

# The SABLE LORCHA

By HORACE HAZELTINE

Copyright, 1914, A. C. APPELBERG & CO.

Before the least unpretentious of all these structures, my hansom stopped, and as I stepped to the curb I got a glimpse of its banner and lantern strung balcony, giving to the street a touch of color that helped to lift it into an atmosphere which, if not Oriental, was at least vividly un-American.

Finding now that I had anticipated my appointment by something like ten minutes I chose to watch further the kaleidoscopic scene without, rather than pass the time waiting at a table within; and to this end took up a position of vantage on the restaurant's low step.

Whether I am more or less keenly observant than the average man I do not know. Probably any one as fascinated by the general scene as was I, would have noted as closely its individual elements. I am not sure. But the truth is that in a very few moments I had acquired a mental photograph of the opposite side of the street, in no far as it came within my direct vision. In other words every detail of the background of the moving picture before me was indelibly printed upon my mind's retina. There was the playhouse, with its plain, rectangular doorway, unadorned, save by a quartette of rude signs; two above, slanting outward, and one on either side, all announcing "Chinese Theater," and one giving the current attraction in Chinese characters, with the added notice, "Seats reserved for Americans." To the left of this was

a quick lunch restaurant, with white painted bulk window, beneath which a pair of cellar doors spread invitingly, one of them resting against a conventional American milk can. On the theater's right was a laundry, dim and evil-looking, two pipe-smoking celestials decorating its low step. And beyond this was the wide opening to a basement, above which, in white Roman lettering on a black ground, I read the legend: "Hip Sing Tong."

Again and again my gaze persisted in returning to this sign and the dimly lighted cavern beneath it. The place held for me the inexpressible, unfathomable charm of the mysterious, beside which the heathenish racket of the theater across the way, the sinister aspect of the dismal laundry and its pair of pipe-smoking guardians, even the constantly changing procession of varied types in roadway and on sidewalks, exerted but meager allure.

From time to time dark, silent figures glided vaguely into view only to disappear within this maze of mystery. Once, while I watched, I had seen a figure issue forth to be lost again instantly in the distant gloom of the curving street. Now, reverting once more to this magnet, after a moment's truce, my eyes were rewarded by sight of another slowly emerging form, silhouetted nebulously against the dusk.

At the head of the steps it paused, uncertainty, and then, instead of gliding swiftly away in the direction of Pell street as did the other, it turned in my direction, passing almost at once into the comparatively glowing radius of the street lamp opposite.

I saw then that it was a man, thin to emaciation, round-shouldered, and crooked limbed. Whether some one jostled him, or a voice from the roadway startled him, I don't know. But for some reason he turned his head suddenly, and the light from the lamp fell full upon a face, stubble-bearded, deep-lined, and repellent, the face not of a Chinaman but of a white man; a face into which I had looked but twice, and then but for a brief moment; yet a face as indelibly fixed in my memory as were the grim fronts of the buildings now behind it—the face of Peter Johnson, the pretended castaway.

I think I must have had it in mind to pick him up bodily and carry him away with me that I might by inquisitorial torture wring from him a confession. Otherwise I should have adopted a less eager and more subtle method of bringing the miscreant to book than that which I rashly attempted. Before I considered the situation I was across the street and at his heels. My finger tips, indeed, were at his shoulder. In the fraction of a second I should have had him gripped and have been hustling him through the crowd as my prisoner. But at the instant of seeming success, he eluded me. In some strange way he caught alarm and, shrinking beneath my hand, darted sinuously off, between this pedestrian and that, with the lightning speed of a lizard.

But, though he escaped my clutch, my eyes were more nimble. With them I followed him until I saw him drop between the cellar doors which opened beneath the white bulk window of the quick lunch room. And where he went, I went after. I slipped on the pavement and, when I came to my feet, I was standing in the doorway of the quick lunch room. I had followed him into the quick lunch room, and I had followed him into the quick lunch room.

And, as misfortune would have it, I must needs catch my heel on the edge of one of the treads, and go sprawling on my hands and knees; while a poignant pain shooting cruelly through my ankle told me that a sprain was added to my mishap.

For a minute I lay as I had fallen, prone and motionless; and in that space I realized the foolhardiness of my whole course of action. My very intrepidity had contributed to disaster. Instead of accomplishing a capture I had cast myself, disabled, into the mesh of the enemy.

The inky darkness and profound silence of the place augmented, of course, my apprehension. In vain I strained my eyes to distinguish an object, my ears to detect a sound, yet I knew that the uncanny creature I had followed must be close to me; lurking, possibly, with raised or pointed weapon to mete out my fate once he made sure of my position.

The minute—it could hardly have been more, though, as I think of it, it seemed infinitely prolonged—ended in a sound above and behind me. Very softly, carefully, some one was closing the cellar doors. Stealthily muffled though it was, the faint creaking of the hinges shattered the spell which held me, and in spite of my tortured ankle, I managed to gain my feet. But by now the silence reigned once again and in the engulfing blackness I lost all sense of direction.

The suspense of the moment was unendurable. To stand there waiting, not knowing when or from what quarter I should be set upon, was nervous torment so hideous that in sheer desperation I plucked my match box from my pocket, drew forth a match and struck it to a blaze. As it flared forth, routing the shadows in disorderly flight, I made quick survey of my dungeon. To my amazement I was apparently quite alone.

Relieved, in a measure at least, I employed another match and still another, hobbling painfully about the grimy, low-ceiled basement, in diligent inspection. My first thought was that Johnson was in hiding, and having located me by my own lighted matches, waited now only an opportunity to throw himself upon me from behind. But I very soon discovered that he had fled. Evidently he had retraced his steps up the rude ladder to the street, closing the doors after him to check my further pursuit.

The place into which I had followed him was evidently a Chinese candy manufactory and cake bakery. To the right of the entrance were rows of shelves containing jars of what I recognized as sweetmeats peculiar to the celestial. In a large bowl on a rough table or counter was the granulated flour with which these confections are invariably powdered; and here, too, were boxes of round, jumblelike cakes. As I saw now that the space upon which I had fallen was so restricted that I wondered how it was possible for my quarry to have reached the steps and reacquired without touching me or at least acquainting me with his movement. And I marvelled, too, that twisting my ankle as I did, I had not plunged at a slant and struck my head upon one or another of the crowding tables and boxes with which the cramped basement was furnished.

My third match disclosed a narrow door in the broad partition at the rear, and fancying that perhaps the elusive Peter Johnson had escaped by that means while I was getting to my feet, I lost no time in seeking to investigate what was beyond. I was somewhat surprised to find the door unfastened. Once open, it revealed a smaller and more crowded room, warm and fetid, into which were packed no less than half a dozen barrels of raw and cooked peanuts, arranged about a low stove or which a peanut-filled cauldron was slowly steaming.

Curiously interesting as all this would have been under ordinary circumstances, I experienced only a surprised relief, for with my injured ankle I was in no little to cope with even the weakest adversary. Indeed, now that this easement was afforded me, my sprain suddenly asserted itself with renewed exacerbation, sharp twinges of pain shooting to my knee and demanding instant relief.

In front of the low stove I had noticed a stool, and for this I groped with the eagerness of the drowning man after a straw. To my joy I laid hands upon it, and drawing it nearer sank down with a sigh of gratification comparable only to that with which a Marathon victor drops to earth after a hotly-contested race.

Gradually, now that my weight was removed, the pain lessened, and a sense of comfort ensued. Contentment unfolded me, which, if I thought of it at all, I attributed, I suppose, to the sensation from the square which I had just been suffering. I remember thinking that I would, with a few minutes and then take my departure, as I had done, but I realized that cellar doors and basement walls were within, and that there could, therefore, be no

impediment to my going when I chose. I distinctly recall that I was conscious of a certain strange incongruity of situation, but could hardly comprehend in just what the incongruity consisted. I knew only that I felt pleasantly warm and drowsy; and my sprained ankle had ceased altogether to pain or annoy.

And then, I was calling in an open boat in midocean, and Peter Johnson, in oilskins, sat at the helm, with a saturnine leer on his face, and tugged at brief intervals, always longer and stronger, upon what seemed to be the sheet, which had become wrapped around my throat and chest and which, by degrees, was crushing my windpipe and lungs, so that my breath came only in sharp, shuddering, aching gasps.

## CHAPTER XV.

### Amyl Pearls.

Who will deny that a sturdy physique is a valuable asset? Had it not been for a deep chest, a powerful pair of lungs, a heart without a flaw, and an underlying vitality such as is possessed by but a small minority in these degenerate times, I must certainly have succumbed. For, as I learned later, I had inhaled enough carbon monoxide gas to have killed the average man of my age, twice over. The stove on which the cauldron of peanuts steamed was a charcoal furnace, and the tiny space within that back room was impregnated with the heavy poisoned fumes to a distance of four feet and more above the floor.

Sitting on a low stool, bent forward over my sprained ankle, which for relief I had raised and rested across my other knee, I had come in contact with the deadly gas, breathing it without suspicion, until drowsiness intervened and stupor, insensibility, and eventually coma followed.

It is customary, I understand, to employ rigorous treatment in such cases to effect resuscitation. If I am to believe what I have been told of my condition when discovered, I was very far on the way to dissolution. I was, in fact, moribund, and in the eyes of those who carried me from the cellar to an upper room I was already dead. It is perhaps needless to add that no steps were taken to revive me. Even had I been regarded as still living I doubt that I should have received any other treatment.

Providence, however, favored me. I was thrown into a bunk under one of the few open windows of Chinatown, and a door left ajar, by accident, probably, drew across me a current of comparatively pure oxygen. Thus revived, nature reasserted itself, and respiration, which had been temporarily suspended, gradually resumed its office.

With dawning consciousness came acute discomfort. My head and back ached unbearably, and my ankle, swollen to twice its normal size, shot pains to my thigh. My tongue seemed too large for my mouth and my throat was raw. Later, memory started a

train of questions and surmises. A half light admitted through the open window gave unsatisfactory answer as to time and place. It might be dawn, midday or evening. I might still be in the same building into the basement of which I had plunged after the so-called Peter Johnson, or I might be miles away. Yet of one fact I was assured. It was no longer night. Day had come again and eight hours at least must have passed since I stood killing time on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant in which I was to have met Yip Sing.

And, as my mind cleared, there rushed in upon me a recollection of Evelyn's apprehension and of my promise to reassure her not later than eleven o'clock. Suffering as I was, physically, I know my mental distress at thought of how she must have waited with growing solicitude hour after hour for that expected ringing of the telephone bell; how, indeed, she must, even now, be distraught, not by uncertainty, but by the conviction that some ill—some serious ill—had befallen me, was more poignant.

In my eagerness to relieve at once this unrest which I knew to be hers I would have risen, but my strength was not equal to the test. My muscles refused to obey my will and I lay supine, inert, powerless. I would have learned the time, but to seek my watch, which I fondly fancied was still in my pocket, seemed such an enormous exertion that I reluctantly gave over the idea. To breathe, to draw air into my lungs and expel it, was prodigious labor, wearing me, it appeared, to exhaustion; though with every inhalation lucidity of thought and, I suppose, physical force as well, were being imperceptibly augmented.

After a time I found myself listening intently for sounds that might prove informative, while with head slightly turned I made scrupulous inventory of the room in which I was cribbed. It was a cramped, confined place, unplastered, and furnished with four rough board bunks, one of which I occupied. The other three were empty; but in the scant passageway between my resting place and that opposite was a stool, and upon the stool the pipe and other paraphernalia peculiar to opium smoking.

Then, very slowly, there came to me a realization of the vulpine cunning of these orientals into whose hands I had fallen. I was to be found here, dead, not from inhalation of foul air in an ill-ventilated cellar, which might excite suspicion and provoke inquiry, but from over-indulgence in opium, to which I had probably been addicted for years, unknown even to my closest friends. For the "hop feed" there is small sympathy, no matter what his position, and my kindly would be

ring to avoid unpleasant publicity. Yes; it was very clear they had thought me dead, and so had left me here unwatched and unattended with the evidence of my mode of passing theatrically displayed beside me. It only remained now for some employe or visitor to discover me and give the alarm.

I had about reached this conclusion, after a long and desperately trying effort at logical reasoning, when my straining ears detected the sound of footsteps in the passage. The door of the den was slightly ajar and I lay well in sight of any passer-by who should glance through the narrow opening.

Whether to feign death, or boldly make known my recovered consciousness, was for just a moment a question. But before my sluggish brain could decide, choice was snatched from me. The footsteps paused, and simultaneously, it seemed, the door swung farther inward, disclosing, not the pig-tailed, greasy-bloused Mongolian I had expected, but a white woman, tall and shapely, with hair of iron gray and the very kindest eyes that ever I looked into.

I made as if to speak, but my swollen tongue refused to perform its office, and something that may best be described as a gurgle was the result. With that she came to my side, and for a little regarded me silently. I felt that seeing the pipe and the little peanut-oil lamp, she must draw the natural inference, and, though there was no reproach in her look, I wished, if possible, to correct that false impression. I therefore made effort to gesture genial, employing a glance to indicate the objects and a very feeble side movement of the head to express repudiation.

It is possible that she understood, but I question that she believed. I have no recollection that she spoke a single word to me, and yet, when she was gone, I felt that she would surely return to my rescue. And I was not misled. I suppose this partial relief to my anxiety resulted in a slackening of mental effort on my part, for I must confess that what followed is very vague in my memory. I know only that she was accompanied by two men, one white and one yellow, who carried me down a narrow flight of stairs, out onto the street and into a waiting cab. I cannot recall that I spoke, but I learned afterward that I had mumbled the word "Loyalton," and thither she accompanied me.

There a physician came, one whom I had never seen before; and I was dosed with aromatic spirits of ammonia and fanned, by a white-clad nurse, who also, at intervals, painted my ankle with iodine, and, whenever I attempted to speak, domineered me in a gentle and perfectly ladylike manner to silence.

With regard to sending word to Evelyn Grayson, however, I was instant; and though she had refused absolutely to gratify my curiosity in other respects, she set my mind at rest on this point by informing me that Miss Grayson had called up the

Loyalton by telephone several times and had been informed of my condition five minutes after my arrival at my chambers.

There were times during the week which followed when I was nigh unto death; and when, finally, after ten days I was pronounced convalescent, it was with the added well-worn phrase that my recovery was "nothing short of a miracle."

It was on the eleventh day that I was first permitted to see and talk with Evelyn. My mother had called daily, sitting in silence beside my bed, but no other visitor in all that, to me, seemingly endless period, had been admitted to my room.

My curiosity was by now very keen to learn what had developed in the interval regarding the Cameron mystery. Had he, by chance, been heard from? What had the detective agency reported concerning Philetus Murphy? And what, I wished to know most of all, had Yip Sing discovered?

I was in a dressing gown, pillowed and footstooled in a great leather chair awaiting my visitors—for Mr. Lancaster came with Evelyn—when their names were announced. I suppose I looked ill—though, save for a grievous weakness, I was feeling fit enough—for Evelyn's smile as she entered merged instantly into an expression of mingled anxiety and sympathy. I know that with her coming I awoke to the truth that my desire for information was a far less moving factor than my craving for sight of her and for the music of her voice, and my only regret was that the understanding between us had not reached the stage of acknowledged betrothal; which, I make haste to add, was certainly no fault of mine.

Weak as I was my arms ached to fold her in a reassuring embrace; yet must I content myself with a mere fervent hand-clasp and an oral declaration that I was by no means so feeble as I appeared.

Nevertheless I was delighted to see that she gave small evidence of the strain she had been under. Save for a slight additional pallor she was still the same wholesome-looking, thoroughly-poised girl of a fortnight ago. And my admiration for her took on an added measure because of this renewed evidence of her sterling courage.

"And you promised me to be discreet!" she reproached, her smile returning, her hand still in mine. "I did not foresee such provocation to indiscretion," I pleaded, with an attempted gayety of tone that must have seemed incongruous. "To have been discreet under the circumstances would have involved a repetition of the one mistake for which you blamed me. You don't know, of course, why I jumped down a ladder

into a pitch-black cellar, do you?" "I know you were in pursuit of some one—a pickpocket, they say, who had taken your watch."

"Do they say that?" I asked, interested.

"That is what Miss Clement learned."

"Miss Clement?" I queried. "Who is Miss Clement?"

"Oh, I forgot that you don't know. Miss Clement is the missionary who found you in the—is it 'hop joint' they call it?"

"The lady with the kind eyes?"

"At my designation her face brightened responsively."

"You remember her, then!" she cried, delightedly. "Haven't she kind eyes?"

"And she doesn't belie them, either. She's just the dearest, most self-sacrificing creature I ever knew."

For the moment we had both forgotten Mrs. Lancaster, and when I would have apologized I found that my nurse had carried her off into the next room and was interestedly showing her some framed photographs of the Siena cathedral.

"And Miss Clement learned that I pursued a pickpocket?" I went on, when Evelyn had drawn a chair near me and sat down. "A very clever explanation to account for the disappearance of my watch, but not the true one. As a matter of fact, the person I followed was a miscreant of a deeper dye. When I last saw him, previous to this encounter, he was known as Peter Johnson."

Wide-eyed, the girl stared at me for an instant.

"Peter Johnson!" she repeated, slowly. "So, I was right. He was in the plot. He had something to do with Uncle Robert's disappearance. He was the one who broke the amyl pearls on board the yacht."

It was my turn now to start. Of what was this young woman talking?

"Amyl pearls!" Was I mad, or was she?

She saw my perplexity, and hastened to enlighten me.

"Oh, dear, Phillip!" she exclaimed. "I forgot again. There is so much to tell you. Really, I hardly know where to begin. Miss Clement has been of such aid to us! She is what they call an 'independent missionary.' That is, she has no affiliation with any of the church societies or reform associations. For fifteen years she has been working in Chinatown among the white women, and she knows the place and the people as if she were indeed one of them. I had her out at Chaghot for a day and I've seen her four or five times here in town, and she has told me everything, and she has explained, or at least given quite reasonable surmises, concerning many of the incidents that seemed to us inexplicable. Did you ever hear of amyl pearls?"

Of course I had heard something of amyl pearls, and I said so.

"They are glass capsules," I added, "and contain a liquid which smells like bananas. They use them, I believe, in heart attacks, by crushing them in a handkerchief and inhaling the drug."

But it was not the same drug, Evelyn explained. Miss Clement had told her all about it. She doubted that it was an amyl, at all, though it was put up in the same fashion, and released in the same way, and it was like an amyl, in that it was extremely volatile.

"Miss Clement has never seen one of them," Evelyn continued, "but some of the Chinese have told her of them, and of the wonders that they, whatever it is, is very expensive and so they are seldom used, but that in China, especially in secret government enterprises, they are employed on occasion. The effect is seemingly to make invisible the person who uses them. Really, they don't do anything of the sort; for they are nothing more nor less than capsules, filled with a peculiarly-acting anesthetic—an anesthetic so quick and powerful in its action that the victim falls into insensibility without warning, and emerges, after an interval of ten or twelve minutes, without knowing that he lost consciousness or that more than a single second has elapsed."

"The idea seems ingenious," I returned. I was interested, surely, but very far from convinced. "But," I objected, "how is it that the anesthetizer is not anesthetized himself?"

"Oh, he doesn't break the pearls under his own nose," Evelyn explained. "He casts them. The slightest concussion fractures the shell, and every one within a certain radius drops instantly into a temporary trance."

"And the swine before whom the pearls are cast, do they drop to the ground to rise again when the ten or twelve minutes are concluded?" I ridiculed.

"Oh, not at all. Your muscles are not relaxed. You stand or sit as if turned suddenly to stone. If your arm is extended, for instance, it remains in that position until the effect ceases." She was very much in earnest, and tried to persuade me that, aided by these pearls, it would be a very easy matter to commit all three of the deprecatory acts which had so amazed and shocked us.

I am the last man to regard anything as impossible in this day of wonders, yet I was by no means willing to accept such a solution merely on the hearsay evidence of a woman who had spent a decade and a half amongst the Chinese of New York City.

"Yes, Evelyn," I said, tolerantly. "It is worth considering, and at the first opportunity I shall look into it. But just now there must be more important matters for you and me to discuss. Did Miss Clement, by any chance, see Yip Sing?"

At the question the girl's pale cheeks flushed to her temples and her

eyes blazed. "I asked her to see him, and she did," was her answer. "I thought she might learn from him when and where you parted, and what led up to the plight in which you were found. But he told her that you had failed to keep an engagement with him. He insisted that you had come to Chinatown intent upon making trouble, and ended by declaring that he had no time to devote to answering the comings and goings of such a harebrained American as you had proved yourself. Did you ever hear of such impudence? I wanted Miss Clement to take me to him that I might tell him what I thought of his outrageous conduct, but she refused. She says he stands very high amongst his people, and that it is not well to antagonize him."

I smiled at her indignation. "After all," I said, "he isn't so much to blame. I must have cut a rather undignified figure chasing Mr. Johnson through Doyers street, and then falling down cellar stairs. When I am able to get out again, I shall go to Mr. Yip and apologize."

But before I was able to get out again, I changed my mind. To be quite definite I changed it that same evening, when, in reading the reports of O'Hara, the detective who for nearly two weeks had been shadowing the red giant, Philetus Murphy, I came upon this entry:

At 5:27 he entered the Mott street store of the Yip Sing Company, remaining until 6:42, when he came out with a tall, thin, well-dressed Chinaman, said to be Yip Sing, himself. Together they went to Ching Wung's restaurant on Doyers street. From there a Chinaman known as Muk Chuen returned with Murphy to Cos Cob."

And the date of this occurrence was the day following my Chinatown misadventure.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A Slump in Crystal Consolidated.

The week of my convalescence was not eventful. Evelyn and Mrs. Lancaster called daily, and the reports from O'Hara came each morning with unvarying regularity and equally unvarying lack of import. The artist, after his visit to Yip Sing, had returned to his Cos Cob hermitage, accompanied by a successor to his former unfortunate Chinese servant, and now rarely left his own grounds. Gravid with suggestion as his appearance in Chinatown had seemed at first, I soon came to realize that it might possibly bear no more vital significance than that altogether commonplace proceeding, the quest of a cook. And in the absence of any confirmatory evidence to the contrary, and with the knowledge gleaned from Miss Clement that Yip Sing, on occasions, added to his regular business of merchandizing that of an employment agent, I saw no reason to attach an undue importance to the incident. Nevertheless I relinquished none of my suspicious regarding Murphy, but continued the detective's surveillance with a fresh injunction to vigilance. And I did not apologize to Yip Sing.

Miss Clement, to whom I believe I owe my life, visited me at my request. How I welcomed her with my gratitude is no more material than how she endeavored to make light of her service to me, declaring that such offices were a part of her day's work in her chosen field, and that her day's work was her passion. And yet it was this part of our interview which gave me my strongest insight into her exceptional worthy character. Absolutely unselfish, she joyed in a life that even a religious fanatic might well have qualified before; finding flowers in muck heaps and jewels amid tinsel.

In five minutes, too, I glimpsed her abounding magnetism, the moving agent in that rare efficiency which was part and parcel of her. Later, I learned of the weight of her influences among the dwellers in the Chinese colony; not from any direct narrative of what she had accomplished—for she was chary of speaking of herself—but by deduction, purely. Moreover, my watch, a few trinkets and a little money, taken from me that night in Doyers street, had all been returned through Miss Clement's good offices; and if, thus far, she had afforded us no real clue in our absorbing exigency, I felt that ultimately her knowledge, coupled with her resourcefulness, would prove to us of unbounded value. And, as events shaped themselves, I was not wrong.

It was now nearly four weeks since Cameron's disappearance, and a fear that he had met death in some fleshly form at the hands of his abductors had come to be with me very nearly an obsession. The care I exercised in hiding my real state of mind from Evelyn could not well be exaggerated. When I appeared to her most hopeful I was actually most despairing. With Miss Clement, however, I had no reason to dissemble. With all frankness I told her of my despair; and when, instead of trying to comfort me with empty words of encouragement she agreed with me that the chances of our ever seeing Cameron again were at a minimum, I liked her the better for being straightforward.

"I sometimes feel," I said to her, "making full confession, 'that we made a terrible mistake in not at once notifying the authorities. Even now I am inclined to lay the matter before them. Anything would be better than uncertainty. A few arrests and the third degree might work wonders.'"

(To be continued.)

The Gift Agh.

It has been well said that nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.