

Miss Helen Fitzgerald, the American Girl Who Escaped from the Torture Temple of the Lamas, Where No Other White Woman Had Ever Penetrated.



Trapped in the Temple of the Devil Dancers

What Happened to the Daring Girl Globe-Trotter When She Ventured Alone Into the Forbidden Holy of Holies of the Dread Lama Priests of the City of Peking.



TRAPPED by the savage priests of Peking in the mysterious Temple of the Lamas where no white woman had ever penetrated; surrounded by devil dancers in hideous masks; a knife at her throat; skinny, jeweled, yellow hands clawing at her madly—this was the terrible experience of Miss Helen Fitzgerald, young and pretty American girl, just returned from China to her home, No. 16 West Sixty-eighth street, New York City.

Miss Fitzgerald, globe-trotter and author, has traveled in every country on earth and witnessed many strange rituals, among them the sacred ceremonial of the Sun Dance of the Blackfoot Indians, where she was initiated into the tribal mysteries after the warriors had given her the name, "Muchanicha." But none of her experiences was as ghastly as when she pierced, alone, the gruesome Tibetan sanctuary, narrowly escaping with her life by a headlong flight down the evil corridors of the temple. She tells here, in her own words, the thrilling story of her battle for liberty with the dreaded Lamas.

By HELEN FITZGERALD

IN the city of Peking, near the Hata Men, or Gate of Sublime Learning, stands the evil shrine of the Devil Dancers, or Yellow Lamas of Tibet. It is known to the Chinese as Yung Ho Kung, to the foreign population as the Lama Temple, and to the Tibetans and Mongolians, whose Holy of Holies it is, as the "Gompa," or solitary palace.

This latter name describes it well, as it broods apart under the shadow of great walls and ancient trees, its tiled roofs appearing in upward curving lines, from behind dense, over-hanging branches. Formerly the home of the Chancha Khatuktu, or Living Buddha, god incarnate, according to Lama faith, the temple has always been carefully guarded from the profane, except upon the occasion of the Devil Dance. This hideously barbaric rite is performed by the priests, or devil dancers, on the thirtieth day of "the first moon" of each year. Wearing masks like death's heads, with gigantic beaks, and serpents intertwined, the priests issue forth dancing to the weird music of pipes and drums.

Uncanny tales are told of persons who have disappeared mysteriously within the labyrinthine inner court where 1,500 monks pursue their base demonology and pay tribute to the red gods of their faith.

Both Chinese and foreign residents of Peking fear the "Gompa" because of its dreadful history. When I reached the Forbidden City on my

The Barbaric Devil Dance Performed by Thibetan Masked Priests on the Thirtieth Day of the "First Moon" of Each Year.

world pilgrimage the one admonition impressed on me was: "Do not go to the Lama Temple! No white woman dares to trust herself there alone! It would mean death—or worse!"

My curiosity was piqued. What were the terrors that caused even the Oriental cheek to blanch at mention of a name? I wished above all things to see the unholy shrine of the infamous Yung Ho Kung. No one would go with me so I slipped outside the house one morning and called my rickshaw boy.

"The Lama Temple," I ordered.

"No can go!" he explained in a choked whisper. Then he drew a trembling yellow finger sharply across his throat as if it were a knife. "Devils!" he breathed.

I knew the superstitions of the coolies, so I smiled, and insisted. A few moments later I stepped from the rickshaw and confidently knocked at the gate. In a moment a swarthy, slant-eyed individual with shaven head appeared and after I had explained by word and pantomime what I wanted he smiled blandly and opened the gate. I went in, my backward glance aware of the terror in my rickshaw boy's eyes.

Straight along a splendid avenue I walked with my guide, past two colossal bronze lions, through pavilions of heavily perfumed incense, the floors rich with rare carpets, woven in wild and remote Ninghasia beyond the Ordos. Then came dark and repellent buildings honeycombed

with cells whence issued strange muffled sounds as of human beings moaning in agony.

This feeling of terror was abruptly emphasized by the sudden blare of unseen horns, the shuddering shrill treble of flutes, the throb of strange, savage drums. And hardly knowing what I was doing I followed my guide into the largest building of all, the temple of terrors.

So far, so good, I thought. Yet even as I watched a new, silent dread came stealing into my heart. My eyes grew accustomed to the murky twilight and straight ahead I saw the colossal figure of the Lord Maitreya, the coming Buddha, carved from a single Yunnan cedar, seventy-five feet high, the stature of the perfected humanity of the future, according to Lama belief. The image was gilded, and a lamp suspended over the head illumined a face of unspeakable cruelty. Against the walls of draperies were the pictured gods of inferno where helpless victims suffer eternal damnation.

Suddenly I realized that my guide had vanished! I was alone in that temple of death, whose mazes were cryptic, and there was no way of es-



"Desperately I seized his sword wrist, struck at the mask repeatedly and screamed in frenzy."

Photograph from Miss Fitzgerald's Scrapbook of the Lama Temple.



cape! Alone in a place whence legend said no woman, yellow or white, came out alive!

Trapped! I stood fascinated, transfixed before the terrible god of the Lamas. Again the crashing discords began in the distance, the narcotic odors of incense filled my nostrils and my senses reeled. I was living in a nightmare like some preposterous tale of the Arabian Nights. In my heart was a clutching dread; all the ghastly stories of white women held in vile captivity rushed through my mind.

There was a rustling of the great draperies, ominous, sinister in its deadly softness. I looked around wildly and pressed my hands hard against my cold cheeks. Standing before me was a monstrous figure, robed in the yellow vestments of a priest, but with the face of a demon.

He wore the Devil's Mask, the symbol of torture, a frightful conception of one large ferocious face framed by the bodies of serpents and human skulls. He stood menacing, and in his clenched hand, half hidden beneath the folds of his robe, something sharp and metallic gleamed in the flare of the tapers.

Desperate and hysterical I sprang forward and tore the Devil's Mask from his face. As it thudded to the floor I saw the dark, angry eyes of a high priest I had noticed outside.

"What happened I can only give through the distorted vision of my fear. I saw a long

claw-like hand approaching my face, the tapering nails gleaming. I tried to draw away, but I was like a person in a nightmare, weighted down. Then, as the fingers grazed my cheek and caught in the flowing fillet lace of my white dress, I was galvanized into action. I sprang aside, but not quickly enough to keep the mad priest from seizing the end of my rose fillet and tearing it.

I felt his hissing breath, saw the insane anger of those terrible eyes. With incredible swiftness he had stooped, picked up his mask and adjusted it, and now as the mask came toward me again he drew his sword from the folds of his robe.

It was the end, I thought, but desperately I seized his sword wrist, struck at the mask repeatedly and screamed in frenzy. My screams were drowned, outside was the growing clamor of unearthly sounds, the light patter of feet.

I do not know how it happened. The devil priest was stronger, but I was mad with fear. His foot had caught in his robe, he was falling. I had turned like a flash, darted through the fell, rose and fled on. Then—

I saw the sunlight, the stately avenue, deserted save for the distant figure of a priest moving along quietly as if nothing had happened. Behind me the blare of horns grew fainter.

Then the yellow gate appeared and I was outside—safe! My rickshaw boy had fled, but the city of Peking stretched before me graceful, immutable. I looked down and saw that the knuckles of my hand were bleeding!



One of the Terrifying Devil Masks Worn by Lama Priests in the Famous "Gompa" Temple at Peking.