the Tartar City, and at no great distance from their old hiding-place in the hollow wall of the Imperial City.

They had met with adventures here and there, had avoided many dangers, yet the worst was to be reserved for the time when they were nearest to friends and safety. They bore cautiously on to the southeast, by deserted streets and desolate burnt areas, and were within a half a mile of the northeast corner of the Legation quarter, with the Great East Gate a little farther off on their left, when they became aware, by the noise of shouting and flashing of torches, that they were almost surrounded by bodies of the enemy.

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"The Tiger is on our track again," Dan exclaimed.

"No; I don't believe these fellows are thinking of us at all," Alec replied. "But while they are about we can't get through. We had better stop where we are for the present."

A likely-looking refuge was close at hand—a partly burned mission building whose roof had fallen in between still-standing walls and pillars. The lads crawled deep into the maze of charred and twisted beams, and found a hollow space where they could stretch themselves full length. Rest was delicious after their fatiguing adventures, and an overpowering drowsiness began to steal upon them. It was the hour of 3 A. M. of the 14th, and the sound of heavy guns suddenly grew audible towards the east, booming sharply above the fire-arms that were snarling at the Legations.

"The relief-force" exclaimed Alec. "Listen! They have come at last."

"Come—at last!" Dan echoed.

The welcome discovery roused and stirred them for but a moment; nestling beside

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each other they drifted into the heavy, dreamless slumber of utter exhaustion.

Hours passed on. Darkness fled before dawn, the sky paled, and once more the sun—now an omen of hope and cheer—climbed the horizon. Nearer and nearer, speaking incessantly with raucous, vengeful throats, came the big guns of the relief-force. Within the Legations excitement grew to fever heat. Peking fell a prey to panic and fear, and the enemy, foreseeing the inevitable, began to abandon the positions they had held so many weeks.

The day was well advanced when the lads woke from slumber—woke suddenly, as if from a bad dream, with a chilling sense of evil that as quickly materialized into a very real and imminent peril; for a man in Boxer garb was kneeling at the edge of the ruin and peering with a fiendish grin into the network of fallen timbers.

“Mow Chang!” Alec said hoarsely.

“And he sees us!” gasped Dan.

It was indeed Mow Chang, the Tiger’s crafty lieutenant. Hearing the startled voices, and knowing that his eavesdropping was discovered, the ruffian sprang to his

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feet and made off, shouting loudly as he ran.

"He'll be back directly with a lot more—perhaps with Li Sheng," exclaimed Dan. "What are we going to do? Is there a way out behind?"

"None; there is no use to try it," Alec answered despairingly, as he looked back at the closely wedged beams and tiles. The *débris* was as impenetrable to right and left; the only exit was that in front.

For a moment or two the lads listened. The surrounding city was humming and buzzing like an angry bee-hive, echoing to wild clamour and din, to the blare of trumpets and the brazen beating of gongs. The cannon of the allies thundered and crashed, and it was almost possible to distinguish the cheering of the plucky little Japanese soldiers who were victoriously storming the Great East Gate. Pekin's long-postponed hour of retribution was at hand.

"The relief force must be within the walls," declared Alec. "I believe the siege is raised. If we stop here in this death-trap we'll be slaughtered like rats. What do you



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say, Dan—shall we make a dash for life before it is too late?”

“I’m with you,” Dan assented. “Come along, and we’ll try to—”

The sentence froze on his lips. It was already too late for flight. Outside of the ruined mission-building appeared all at once a half-score of Boxers, armed with swords and lances. They danced about like inhuman fiends, and gazed with hungry, wolfish eyes into the *débris*, where they could vaguely perceive their intended victims.

“Kill the foreign devils!” they yelled. “Off with their heads! Sha! Sha!”

With some difficulty Mow Chang, who was one of the party, allayed the clamour.

“Leave this to me,” he said in a peremptory tone to his companions; and with that he called loudly to the lads: “Come out and surrender yourselves and you shall not be harmed; by my ancestors, I swear it. The fighting is ended, and we will lead you to your friends.”

“Do you suppose we are such fools?” Alec replied. “We know you better than that, you lying dog. We shall stop where we are until our friends come for us.”

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Seeing that his cunning ruse had failed, Mow Chang threw off the mask.

"Go in and take the foreign devils!" he screamed, foaming at the lips with rage. "Drag them forth! Slice them to death by inches!"

There was a brief period of inaction. The capture of the fugitives promised to be neither a safe nor an easy task, and the matter was hastily discussed.

"They've got us tight and fast," Dan said bitterly. "It's hard luck. And Gasalee so near!"

"We can give a good account of ourselves before we go under," Alec replied through his clenched teeth, "and by heavens we'll do it, too! We have ten shots between us—don't waste one of them. Watch sharp! Here they come!"

Like two grim, snarling bull-dogs the lads waited, each with his revolver gripped in his right hand. They had cleaned weapons and cartridges after the wetting they had received the previous night, and cleaned them effectively, as the result was to show.

The passage into the ruin narrowed at the farther end, but was fairly wide at the mouth.

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Three ugly-visaged Boxers began to crawl into it, two abreast and one behind. Bang! went Alec's revolver, and there was one foe the less to contend with. Bang! bang!—Dan had fired twice, striking one of the surviving ruffians in the head and pinking the other in the chest. Howling with pain, the wounded man quickly dragged himself back and was hauled out of range by his comrades. Two lay dead, a ghastly and repulsive sight, within the cavernous jaws of the burrow.

The powder-smoke wreathed slowly upward amid the jagged beams. The Boxers, who had not looked for armed resistance, were paralyzed for a moment and did not show themselves. Then, after venting their fury in diabolical yells, half a dozen of the red-sashed miscreants, whose numbers had increased, darted into the open and let fly with their lances. The long, lithe weapons hurtled into the passage, some lodging half-way, while several penetrated the timbers behind which the lads screened themselves timely.

It was their turn now, and the quick, barking reports of the two revolvers seemed

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to shake the whole mass of *débris*. One Boxer fell dead, and another crawled away with a bullet in his thigh. The rest fled, but not until Mow Chang, who had hitherto been invisible, had exposed himself for a brief second. It was long enough for a ball from Alec's revolver to lodge in his left shoulder, and with a yell and an oath he reeled out of sight.

"I wish I had killed him," muttered the lad. "By Jove, Dan, do you know there's really a chance for us, after all? The advantage is on our side, and if we can keep these devils at bay a little longer help may reach us from the Legations or from the relief-force."

"Then we must be sparing of our ammunition," said Dan. "How many shots have you left?"

"Only one," Alec replied.

"And I have two. It's little enough between us." He put an arm out and secured a couple of the lances. "These will serve us," he said, "when our revolvers are empty."

But the cheering ray of hope was of brief duration; it vanished almost as soon as it

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was conceived. The Boxers, now strangely silent, were not inactive. They were moving about briskly, as was shown by wavering shadows on the sunlit surface of the street, and of a sudden, hoarse and triumphant shouts arose. Then the hissing crackle of flames was heard, and little red flashes leapt to view amid the tangled beams to right and left of the mouth of the burrow.

"They have fired the place!" gasped Alec. "God help us!"

"The fiends!" cried Dan. "Can they be so cruel as to roast us to death?"

The horror of the fate that threatened them, that seemed inevitable, held the lads spellbound and speechless. A minute passed. The flames ate deeper into the dry timbers, constantly darting forth their angry tongues in fresh places. Thick, yellowish smoke poured along the passage, hiding the Boxers who were yelling with delight outside.

"I'm suffocating!" panted Dan.

"So am I," Alec cried. "I can't face this; give me the sword for preference. Come on, Dan, we'll rush out and tackle them. There's a ghost of a chance of our getting through—"

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"Listen!" Dan interrupted eagerly.  
"What's that?"

Above the clamour swelled a lusty sound of cheering. A rifle cracked—another and another. A rattling fusillade followed, and when the lads had scrambled frantically through the flame and smoke, and had staggered with singed hair and smarting eyes into the street, they realized at a glance the thrilling fact that they were saved. The Boxers were in flight, and pressing them closely, with fixed bayonets, were a force of Legation marines, numbering more than a score.

## XVI

### *The Passing of the Tiger*

“**H**URRAH! hurrah!” Dan shouted huskily. “There they go! Come on—”

His voice choked and he reeled heavily against Alec, who with difficulty held him up. Both were dizzy and half-blinded, overcome by the smoke they had inhaled and by the effects of the scorching heat. They longed to join the pursuit, and did make an attempt to follow their rescuers, but were incapable of staggering more than a dozen feet.

The Boxers, their murderous sport frustrated in the very moment of triumph, ran like deer and scattered right and left. Several were overtaken and ruthlessly jabbed through and through with cold steel, and this giving the others a chance to escape, the marines unwillingly abandoned the chase

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and turned back. They were a motley, ragged, unshaven lot, comprising five or six different nationalities, and the first of them to rush up to the delighted lads—who were by now feeling considerably better—was Kin Soon. The faithful fellow shed tears of joy as he embraced Alec, and it seemed difficult for him to comprehend that his young master was really alive. Bill Cocket and Nick Killehoff were also of the party, and this oddly-contrasted pair of chums showed genuine emotion as they greeted the lads and plied them with questions.

“By the beard of St. Isaac, is it to life you have come again?” exclaimed the Russian. “The Pigtails did not kill you, eh?”

“Kill them?” cried Cocket. “Do they look like it, Nick? Holy Whitechapel, they’re as much alive as you or me. But it’s a rum go. Where ’ave you two chaps been ’iding yourselves all this while? After that mine exploded in the Fu, there wasn’t a soul but what believed—”

“It’s too long a story to tell you now,” Alec interrupted. “Here we both are, safe and sound. That’s enough for the present.”

“Yes, we’re right as ninepence,” added



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Dan. "My father and mother—how are they?"

"As well as could be expected," replied Cocket, "considerin' what they've 'ad to go through, and 'ow 'ard 'it they were by your—"

"They'll cheer up when they see me," broke in Dan; and a lump rose in his throat as he pictured the reunion. "Come, what's the news, Cocket?" he added. "Where's the relief-force? Is the siege raised? But it surely must be, else you wouldn't be outside the Legation quarter."

"Hurrah!" shouted Alec. "Is Gasalee really in?"

"Well, he wasn't far off when we come away," said Cocket, "and he may be in by this time. The Chinese knew he was pressin' closer, and of a sudden they began to bolt from the barricades and trenches. We followed 'em up on the north and occupied their positions; and then, 'earin' a jolly row over in this direction, we got orders to see what it meant. And a lucky thing for you we did. The orficer what brought us, 'e thought the Boxers 'ad discovered the 'idin'-place of some native Christians. But

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where's the 'eathen girl? I mean the Princess Looloo something, what you've stuck to since you rescued 'er from the Purple Palace."

"She is a prisoner in the hands of the Empress-Dowager," Dan answered gravely, "and I hope there will be time to save her. But I'm afraid that by now—"

The conversation was interrupted by Lieutenant Cole, the young British officer in charge of the marines. He knew both Dan and Alec, and greeted them with the demonstrative ardour of a schoolboy.

"Well, this beats everything in the way of miraculous escapes!" he cried. "Fancy you chaps turning up all right, when you've been counted among the dead! We never expected to see either of you again. By Jove, it was fortunate the Boxers made noise enough to attract our attention. You must have been in a warm place a bit ago."

"Warm?" exclaimed Dan. "It was a fiery furnace—look at it now. We had reached the point where we had to choose between fire and sword. We were just going to rush out, and it would have been all

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up with us had you arrived half a minute later."

"I'm jolly glad we didn't," said the officer. "That first volley was a raking one, eh? Did you see the effect of it? The devils dropped like sheep."

Followed by the lads, he approached the dead Boxers who lay before the entrance to the burning building, scattered in ghastly attitudes on the blood-stained ground. They numbered seven, and among them was Mow Chang himself, flat on his back, with a bullet-hole between the staring wide-open eyes.

"One miscreant the less to be reckoned with," said Alec, as he looked with a shudder at his old enemy.

"I wish it was the Tiger," muttered Dan. "He deserves a hundred deaths."

"If Li Sheng isn't caught," declared the officer, "it won't be for lack of effort."

He turned a watchful eye on Cocket and Killehoff, who were searching the bodies. Kin Soon was standing near, and Alec drew him to one side.

"My father?" he asked, in a hesitating voice. "Tell me, is there any news of him?"

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"Alas, none, young master," was the reply.

"I feared as much," said Alec. "There is no hope for him, then."

Kin Soon was silent, his honest countenance reflecting the lad's expression of misery and despair.

"Cheer up, Drury," urged Lieutenant Cole, who had overheard the brief conversation. "You and Killigrew have turned up alive, and why shouldn't your father do the same? I'd be willing to bet that he is safe in Shan Se, hidden away by the Viceroy. You'll see him in Peking one of these days. Come, it's time we were getting away from here," he added. "If we fool about much longer we stand a chance of being cut off by the Boxers; the city must be swarming with them. And I don't want to miss Gasalee's entry."

With that he gave the order to retire on the Legations, but before the straggling groups could fall into line a diversion was caused by a native lad who was seen running towards the spot from the direction of the north.

"Hold on a minute," said the officer.

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The young Chinaman rapidly approached, both hands uplifted to show that he was unarmed and bent on a friendly purpose.

"He's hailing us," exclaimed Dan. "I wonder what he wants. I say, Alec, there's something familiar about him. He looks like—"

"By Jove! I believe it's Ping Tang," Alec cried excitedly.

He was right. Ping Tang the runner proved to be, to the boundless delight of the lads. He arrived, panting for breath, staggering and spent with exhaustion.

"The Empress-Dowager!" he gasped hoarsely. "She and her escort are leaving the palace, flying from Peking. And it is reported that they are taking the Emperor away against his will. I saw yonder gate thrown open for them—they must already be passing out of the Imperial City."

"By Jove! what a chance—if we dared tackle it," cried Lieutenant Cole. "Is this fellow to be trusted, Drury?"

"Absolutely. I'll vouch for him," replied Alec.

The effect produced by Ping Tang's startling piece of news may be imagined. The

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chance of capturing the Son of Heaven and his wicked aunt roused enthusiasm in every heart; unanimously the men clamoured to be led to the attempt, and Dan and Alec were as keen as the rest.

A brief hesitation, and then the lieutenant decided to accept the responsibility.

"It's a reckless thing to do," he exclaimed, "for we may be cut off, or run into a strong force. But it's worth the risk. Fall in! Forward; quick trot!"

Turning their backs to the Legation quarter the party swung off at a rapid pace, Ping Tang in advance. He had previously found an opportunity of telling the lads, in a few words, that his mother was safe in the old hiding-place, and that he had but recently left her in order to ascertain what success the relief force was meeting with.

The besiegers must have fled to the west when they abandoned their positions, for with the exception of small groups of Chinese, who lost no time in disappearing, this part of Peking was clear of the enemy. Making rapid progress through a maze of lonely streets, the flying column soon came within sight of the avenue that led from the nearest

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gate in the eastern wall of the Imperial City. The first glance revealed the disappointing fact that the greater portion of the Imperial *cortège* had already gone by, and that it was too far ahead to be overtaken, as well as too strongly guarded to fall an easy prey. But the tail of the procession was still within reach—a palanquin with hangings of yellow silk, borne by eight pole-bearers. It was preceded by a small detachment of mounted banner soldiers, and a dozen foot soldiers brought up the rear.

The discovery was mutual. At once, as the officer's word of command rang loudly, the marines dashed forward with eager cheers. They let drive a scattering volley at the enemy, who were making a desperate attempt to escape, and among those who fell were two of the pole-bearers. As they pitched to the ground the palanquin was turned over on its side, and the rest of the bearers and the foot soldiers, drawing their swords, prepared to offer resistance. At the same moment the mounted bannermen wheeled their steeds and galloped back, but a well-aimed fusillade emptied three or four saddles, and the survivors lost heart and

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spurred on to overtake the head of the *cor-tège*.

"Now give it to them, boys," shouted Lieutenant Cole. "Cold steel for the beggars, and spare none. Charge!"

It was a welcome order, and the marines carried it out with reckless gallantry. In a trice a desperate hand-to-hand struggle was raging, the enemy holding their ground before the overturned palanquin, and hacking with swords at the glittering, jabbing bayonets. But from the first they were out-matched by the longer reach of their opponents. It was a terrible scene of carnage, and British cheers could not drown the yells of rage and agony as the soldiers of the Empress-Dowager fell one by one, dead and dying, some with their last effort clutching at the steel as it was wrenched from their vitals. Bloody feet trampled the fallen, bloody hands still swung the sharp two-edged swords from the Imperial arsenal.

Ping Tang's lance—he had taken it from one of the bodies at the temple—flashed here and there, and was soon dripping at the point. Dan and Alec, though they carried only revolvers and had been warned to keep



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to the rear, pushed almost unconsciously into the thick of the scrimmage. Their position was one of grave peril, and they had barely realized that fact when they were suddenly confronted, at close quarters, by the man whose escape from Pekin they were most anxious to frustrate—by the arch-scoundrel and leader of Boxers, Li Sheng.

Ping Tang, busy on the left, was blind to the danger of his friends. The Tiger had apparently just come on the scene, and was thirsting to slay. It was too late to evade him. He instantly caught sight of the lads, and striking down a marine who was in the way, he sprang towards them with a furious cry. Alec's pistol was empty, and Dan, firing his last cartridge with a nervous hand, merely hit the Tiger in the shoulder.

Both lads turned to run, and Alec slipped in a pool of blood and fell headlong. The maddened ruffian was almost upon him, his great sword lifted for a deadly blow, and it seemed that nothing could save the young victim. But Cocket, turning his eyes that way in the nick of time, made a swift dart from one side. His bayonet flashed, lunged fiercely, and down went Li Sheng in a writh-

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ing heap, the cold steel buried six inches deep in his breast. He attempted to rise, then sank back with a curse on his lips. His head dropped limply; he shuddered and lay still. At last he had paid the penalty of his treachery and crimes.

Dan was whiter and more agitated than Alec, who, when helped to his feet, warmly shook the hand of his rescuer.

"You saved my life, Cocket," he said, "and I sha'n't forget it. So Li Sheng has really pegged out. He was a very devil incarnate—if there is such a thing—and I'm going to keep this to remember him by"; he stooped down and wrenched the sword from the Tiger's stiffening fingers. "Not that I'm very likely to forget him," he added

"I should think not," muttered Dan.

The fight was about over by now. Soldiers and bearers had lost half of their number, and giving up the unequal contest the survivors took to their heels, having killed two of the marines and wounded four. It was useless to pursue them, and general attention was drawn to the palanquin, which Cocket and Killemoff, with bright visions

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of loot dancing before their eyes, were the first to approach. As they caught hold of the poles, with the intention of righting the equipage, the silken hangings were drawn apart and forth stepped—the Princess Loo-Lao.

“Great Peter!” ejaculated Killehoff.

“Well, I’m blowed!” gasped Cocket.  
“A bloomin’ petticoat!”

The girl brushing by them, ran gracefully to Dan and Alec.

“How glad I am to see you again!” she cried. “You are safe—with your friends. I felt very anxious, for though I relied on the Emperor’s promise, I was afraid that Captain Fang was not to be trusted.”

“Captain Fang was all right,” said Dan, “else we shouldn’t be here now.”

Mutual explanations had to be postponed until a better opportunity. For the present, it was enough to know that the princess had been rescued from those who would have carried her far away from the capital and held her as a hostage. Lieutenant Cole reformed his men, and the little column, carrying the dead and wounded, marched back as they had come, listening the while with sup-

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pressed excitement to the sound of English cheers in the distance and the rattle of small arms at the Great East Gate. Without meeting any foes they reached Canal Street, tramped over the Water Gate, and entered the Legation area. Not until then was the discovery made that Cocket and Killemoff were missing. Why the two marines had lurked behind was not difficult to conjecture.

## XVII

### *On the Legation Lawn*

TWO naval officers, who had met at a point between the Mongol Market and the Su Wang Fu, paused to exchange a few words and to strain their ears in the direction of the Great East Gate. They were waiting anxiously, impatiently, as they had waited since the rising of the sun. But no fear of calamity or disaster, of an overpowering Chinese horde and a beaten-down resistance, had at the present time any part in their anticipations; theirs was the suspense of a joyful event momentarily expected and yet tediously deferred.

"Why don't they come?" cried Captain Bannister, of H. M. S. Orlando. "Look, Canrobert"; and he held out a hand that perceptibly twitched and vibrated. "In the thick of it all yesterday," he added, "I could have picked off a score of Boxers at any

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range you like. And now, to save my life, I don't believe I could hit a target at fifty paces."

"Monsieur l'Capitaine is right," quietly replied Lieutenant Raoul Canrobert, of the French cruiser D'Entrecasteaux, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Hélas! this is the sort of thing that tells on a brave man's nerves."

And so indeed it was, as many for the first time discovered. Worse than the crowded horrors of the long weeks while the siege lasted, worse than the bedsides of wounded and dying friends, the constant dread of a successful attack, the ordeal of raging flames and clamour of bloodthirsty voices, the hissing hail of bullets and scream of exploding shells, the blare of devilish-tongued trumpets and shouts of alarm in the dark watches of the night—vastly more trying than all these, measured of course by the standard of patience and calm endurance, was the restless vigil which continued through the morning hours of that never-to-be-forgotten 14th of August.

The sun, blazing like a ball of molten metal, crept higher and higher over Pekin.

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At intervals, here and there, a few straggling, harmless shots were fired. Those of the garrison who were on duty still lined the trenches and barricades, ready to frustrate any sudden move on the part of the strangely inactive foe. Anxious groups stood on the wall, watching the shells bursting over the East Gate, listening to the rattle of small arms and the thunder of the heavy artillery that all knew was directed by Gasalee and Fukushima. Within the besieged area men paced to and fro, children asked persistent and foolish questions, and haggard-faced women strove to hide their feelings and to endure the suspense that was strained almost to the breaking-point.

“Why don’t they come?”

The query, so often put, remained unanswered. The minutes wore on, the weary hours passed. Rumours flew about, roused spasmodic bursts of cheering, and died away in echoes of disappointment. The morning was nearly spent, and the relief-force had not arrived.

But the tardy, prayed-for succour, the reward of weeks of unspeakable heroism and suffering, was not to be much longer delayed.

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Towards noon it was evident, beyond a doubt, that the big guns were coming closer and closer. A little later luncheon was served at the British Legation—the unpalatable horseflesh, the black bread and stale rice—and among those whose appetites failed them, who rose from their seats before others had finished, were Eustace Killigrew and his wife. They strolled silently across the burnt and trampled turf of the enclosure, listening to the booming roar of the guns, and thinking with what unalloyed happiness and delight they would have welcomed the sound under different circumstances. But now, with the memory of their sorrow still fresh, relief was a word that had lost most of its savour and sweetness. For them the bitterness and heart-ache; for others the mad transports of joy.

A shout was heard suddenly in the distance. A noise of cheering rolled, and swelled, and spread like a wave.

“Look, Eustace!” exclaimed his wife.

A Chinaman, one of the native converts, had dashed into the Legation grounds. He ran swiftly forward, waving his arms and pointing behind him.



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"The Allies are in the city!" he cried.  
"Hurrah! the soldiers are coming!"

"At last!" murmured Mrs. Killigrew, a brief light flashing over her sad face.

"At last!" echoed her husband. "Thank God!"

Everywhere, from point to point, leapt the thrilling news. Imagine, if you can, what it meant to the long-suffering and indomitable garrison. The men on duty, though they did not abandon their posts, threw discipline to the winds. Some jumped in the air, or danced and sang; others, yelling with excitement, ran to the loopholes and fired wildly at the Chinese. A noisy crowd, gathered together in less time than it takes to tell, rushed towards the Water Gate, through which the stalwart form of General Gasalee had just appeared. One would try in vain to picture the scene. No words can describe the frenzied manifestations of delight, the cheering and shouting, the emotions of strong men and heroic women, as the general and his staff marched down Canal Street, at the head of the column of bronzed and turbaned Indian soldiers—the 7th Rajputs and the 1st Regiment of

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Sikhs. They swung into the grounds of the British Legation, where the tumult and enthusiasm were redoubled, and each strove to be the first to greet the rescuers. Chaos reigned, and pent-up feelings were let loose. For the remainder of the day there was to be nothing but running to and fro, and greetings of reunited friends, and asking of all manner of questions.

But the little mounds of earth that were scattered under the parched and bullet-riddled trees, the roll of the valiant dead, could not be wholly forgotten even on such a delirious occasion. For some the extravagant joy was tempered with sorrow, and it was only natural that the contrast, the happiness around her, should break down Mrs. Killigrew's fortitude. She looked on for a time, and then, clinging to her husband's arm and weeping quietly, she moved across the lawn to enter the Legation. Several minutes later, when they were out of the thick of the crowd, Mr. Killigrew stopped with a gasping exclamation. A lad was hastening towards him, and at the sight of the familiar face—the face that he had long believed to be cold in death—he whitened to the very lips.

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"Mary, look!" he shouted. "It can't be—yes, thank God, it's our Dan! Ah, don't faint—"

"Father! Mother!" the lad cried breathlessly, as he reached the spot.

If ever a woman's deepest grief turned to heart-felt gladness, Mrs. Killigrew's did at that instant. By a supreme effort she saved herself from swooning; speechlessly, trembling with emotion, she took the boy to her arms, and their tears of thanksgiving mingled.

"Heaven has been merciful!"

It was all that Eustace Killigrew could say as through moist and dimmed eyes he watched mother and son in each other's embrace. He could say no more when his own turn came, could only repeat the words fervently. He held the lad at arm's length, devoured him with hungry looks.

"This is worth everything I've gone through," said Dan, choking back the lump in his throat. "It's like living again. I've got a story to tell you that would fill a book. But I mustn't forget—"

He broke off to call the attention of his parents to Alec and Loo-Lao, who had fol-

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lowed at his heels and were standing nearby. He introduced the princess, and both received a hearty welcome from the secretary and his wife, to whom the reappearance of Alec seemed even more of a miracle than did Dan's safe return.

The little group moved on, conversing in eager tones, and they had just stepped into the shade of one of the Legation porches when Kin Soon hurried up to them. He was visibly agitated, and his eyes threatened to burst from their sockets.

"Good news, young master," he panted. "Your honoured parent—"

"What of him?" cried Alec.

Kin Soon's reply was inarticulate. He turned, rushed into the throng, and emerged an instant later followed by two stalwart figures—an elderly, dignified Chinaman, and a tall, bronzed Englishman in native dress. The former was Prince Lan, and as the Princess Loo-Lao flew with hysterical sobs of joy to his bosom, he forgot his Oriental stolidness and kissed his daughter as ardently as any European parent could have done under similar circumstances.

And the bronzed, disguised English-

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man? There was no need to ask his identity, for Alec had hailed him as father, and the happy pair were in each other's arms.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Captain Drury. "I never expected to see you again, my boy."

"I wonder which of us has the most adventures to tell," said Alec, when his excitement had partially cooled. "What a day of wonderful surprises! This is Mr. Killigrew," he added, "who has been a good friend to me. My father, sir."

"Killigrew?" gasped Captain Drury, starting as if shot.

"I offer you my hearty congratulations," said the secretary, "and I can assure you that your gallant son—" He stopped, a puzzled and bewildered expression growing on his face as he stared with quickening breath at the bronzed military-instructor from Shan Se.

"Eustace!" cried Captain Drury. "Don't you know me?"

"Ralph, as Heaven is true!" burst hoarsely from Eustace Killigrew's lips; and with that their hands met in the tight, magnetic

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grip by which strong men are wont to express feelings too deep for mere words.

The mystery was quickly explained, though not before Dan and Alec had made a good guess at the truth.

"Eustace," cried Mrs. Killigrew, "surely this is not—"

"Yes, my long-lost brother, Mary," declared her husband. "Ralph, let me present my wife." He turned to Alec. "My boy, your father's right name is Killigrew," he added. "He is my brother, though for twenty years I have seen or heard nothing of him, and for half that long I have mourned him as dead. Do you remember how closely I questioned you at our first meeting?—I saw Ralph's likeness in your face."

"Hurrah! then you and I are cousins!" Dan cried with delight, as he grasped his chum's hand. "What a bit of luck, Alec!"

Further explanations could not be made at present, for now, when the lads were beginning to feel a little accustomed to their new relations, they had to face the embarrassing and fervent gratitude of Prince Lan, who had meanwhile been listening to a brief

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narration of his daughter's adventures. Ping Tang and Kin Soon also came in for a well-deserved share, both from the Prince and from the two Englishmen, not to speak of Mrs. Killigrew.

"Shall we continue our conversation indoors?" suggested the secretary. "You must be nearly starved, and I invite you all to take luncheon—if you can find anything better than horse-flesh. But I have an idea that some welcome supplies arrived with General Gasalee's column. Dan, will you go to Mr. Conger and ask him—"

"Hold on a minute," Dan interrupted. "I say, look yonder. Somebody is in trouble, I wouldn't mind betting."

A sergeant's guard of eight men was approaching the Legation, and as they drew nearer they were seen to be in charge of two prisoners. In the middle of the ranks, with a lacquered and brass-bound chest on their shoulders, marched the pair of missing marines, William Cocket and Nick Killemoff, whose sullen and crestfallen faces told a plain story. A halt was called by the portico, and the bearers put their heavy burden to the ground.

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"What's all this?" inquired Eustace Killigrew.

"A case of looting, sir," replied the sergeant. "If you'll take charge of this here box—"

"I believe it is my treasure," exclaimed Prince Lan, as he pushed in among the soldiers and examined the box at close range. "Yes, it is indeed mine," he cried. "The chest of my honoured ancestors! I filled it with money and gold before the siege, and put it for safekeeping in one of the apartments of my palace, in a space behind a secret panel. Behold, my daughter."

Loo-Lao corroborated her father's statement.

"It was found in just such a place, sir," the sergeant declared, addressing Mr. Killigrew. "In the Purple Palace, as they call the house. And we caught these two chaps in the very act of looting the stuff."

"Look 'ere, why don't you tell the 'ole truth, an' not the 'alf of it?" indignantly blurted Cocket. "We did the catchin' first, Nick an' me. We found six Boxers what 'ad battered a 'ole in the wall an' taken the box out, an' we sailed in an' killed the



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bloomin' lot of 'em. You can't deny that, sergeant—you seen the six corpuses with your own eyes."

The sergeant reluctantly admitted that such was the case.

"Blimy, there you are, gentlemen!" exclaimed Cocket, with an air of innocence and triumph. "An' as fur lootin', why, that's all bally rot. We meant to give the stuff to the cove what owned it"; he winked an eye slyly at Dan. "My pal will say the same," he added. "Ain't that gospel truth, Nick Killehoff?"

"It is," the Russian replied, solemnly. "By Isaac's beard, William Cocket, you never told a truer thing. We would at once the lawful owner have sought for."

"I like that, I do," the sergeant cried wrathfully. "Wasn't you on the point of breaking the chest open with the hind leg of a bronze stork?"

"Merely drivin' a loose nail in tighter, so's we could carry the stuff safely," pleasantly explained Cocket.

"True again, William," chimed in the Russian. "A loose nail, with a brass head."

At this point the secretary interfered.

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"The owner of the treasure is certainly Prince Lan," said he, with a smile. "I will vouch for that, sergeant, and accept the responsibility. So, let him have his property."

"I'm quite satisfied, sir. But what about these precious rascals?"

Eustace Killigrew laughed. "I think they have been punished enough," he replied.

The sergeant took this view of the case—it was hardly an occasion for the strict enforcement of discipline—and he and his men marched off, followed by the culprits.

"Six Boxers sent to their 'appy 'ome," Cocket remarked audibly. "They *was* a 'andful, eh, Nick?"

"They was," assented the Russian. "Tigers for fighting, William."

"Ah, these two brave soldiers!" cried Prince Lan. "They slew six evil Boxers and saved my treasure. Shall they go unrewarded? No!"

He quickly forced the lid of the chest open, called Killemoff and Cocket back, and heaped the hands of both with gold and silver coins. With profuse expressions of grat-

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itude, wearing broad, smirking grins on their sunburnt faces, the pair of rogues went their way rejoicing. As for the sergeant, who had so far looted nothing more valuable than the half of a broken jade vase, his feelings were of such a nature that he dared not put them into words.

## XVIII

### *Farewell*

AS the sun crept lower towards the western horizon, and the purple shadows lengthened behind walls and buildings, a happy little group might have been found in a comparatively quiet corner of the Legation. It consisted of Prince Lan and his daughter, Dan and Alec, Eustace Killigrew and his wife, and Captain Drury—if we may call him so to the end. Kin Soon and Ping Tang were missing, having gone up Canal Street to watch the detachments of soldiers who were still straggling in. The excitement and enthusiasm had not yet begun to ebb. Cheering and shouting were constantly heard, and on the lawn each knot of khaki-clad staff-officers, of lean, turbaned Sikhs and Rajputs, was surrounded by eager questioners. The rattle of fire-arms, almost continuously audible, told that

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the Allies were pushing their work to completion. General Chaffee, the American commander, was about to occupy the Chien Men gate with his plucky force. In the far north of the city the Boxers were making a last effort to subdue the garrison of the Peitang Cathedral, which had endured a siege little less severe than that of the Legations. The French soldiers were expected to relieve their heroic fellow-countrymen, but for some reason no steps to that end were taken during the 14th.

"This tastes better than food and drink, Eustace," said Captain Drury, as he puffed slowly at a fragrant cigar his brother had given him. "My friend the Viceroy looked after my comfort to the best of his ability, but he failed to send me an ounce of tobacco, though I repeatedly asked for it. And now suppose we hear what our boys have got to say for themselves."

It was a long story, and the telling of it, in which Dan and Alec were from time to time assisted by the Princess Loo-Lao, required several hours. It may be imagined with what intense interest the narrative was listened to, with what ejaculations of

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horror and surprise it was frequently punctuated.

"If I had a thousand fortunes to bestow," Prince Lan said to the lads when they had reached the finish, "they could not half reward you for all that you have done."

"There can be nothing more thrilling," exclaimed Mr. Killigrew, "in the whole history of the siege."

"I agree with you, replied Captain Drury. "I never dreamed of anything of this sort, and I'm heartily glad that I didn't. I was greatly worried about Alec, of course, but at the same time I felt pretty certain that he had been able to carry out my wishes, and was shut up in the Legations. As for my own experience, it was rather uneventful, and can be told in a few words. The Viceroy of Shan Se proved a true friend, in every respect worthy of the confidence that I reposed in him. He sheltered and hid me during those dark weeks of massacre and insurrection, and after Prince Lan here was sent to him from the capital for safe-keeping, when he realized that the Boxer movement must inevitably be crushed and the rule of the Empress-Dowager overthrown, he started

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both of us down to Peking under a strong escort. We got through without much trouble, though we had several narrow escapes just before we entered the Legation quarter. But things might have terminated very differently had we not been disguised."

At this point there was an interruption, a messenger coming up to the party to announce that the Foreign Ministers were desirous of conferring with Prince Lan. He departed at once with Loo-Lao, who would not be left behind.

"It's good to see you again, Ralph," said Eustace Killigrew, after a moment of silence. "The years have changed you very little. But I can't understand why—"

"I have no excuses to offer worthy of the name," Captain Drury interrupted, sadly. "My pride stood in the way, and after knocking about the world I grew careless and indifferent. I'm sorry enough now, Eustace, and we must try to make up for the time we have lost."

"You never told me a word about your early life," said Alec.

"There is very little to tell, my boy," his father replied. "Nearly twenty years ago

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I was a wild, hot-tempered, foolish young cub, with more spirit than common-sense, who didn't know when he was well off. I resented my father's stern treatment—it was meant for my own good, but I fancied him to be cruel and unjust—and in a fit of passion I ran away from home and went to sea. I wrote once to my people, but it appears they never received the letter, and not getting an answer I made no further effort to communicate with them. I would give anything to see my parents again, but they are both dead. It is almost more than I deserve to have found a brother."

"We shan't be parted in the future," vowed Eustace Killigrew. "It is a happy omen, Ralph, that fate should have united us just when this black storm is past, and the blue sky is breaking through the clouds. A handful of foreigners have shown China what they can do against murderous thousands, and it only remains for the Powers to stamp the lesson deeper, and exact punishment for the guilty and full compensation for losses sustained."

"They will do it, too," declared Captain Drury. "Never again will the Lega-



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tions be placed in such a humiliating position."

With this prophecy—which is most unlikely to prove false—we may ring down the curtain and take leave of the reader. The historic events subsequent to the relief and complete subjugation of the Chinese capital are too well known to claim a place in the story, though several of them may be briefly mentioned. The dawn of the 15th of August beheld General Chaffee driving the Chinese from gateway to gateway, and taking possession of the entrance to the Imperial Palace, an engagement in which fell the intrepid Captain Reilly. That same day, after the Japanese had come down from the north and demoralized the besiegers, the Pei-tang Cathedral was relieved by a force of French, British, and Russians. On the 28th occurred the triumphal march of the Allies through the courts and avenues of the Forbidden City, and meanwhile Peking had been divided into districts under the control of the Powers, proclamations had been issued, and the work of restoring law and order was moving smoothly.

Chow Yen, of the Street of the Booksell-

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ers, turned up safe and sound, with a marvelous tale of adventures to relate. Prince Lan and his daughter went back to their stately home, and when the danger was over Ping Tang rejoined his aged mother. Kin Soon, united to his beloved master, had nothing left to wish for. Eustace Killigrew and his brother decided to remain in Pekin for the present, and this resolve gave entire satisfaction to Dan and Alec, whose only fear had been that they might be parted.

The future of China is as yet uncertain, but should the young Emperor ultimately acquire the reins of government uninfluenced by his wicked and designing aunt, it is not unlikely that he will choose for his Imperial consort the pretty and amiable little Princess of the Purple Palace.

THE END