

The GREEN CAT!



By
EDMUND
BURTON

Out of a tragic disaster to a British torpedo-boat springs a thrilling adventure for Midshipman Clive Chester, the sole survivor—an adventure which plunges him into a sinister war between two Chinese secret societies!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE SOLE SURVIVOR!

DONG, dong, dong!
The great copper bell of Canton boomed the hour of three.

Under the blazing sun the calm blue waters shimmered. A single British torpedo-boat rode at anchor some distance off-shore, the White Ensign fluttering at her stern—a solitary emblem of the Motherland's might in an Oriental setting.

Midshipman Clive Chester, ever a strong swimmer, was revelling in his favourite pastime, watched by a little group of other "snotties" leaning on the rail as he turned and

twisted in the water, displaying for their benefit a new stroke of his own invention—a peculiar overarm-cum-trudgen stroke which drew his gleaming body through the shimmering sea at a remarkable pace.

Presently he shot away towards the shore, and had reached a point a considerable distance from his floating home, when a sudden shattering noise made him turn his head in amazement. He was just in time to see the torpedo-boat open like a paper bag and, with flames shooting from her hull, slip downwards into the depths!

A few shattered pieces of wreckage

floated on the surface where she had been riding so proudly a minute before ; but that was all to tell the tale. Not a survivor had escaped, apparently, owing to the appalling rapidity of the vessel's end.

"Great Heaven!" Clive breathed as, raising himself in the water, he took stock of his surroundings. "What can have happened? They were about to test that new torpedo-tube, and—yes, that must have caused it. Something went wrong, and—good lor'! They're wiped out, poor chaps!"

It was an extraordinary predicament, surely, one in which, it is safe to say, a midshipman of His Britannic Majesty's Navy had never found himself before. But Clive was level-headed, and he lost no time in trying to succour any who might be left, small hope though there seemed to be of this.

He hailed one of the native boats which was speeding to the scene of the disaster and, climbing aboard, directed the Chinaman to help in the search. But it was all in vain. Quite plainly their assistance would not be required, for even the strongest swimmers would surely have been drawn under by the suction, unless they had had time to get well away—which, with the sole exception of Clive himself, they certainly had not.

Sadly he gave orders to be landed on the quay, and the owner of the sampan turned the craft about. The Chink looked at the white lad clad only in bathing costume, and dumbly indicated a great square of sacking which was lying at the bottom of the little vessel.

Clive, interpreting the fellow's meaning, stooped and picked this up, wrapping it round his body which had now dried in the hot sunshine.

It was a strange garment for a British midshipman to be forced to

wear, but it was better than none at all under the circumstances. And still wearing the sacking, he presently stepped ashore, sitting down on a thick coil of rope to think out his unenviable position.

Few, if any, of those who passed paid attention to him. They seemed to be busy with other matters. Presently, lifting his eyes, Clive noticed that some kind of disturbance appeared to be in progress—a sort of political meeting.

There were men gathered in groups, wildly gesticulating, whose voices sounded like the squealing of so many guinea-pigs—the peculiar squeaking of the heathen Chinese when stirred out of his habitual Oriental calm. A little way to the right of this crowd, a gang of coolies were having a "free-and-easy" with the aid of sticks and cudgels. Possibly these composed the "opposition party," Clive imagined, but he could not understand what it was all about. Indeed, his heart was too sad and his mind too occupied at that moment to take a great deal of interest in anything beyond the terrible disaster which had come as a bolt from the blue sky above.

Then, suddenly, he became conscious of a voice addressing him in perfect English. Looking up again, he perceived that a richly-appointed palanquin had stopped a few yards away, and that a well-proportioned Chinaman of the higher caste was gazing in his direction.

"I am sorry to hear of this terrible accident, young man," the splendidly-attired personage was saying. "I am the Mandarin Fu Wan. The boatman who rescued you stopped my palanquin just now and told me of your plight, for he knows that I have always been friendly with the British. Pray come here!"

Wonderingly, Clive rose and ap-

proached the conveyance which the bearers had set down on the quay. He stared at the richly-clad occupant, looking closely at the latter's face and feeling reassured, somehow.

Clive had been over two years on the China station, and had learnt enough to distinguish the rabble from the patricians ; and the visage of the Mandarin Fu Wan was undoubtedly a prepossessing one.

His eyes, though slant and narrow, were honest ones, and he had far more expression in his features than is usual with men of his nationality. What was more, the expression was a good one.

"This is a strange plight for a member of the British Navy to find himself in," the Chinaman continued, "and I must do my best to better it. Will you honour me by accompanying me home, young sir? I can put you up for the present, until you know what you intend to do."

Clive was nothing loth. Anything, indeed, was better than travelling about Canton clad only in a bathing costume and a piece of sacking, and without more ado he muttered his thanks, taking his seat beside the mandarin in the palanquin.

"I have spent some time in your great country," Fu Wan explained, as the pair were borne through the tortuous streets, "and I have been well treated by your people ; so anything I can do to assist an Englishman in trouble is done willingly and with extreme pleasure. I was educated in one of your universities ; hence my speaking in your own tongue. There were no other survivors from your ship, I believe?" he added irrelevantly.

Clive shook his head sadly.

"None," he replied in a low tone ; "it happened too quickly, whatever it was. One minute she was floating on the surface, with a crowd of fellows

watching my swimming stunts ; the next, she had vanished."

"Terrible, terrible!" murmured Fu Wan. "That is the worst of being too progressive. It makes men deal with things which may as easily destroy themselves as their enemies. We Chinese are not too progressive, and in that, I imagine, we are wise."

"But surely, sir, you admire the Western methods of progress—you who have lived among us and had an opportunity of studying matters first hand?"

"Oh, yes—I admire your people and their greatness," the other admitted, "but yours is a different temperament from ours, you must remember. What suits the Britisher does not suit the Chinaman."

For a few moments there was silence whilst the journey continued beyond the confines of the town and into much pleasanter surroundings.

"But China—Canton especially—is stirring just now," Fu Wan resumed musingly. "You may have noticed a disturbance on the quay as I came along?"

"I did—yes."

"It is one of many. There is considerable unrest at the moment, and there may be trouble later. Ah! Here we are now!" The mandarin stopped his palanquin and climbed down, followed by Clive. "Pray come with me, my young friend!"

They had halted before a pair of great red double-doors, which presently were opened from the inside, and the couple passed through into one of the most gorgeous buildings it had ever been Clive's lot to enter.

The hallway was a riot of inlaid marble and lacquer-work, whilst soft silken hangings draped the walls and doorway leading from this to other parts of the house.

The colouring was rich, but not gaudy. It was the dwelling of a

man of excellent taste, for, with all the many blended hues, nothing clashed nor offended the eye.

A servant in white livery appeared suddenly in one of these doorways, bowing low.

"Sing will give you some proper raiment, my friend," Fu Wan said. "Accompany him to my son's wardrobe, and choose what you desire. My son is at present away, so all he has is yours for the time being. When you are ready, please follow the servant to my apartment."

Like one in a dream Clive passed along the many corridors in the wake of the white-liveried Sing. The man spoke no word, but it was plain that he knew exactly what was required of him. He brought Clive to a richly appointed bedchamber, and here a miscellaneous collection of beautiful clothing was spread out for his benefit. It was all, to the romantically inclined middy, just like a page torn out of the "Arabian Nights."

He selected a tunic of green Shantung silk, with a monogram on the breast pocket, together with some underwear of very soft material, and a pair of beaded, felt slippers. Then, having surveyed himself quizzically in the long mirror, he nodded to his guide.

Sing plainly understood and bowed low, turning on his heel and conducting his charge through another long corridor, where he presently knocked upon the portals of a richly lacquered door. Then he stood aside and Clive found himself again in the presence of his benefactor, the Mandarin Fu Wan.

Tea was set for two on a small table to one side of this sumptuous apartment, and the fine-looking Chinaman motioned his guest to be seated.

That meal was one of the most appetising of which Clive had ever partaken. There was not a great deal

of food on the table, but what there was was exceptionally rich and palatable, and the middy, more hungry than he had believed himself to be till that moment, did ample justice to it.

Then, as Sing entered to clear the table, Fu Wan sank down upon a soft divan, drawing a gold-mounted cigar case from the pocket of his robe.

"One of your Western vices," he smiled, as he selected a weed. "In fact, I still have these sent me from London."

He struck a match, lighted the cigar and, after a few luxurious puffs, turned again towards his guest. Clive noticed that the mandarin's face had assumed an expression of the utmost gravity.

"I am expecting other visitors," he began, "but they need not disturb you, since your presence will not interfere with our meeting. As a matter of fact, I expect you will be in sympathy with our object, and therefore interested in what takes place here presently. Do you understand any of the Chinese tongues?"

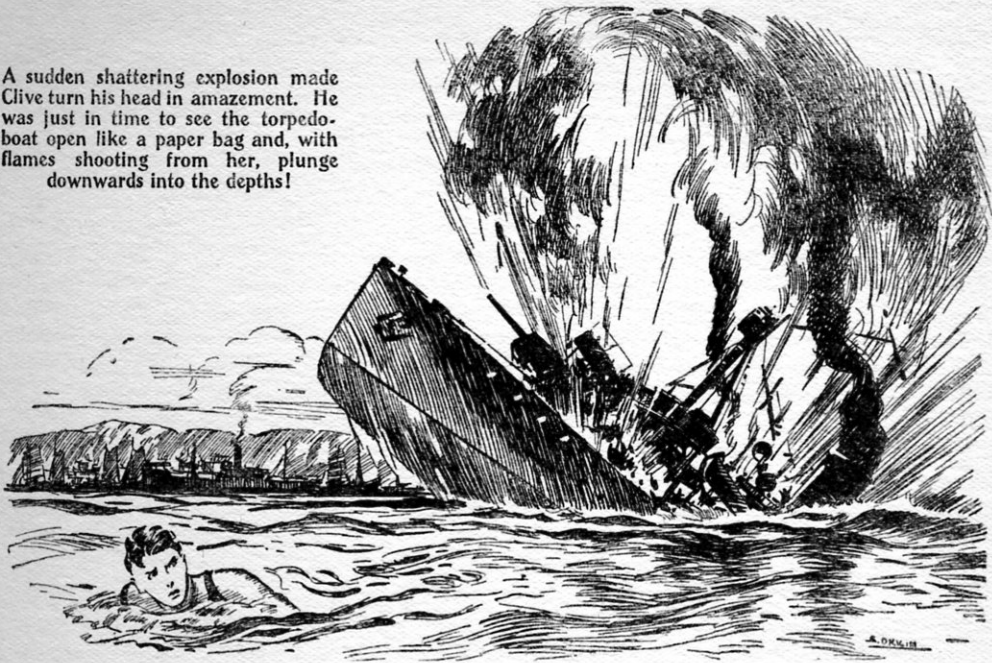
Clive nodded.

"Yes, I've something more than a smattering," he said. "I've been over two years out here, and I did not spend all my time fooling about."

"You English seldom do," the other remarked. "You learn a good deal wherever you go, and that is one of the secrets of your world-power. However, I may as well explain something before we are interrupted, because I feel sure you will prove a sympathetic listener. I am a good reader of faces, and I liked yours from the moment I saw you seated on that rope by the water-front."

Clive leaned forward expectantly. Something about this strange mandarin fascinated him. He guessed he was a straight individual, and he certainly possessed a most magnetic personality.

A sudden shattering explosion made Clive turn his head in amazement. He was just in time to see the torpedo-boat open like a paper bag and, with flames shooting from her, plunge downwards into the depths!



"In a few minutes, young man," Fu Wan pursued, "there will assemble in this room the principal members of the Order of the Green Cat. I have the honour to be chief of the Canton district, and therefore hold the high office of the order. Look! There is the emblem of my strength." He pointed to a small ornament standing in an alcove on the far side of the room. "He who has the Green Cat can count on possessing incalculable influence with the teeming population of this ancient city. My minions are all true men—the real honest workers of this great hive—but we have opposed to us the insidious Order of the Lotus, and at this moment that nefarious society seeks to exterminate the leaders of the Green Cat throughout Southern China.

"My emissaries have shadowed certain miscreants hovering around the true leaders these past five nights, so I know that underhand movements are afoot.

"A white man in these moments of disruption, when *anything* may happen, is not safe abroad; so, observing you and hearing of the plight you were in, I took compassion upon you. I admire the Westerner and his ways—"

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir, and I trust I shall be able to repay you some day," Clive interrupted, with a smile. "To-morrow I expect some of our fellows will arrive from Hong Kong, for they are bound to have received news of the disaster by now. You may be sure I shall tell them what a friend in need you have been to me."

At that moment Sing reappeared, ushering in half a dozen Chinese gentlemen, who exchanged words of greeting with their host and took up positions round a larger table.

Clive leaned back, studying the group with interest; then he prepared to listen to what passed—or at least, to as much of it as he could catch.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

"My friends," said Mandarin Fu Wan, speaking very gravely and deliberately, "we are faced with a very determined attempt to overthrow our ancient organisation, and it is necessary that we be quite prepared for all eventualities. Two years ago we were threatened in a similar manner, and then we stood firm—as firmly as we shall stand now. But since that last attempt, our enemies have been considerably strengthened; therefore, the present move on their part is all the more dangerous.

"Our main power, as you know, lies in the possession of the emblem of the Green Cat yonder." The mandarin pointed to the small ornament which he had already indicated to Clive. "I, as the chief of the Canton district, hold it at present. Should I die, it will pass to you, Most Illustrious Brother Kung Lu, as next in succession, and so on until each of the Six Sons of Wisdom possesses it on the demise of the reigning chief. This is all clear and straightforward; but in that Cat lies at once our strength and our weakness. Should it be stolen or otherwise pass into the hands of the Lotus people, then it will mean the undoing of years of effort for good on the part of our honoured society; for that which the emblem contains would prove a weapon which we could hardly fight against."

The others nodded in grave agreement with the words of Mandarin Fu Wan. Presently the latter pursued:

"For this reason, from this night onwards I intend to guard the Green Cat even more closely than before. I shall remove it to my sleeping apartment, safely though it has rested here for so long, and it shall never leave my sight until the time may

come for Brother Kung Lu to take it over. That, I think, is a good plan."

Again the six nodded their heads, and the meeting progressed for some little while, various matters being discussed ere the Sons of Wisdom rose and took their leave.

After the last had passed through the door to the corridor without, the mandarin turned to his young guest, who had been trying to follow what was said, but had not succeeded in grasping all that passed. The others, it may be mentioned, had paid Clive no attention whatever, evidently taking his presence there as a matter of course, since Fu Wan had spoken openly before him.

"You have heard what was said, young man?" the Celestial asked in English. "If so, you will understand that something very grave was under discussion."

"Yes, I gathered that," Clive replied, "but I do not pretend to fathom the whole thing yet. I learned that there was something hidden in the body of that ornament over there which must be guarded against theft, and that it is to pass from one to another of you as each assumes the chieftainship of your society. Isn't that so?"

"Quite right, so far as it goes," Fu Wan replied, crossing the room and returning with the ornament in question in his hand. "Perhaps I should explain more fully."

Clive looked at the article with great interest. It was a beautiful example of ceramic work, jade in hue, and measuring some ten inches in length. It was a perfect model of a cat, the eyes consisting of two flawless emeralds, with tiny pigeon-blood rubies surrounding the larger stones. Fu Wan gave the head a peculiar twist, which caused it to part from the body, and from the hollow thus revealed he drew out a tightly rolled

portion of silk secured with a rubber band. This he opened, displaying a chart or map so minutely executed that it was impossible to decipher much of the lettering with the naked eye.

Next the mandarin took up a large magnifying glass, which he handed to his companion, and with the aid of this Clive ascertained that the silk was really a most elaborate map of a city or town, drawn to an exceedingly small scale and containing a large number of tiny dots in gold, green, and red.

He looked up, his eyes asking many questions which Fu Wan was quite ready to answer.

"This is a map of the City of Canton," the latter explained. "It is absolutely accurate, giving every house, every street, and every alley. It was executed by the finest draughtsman in all China, and took some years to complete. The golden dots mark the houses of the district commissioners of our order, the green dots those of the sub-commissioners, and the red dots represent the dwellings of the rank and file of our supporters. You will notice that there are hundreds of the last-named compared with those of the other colours. This, then, constitutes the membership list of the Society of the Green Cat and would, of course, be a powerful weapon in the hands of our enemies, could they but obtain it. You see, Mr. Chester, all that would be required to strike at every loyal unit of our organisation would be a close study of this map, for it gives the residence of each one of us and is revised from time to time as members move from one part of the city to another. You see, it is always quite up to date."

"But to strike at all these people would be a long job, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," Fu Wan nodded, "but

the organisation of the Lotus Order is very complete—and very ruthless. Also, their methods of extermination are sure and silent. Their emissaries—thousands of them—would steal abroad whilst Canton slept and deal death by means of the blowpipe and poisoned dart, after the manner of the savage of the woods. Indeed, some of our known members have already been killed in this way; but without this map, what you English term a 'clean sweep' could not be made. That is why we expect an attempt will be made to steal it, sooner or later, now that the Lotus Order has been strengthened sufficiently to become a real menace to our existence."

Clive shuddered. He had heard of this blowpipe and dart business before, and what he had heard was not very nice.

"The poison they use," Fu Wan continued, "is manufactured by a certain chemist in Nanking—a man suspected many times of evil work, but not convicted because he has a certain power which enables him to evade the law. But sufficient is known by us of his collusion in this matter to furnish ample proof that from him, and no one else, the Lotus Society gets its terrible supplies. Where the ingredients of the poison are first obtained is something of a mystery, but we have learnt that this chemist makes regular journeys to the Gobi Desert, taking with him several assistants, so that may explain matters.

"We have seen some victims of the dart during the past two years or so—isolated cases which, nevertheless, prove that our very life as a society for good stands in jeopardy. Now we learn that bigger things are about to be attempted—things which will require all our strength to combat. The squabbling you saw on the dockside is but a murmur of a breeze that may

herald open rebellion among the lower orders, the majority of whom are supporters of the Lotus."

"I see," said Clive. "So that is why you announced your intention just now of never letting the Green Cat out of your sight?"

"Precisely." Fu Wan pointed to a door at the far end of the apartment. "My bedchamber is yonder. Yours is here"—he indicated another door at the opposite side—"until to-morrow, or until your Naval authorities need your services. I will inform the British consul of your present position. And now," the mandarin rose, replacing the map in its receptacle and putting the Cat's head back into position again, "I have had a tiring day, and so have you; therefore, let us retire. Sing should be within call if you require him."

Though it was not late, Clive was quite willing to get between the sheets, and having shaken hands with his kindly host, they parted in the middle of the long room, each leaving by an opposite door. Just once the midddy looked back and saw Fu Wan disappearing into his private apartment with the precious Green Cat nursed to the folds of his robe.

Clive had no need to summon Sing, for that well-behaved servant had already done everything that was required of him. The comfortable bed was freshly made, a new robe and complete change of clothing were spread out on a settee close by, for wearing in the morning, and English pyjamas hung over the back of a chair.

"Jove! This is just like being at home," the midddy thought, as he rapidly undressed himself and scrambled into bed. "I'd feel no end happy if it wasn't for the terrible happening that put me into this position to-day. Poor Simpson, and

Watkins, and the rest! All wiped out in a flash, and this lucky individual only saved through chancing to have a swim before duty. Truly, Fate plays queer tricks!"

For a little while he lay awake, pondering upon this and upon the strange affair of the Green Cat. Then he dozed off, until the striking of the midnight gong aroused him again. He was conscious of a severe thirst, possibly owing to the rich food he had eaten, and, despite his efforts to sleep once more, he at length felt that he simply must have a drink.

This was, indeed, aggravated by the drip-drip of rain falling outside, for the weather had broken with sunset and a regular deluge was now pouring down.

He had noticed that a small bathroom adjoined his sleeping apartment, and, facing this, was another door leading to the garden outside—a door containing a large grid that was open for air.

Clive left his bed, thrust his feet into his felt slippers, and entered the bathroom, which was illuminated by the soft light of a paper lantern burning in the ceiling. He quenched his thirst and was about to return when a sudden sound caught his keen ears—a sound distinctive from the dripping rain, which made him start back in alarm.

Then, softly drawing aside the silken curtains which draped the bathroom entrance, he peeped out. His sleeping apartment was very dimly lighted by the reflected rays of the lantern, and by these he was just able to see the door containing the grid which now faced him.

And that door now stood slightly ajar! More, a shadow was moving away from it—moving towards the other door which led to the big apartment and to Fu Wan's room beyond it!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A DANGEROUS MISSION

CLIVE'S mind was made up in a flash. This nocturnal visitor meant no good to the occupants of that well-ordered abode. He might be a common thief, or worse—one of the dreaded emissaries whom Fu Wan had mentioned.

The shadow moved forward, the middy following step by step in his soft slippers. The pair entered the large chamber, which was still lighted by a single coloured gleam in one corner, and here the intruder paused, staring about him. Clive also halted, partly screened by those silken curtains which seemed to hang everywhere.

He heard the man's breath hiss through his clenched teeth—it sounded like a subdued exclamation of disappointment. Then the latter

continued his way, softly opening the door of the mandarin's bed-room, and Clive noted with horror that something long and narrow was gripped in his hand.

Desperately the middy glanced round the room in search of a weapon. A small curved sword hung on the wall, and he swiftly drew it from its sheath. Then, seizing a wooden tray, he dashed forward with a shout, his makeshift shield held in front of him.

He burst into the bedchamber like a whirlwind. There was another lantern alight here, and by this Clive realised that his arrival had come too late by the fraction of a second; for even as he entered he saw the genial Fu Wan sink back on his couch with a dart embedded in his throat.

The murderer drew back with a snarl at this unexpected interruption,



The Chinaman drew back with a snarl at Clive's sudden entry and raised a blowpipe to his lips. Up shot Clive's tray, and a poison dart thudded upon it viciously.

and again raised the blowpipe to his lips. Up shot Clive's tray and something thudded upon it viciously. Before the man could make another attempt the sword had taken him fairly in the chest and he sank down with scarcely a cry, dead almost before he reached the floor.

Clive stooped over the stricken Fu Wan. The mandarin's face was already of a peculiar grey pallor, plainly telling that the poison had obtained a firm grip.

"Nothing can be done for me!" he gasped. "Take the Cat—take it to the house of Kung Lu, in the Street of a Thousand Joys, and give it into his hands only. He is the next——"

"But where, sir, where is the Cat?" the middy interrupted, gazing about him, and Fu Wan, summoning his last remaining strength, raised himself painfully on his couch.

"By Confucius!" he gasped, "it is not here. It was there, beside my bed, when I lay down, yet—ah! I know what happened. I woke and disturbed him. He had already taken the Cat and was going out, possibly by the window yonder, and—and he must have it on his person, boy!"

"All right, sir! I'll search him presently——"

"No, no! Search him now—*now!*" Fu Wan gasped. "I must know that it is safe before—before—a-ah!"

The end came with dramatic suddenness. The mandarin sank back again even as he was speaking, and his spirit fled to the Shades.

Clive summoned Sing and briefly told him what had occurred. The servant stared dumbly down at his late master's still form, but did not touch the corpse, for a Celestial has an inherent objection to doing so. Meanwhile, the middy was busily searching the person of the dead assassin, without result. Where *was* the Green Cat?

"What can he have done with it, Sing?" he asked in Chinese, waking the servant from what seemed to be a stupor of grief. "It is not here, and the illustrious Fu Wan commanded me, with his dying breath, to deliver it personally to the Mandarin Kung Lu, at his house in the Street of a Thousand Joys."

"Yes, I know the house," Sing nodded. "I can take you there——"

"Not without the Cat!" Clive cut in. "We've got to find that. Ah! What's this?"

Suddenly crossing to the window, he pulled aside the curtains. The casement had been opened, whether by Fu Wan or his assassin it was impossible to say; but more probably by the former, since the night was warm. And there, on a patch of lawn outside, lay the Green Cat of Canton.

Clive stepped out, returning with the precious object in his grasp. The head was still tightly fixed in its place, and a shaking betrayed a rattle of something inside, proving that the map was there intact.

"I see what happened," the middy said. "This ruffian took the Cat and threw it through the window when he saw signs of the mandarin awakening. He intended leaving by the window himself and picking it up as he went."

"Or," Sing suggested, "he had others waiting in the garden to recover the ornament when it was cast out. But, noting our presence here and possibly hearing some sounds, they feared to approach so close to the window."

"Phew!" Clive whistled. "I never thought of that. What's to be done? Can we leave here unobserved? We must deliver the Cat to its new owner before doing anything else, Sing. It is most vital."

For answer the servant nodded

towards the dead mandarin on the couch.

"Round my master's neck, sir," he said, "is a golden key. It opens the door of the long passage which leads to the boat-house. We have a small launch there, and can make most of the journey by water. It will be the safest way."

"Good!" said Clive, crossing over to the body and, sure enough, finding a small key hanging by a thin chain round the mandarin's neck.

He detached it and handed it to Sing, who swiftly led the way from the apartment.

They traversed numerous corridors, the servant instructing those he met to keep watch in the death chamber, and presently both paused at a small door of bronze hue. It was covered with numerous Chinese characters, and seemed, as well as Clive could gather from that brief examination, to be a list of Fu Wan's ancestors, with certain dates opposite each name.

"This door leads to the burying-place of my master's people, and through here he will be carried later," explained Sing. "But it is our best way to the boat-house, since we shall pass underground for a considerable distance ere coming up again."

He opened the door with the golden key and went on ahead, bearing a lantern of which he possessed himself en route. The passage wound like a snake between walls of dull-green marble, and half-way along its length the pair passed a massive ebony door showing still more hieroglyphics. Sing dumbly indicated this as he slowed down momentarily; then he took a sharp branch to the left, and Clive felt the ground rising steadily beneath his feet.

Thus they came to the open air, and paused near the water's edge, in the drenching rain.

A few yards away stood a small

boat-house, and the key of this Sing produced from his own person. He glanced round warily, as though fearing spies even here.

"I say," whispered Clive, noticing the action, "we have no arms in case we're attacked! What's to be done?"

Sing smiled to himself in the darkness, and again rummaged in the folds of his robe, bringing out a couple of short lengths of material which were heavily weighted at one end. He handed one of these to his companion.

"More silent than firearms!" he replied. "One blow is generally sufficient. Now, come!"

Clive swung the weapon in his hand. It was easy to use, and more deadly than a life-preserver. As Sing had said, one blow, properly delivered, would hardly require to be repeated.

"Is the launch ready?" he asked. "Have you petrol?"

"It is ready," the servant said. "My late master liked to journey on the water, and everything was kept prepared for his wishes. We shall travel down the river for about one mile; then you can land at the Street of a Thousand Joys and deliver your burden."

In a very few minutes the launch was afloat. The pair got aboard and Clive himself started the engine. All seemed to be going particularly well—but it is just at such moments when surprises occur. And the surprise, in their case, took the form of two of the Lotus spies who, working with the dead thief, had since been watching the western end of Fu Wan's grounds.

These men caught sight of the escaping pair as the launch dipped into the river, and rushed forward just too late to attack their opponents on the bank. But, determined to avoid whatever punishment overhung

them at the hands of their society in the event of failure, the spies plunged into the water, swimming strongly after the receding launch.

It was at this moment that the engine began to misfire, then to stop, and the little craft slowed down, drifting with the current. Sing bent over the mechanism, striving to put matters right, whilst Clive watched the progress of the two swimmers from the stern. Helped by the current, the latter were certainly creeping up mightily fast, and presently one of them grasped the gunwale with a yellow hand, his other arm shooting upwards as he cast a knife at the middy's form above.

But Clive had not been idle. As the pair approached, he drew the strange weighted weapon from the pocket of the jean blouse he had donned before leaving, and brought it down with all his strength on the man's upturned face, even as the knife sailed through the air and missed him by the fraction of an inch. The fellow grunted, and disappeared in the flood; but the other was still coming on hand over hand.

At that moment Sing got the rebellious engine going again, and the little launch forged ahead; but the swimmer was almost within arm's-length by now. Up went his hand, snatching the knife from his teeth and throwing it straight at Clive. Even as the steel whizzed towards him, the middy lurched forward and dealt a sure stroke at the thrower. Yet he only escaped by a hair's-breadth, for the knife ripped through the jean blouse at his left shoulder, cutting the flesh beneath.

But Clive's second stroke was as sure as his first. The weighted thong took the spy fairly on the temple, and he followed his confederate beneath the surface. As Sing had wisely said—there was seldom need for a

second blow with such a weapon.

By now the launch was roaring downstream, and the rain had ceased suddenly. A watery moon peeped through the clouds overhead, and a few equally watery stars made their appearance. Surroundings grew clearer, and presently Sing, who had been scanning the left bank closely, motioned Clive to steer in that direction.

"Yonder begins the Street of a Thousand Joys," he said. "Shall I remain with the boat, or would you wish me to accompany you?"

"Better come along, too—you say you know Kung Lu's house," Clive replied. "They may have other spies about here, in case that thief might have blundered. These fellows are cunning, and will very likely have taken every precaution. We can moor the boat to the bank."

"Assuredly, Young Son of Wisdom!" the Chinese nodded. "You have a level head firmly placed upon strong shoulders. So be it!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE SPY

SWIFTLY the middy and his companion passed along the narrow thoroughfare, Sing slightly in advance.

"The house you seek is some little distance down on the left-hand side," he explained as they progressed. "We shall reach it very soon."

They padded along, meeting not a soul. It was now very late and scarcely a light showed in any of the houses they passed. The moon was now shining brightly, and the sky had quite cleared of rain-clouds, but the shadows beneath the buildings were deep and sinister, causing Clive to give many a sidelong, anxious glance as he hurried onwards in the wake of his soft-footed companion.

Suddenly Sing paused, indicating a large building on the left.



No sooner had Clive and Sing reached the house of Kung Lu than a large piece of rock whizzed past the middy's face and struck the door.

"It is here, the illustrious Kung Lu's dwelling," he said. "And it seems that your fears were groundless, Wise One. There is nobody about."

Clive crossed over, seizing the heavy bronze knocker and giving a loud summons on the massive door. And then it was proved that his fears, instead of being groundless, were only too well-founded.

A head appeared round the corner of a neighbouring alley; then something heavy whizzed through the air, striking the door a few inches from Clive's face and bursting with a discharge of white-powdered stone. It was a big lump of gritty rock, which would assuredly have brained him had it not missed its target.

Quickly the head withdrew, but Clive's blood was up. He thrust the Cat into Sing's hands.

"Take this and get inside as soon as they open the door!" he snapped. "I saw that fellow's face, and I wish to make sure that my suspicions are correct. I'm going after him!"

Ere Sing could restrain him he had hurried away, sprinting round the corner of the wall. He was soon overhauling the man, who was not a good runner and was panting along some yards ahead.

Clive increased his pace, drawing level. Then his arm went back, and down came that deadly weighted sling, the business end of it catching the fellow on the base of the skull. He pitched forward like a pole-axed

ox, then rolled over with his face upturned towards the moon.

"Yes, I guessed as much," Clive muttered, gazing down. "I saw you working in the garden of poor Fu Wan's house when I arrived there, and I took a most strong dislike to you. I wondered how that other chap got in, but it's all clear now. You had the key of the door, so you deserve all you got!"

A rush of feet from the darker depths of the alley sounded at that moment, and Clive bolted like a hare back the way he had come. He now realised that it was madness to have followed this fellow, who would surely not be alone, but he had felt incensed at being so nearly struck down by that huge lump of stone, and he was ever impetuous.

He should never have left Sing. Indeed, he had been told to deliver the Cat to Kung Lu personally and, in the excitement of the moment, he had disregarded the dead mandarin's express wishes. What if Sing had been attacked in the meantime, before the door was opened to their summons, and the Cat again stolen?

But Clive, as it turned out, was worrying himself without cause. As a matter of fact, more than one spy had been watching Kung Lu's house for some hours, but as no one came, they had concluded that the man who entered Fu Wan's abode had succeeded in his task and that the Cat had now been handed over to the heads of the Lotus Order.

Consequently, with the exception of the fellow who had cast the stone, they had withdrawn into the network of alleys close by, and had only awakened to life again when their confederate had rushed towards them with the Britisher in hot pursuit.

When the middy again reached the Street of a Thousand Joys, it was to find Sing still rapping on the portals

of the new chief's house. The hour being so very late, all the servants were in bed; hence the delay in answering the summons.

And hard upon the sprinting lad's heels came half a score of ruffians armed with knives and sticks. They poured from the alley-mouth like an evil wave, but Clive was running as he had never run before, and joined his companion just as bolts were drawn on the inside of the door.

The pair tumbled through even as the vanguard of the enemy approached and, springing upright, Clive thrust the massive door to with his shoulder, shooting the central bolt.

"Jiminy! That was a near squeak!" he gasped, dashing the sweat from his forehead. "Another second, and——" He paused as he found himself confronted by the Mandarin Kung Lu in person. The latter looked at his unexpected callers strangely.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Surely you are the white youth who was with my friend, Fu Wan, during our conference? I recognise your face."

"I am, sir," Clive nodded, speaking in English, for that was the language the other had used. "Your friend asked me to bring you something. Here it is!"

He took the ornament from Sing and handed it over. Kung Lu's visage grew very grave and strained.

"The Cat!" he ejaculated. "Why, what has happened? Is my friend, Fu Wan——"

"I have bad news for you, sir," Clive cut in quietly. "The illustrious Fu Wan is dead—murdered by those fiends who support the Lotus. I was just too late to save him, and—and, with his last breath almost, he commanded me to bring the Cat to you. I have done so!"

For a few moments Kung Lu was

silent. He unscrewed the head of the ornament, examined the map carefully, and replaced it. Then he held out his hand to Clive.

"You English can always be relied upon to act well under difficulties," he said gratefully. "You have done more this night than you perhaps realise. Had this thing fallen into other hands, it would have meant chaos!"

Clive nodded.

"I know that. The lamented Fu Wan explained matters to me fully and I quite understand how important my mission was. But now, what is to be done? Those others saw where we came, and may make a further attempt——"

"They may," Kung Lu said quickly, "but they will fail. I have the Cat, thanks to you and this loyal servant of my great friend, and I have means of hiding it which none knows of but myself. Rest assured, young sir, that our society shall live to flourish triumphant over its enemies!"

At that Clive and Sing were content to leave matters. The mandarin, beckoning them to follow, passed

along the corridor and into a small apartment, beautifully furnished, where he bade them remain for a short while.

When he returned, it was without the Green Cat of Canton, and a slight smile on his otherwise grave face suggested that it had been safely disposed of, as he had said.

"How did you come to be at the house of my friend?" he asked Clive. "It was opportune——evidently."

Clive briefly related what had occurred, telling of the explosion which had sent his vessel to the bottom and stranded him on the quay in his unenviable plight, and how Mandarin Fu Wan had brought him home to remain with him until his position had been decided upon by the Naval authorities.

"Well," said Kung Lu, as the midday finished his story. "Pray look upon me as a successor to the illustrious Fu Wan. You will honour my house with your presence while I have a message sent to Hong Kong concerning your present whereabouts. As for this good fellow"—he glanced at Sing—"he will return to his late master's villa, for he will doubtless be needed there."



"The Finger of Fate"

By WILLIAM WIBLEY

(the actor genius of the Remove)

I'VE written a play that is sure to attract,
A drama of thrills and of vigour ;
A play I intend the Removites to act,
Although I admit, as a matter of fact,
Their acting makes everyone snigger.

I know that the various plays in the past
Perhaps might have been a bit brighter ;
But now we've got hold of a corker at last—
At least, there's ONE jolly good man in the cast,
Who, as you may guess, is the writer.

The play is entitled "The Finger of Fate,"
Or, "Death in the Temple of Twilight" ;
And I play the part of Sebastian Skate,
Who breaks into houses and pinches their plate
And finally falls through a skylight.

Then Wharton is cast as Professor de Breeze,
A potty old Indian scholar,
Who lives in a house full of poisonous bees
And cuts off the nose of each person he sees
For the pleasure of hearing him holler.

To Smithy is given the part of Wung Foo,
The Prince of Celestial wizards,
And he, with the help of his villainous crew,
Contrives to get rid of a victim or two
Before he is eaten by lizards.

Frank Nugent is clutched in the grip of a Tong
Who tickle his feet with a fescue ;
And when he sees numerous bodies along
The floor of his room, he thinks something is wrong,
And so he bawls loudly for rescue.

This play would do credit to any large stage ;
That's one thing of which I am certain.
Can any play beat it by one of my age ?
A violent death upon every page,
An earthquake at every curtain.

And yet, though the play is so good, I must state,
In case you've decided to praise it,
That all the success of "The Finger of Fate"
Is due to the part of Sebastian Skate,
As played by—the actor who plays it!

