



THE SLAYER OF SOULS

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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# **The Slayer of Souls**

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# CHAPTER I

## THE YEZIDEE

Only when the *Nan-yang Maru* sailed from Yuen-San did her terrible sense of foreboding begin to subside.

For four years, waking or sleeping, the awful subconsciousness of supreme evil had never left her.

But now, as the Korean shore, receding into darkness, grew dimmer and dimmer, fear subsided and grew vague as the half-forgotten memory of horror in a dream.

She stood near the steamer's stern apart from other passengers, a slender, lonely figure in her silver-fox furs, her ulster and smart little hat, watching the lights of Yuen-San grow paler and smaller along the horizon until they looked like a level row of stars.

Under her haunted eyes Asia was slowly dissolving to a streak of vapour in the misty lustre of the moon.

Suddenly the ancient continent disappeared, washed out by a wave against the sky; and with it vanished the last shreds of that accursed nightmare which had possessed her for four endless years. But whether during those unreal years her soul had only been held in bondage, or whether, as she had been taught, it had been irrevocably destroyed, she still remained uncertain, knowing nothing about the death of souls or how it was accomplished.

As she stood there, her sad eyes fixed on the misty East, a passenger passing—an Englishwoman—paused to say something kind to the young American; and added, "if there is anything my husband and I can do it would give us much pleasure." The girl had turned her head as though not comprehending. The other woman hesitated.

"This is Doctor Norne's daughter, is it not?" she inquired in a pleasant voice.

"Yes, I am Tressa Norne.... I ask your pardon.... Thank you,

madam:—I am—I seem to be—a trifle dazed——"

"What wonder, you poor child! Come to us if you feel need of companionship."

"You are very kind.... I seem to wish to be alone, somehow."

"I understand.... Good-night, my dear."

Late the next morning Tressa Norne awoke, conscious for the first time in four years that it was at last her own familiar self stretched out there on the pillows where sunshine streamed through the porthole. All that day she lay in her bamboo steamer chair on deck. Sun and wind conspired to dry every tear that wet her closed lashes. Her dark, glossy hair blew about her face; scarlet tinted her full lips again; the tense hands relaxed. Peace came at sundown.

That evening she took her Yu-kin from her cabin and found a chair on the deserted hurricane deck.

And here, in the brilliant moonlight of the China Sea, she curled up cross-legged on the deck, all alone, and sounded the four futile strings of her moon-lute, and hummed to herself, in a still voice, old songs she had sung in Yian before the tragedy. She sang the tent-song called *Tchinguiz*. She sang *Camel Bells* and *The Blue Bazaar*,—children's songs of the Yiort. She sang the ancient Khiounnou song called "The Saghalien":

*I*

*In the month of Saffar  
Among the river-reeds  
I saw two horsemen  
Sitting on their steeds.  
Tulugum!  
Heitulum!  
By the river-reeds*

## II

*In the month of Saffar  
A demon guards the ford.  
Tokhta, my Lover!  
Draw your shining sword!  
Tulugum!  
Heitulum!  
Slay him with your sword!*

## III

*In the month of Saffar  
Among the water-weeds  
I saw two horsemen  
Fighting on their steeds.  
Tulugum!  
Heitulum!  
How my lover bleeds!*

## IV

*In the month of Saffar,  
The Year I should have wed—  
The Year of The Panther—  
My lover lay dead,—  
Tulugum!  
Heitulum!  
Dead without a head.*

And songs like these—the one called "Keuke Mongol," and an ancient air of the Tchortchas called "The Thirty Thousand Calamities," and some Chinese boatmen's songs which she had heard in Yian before the tragedy; these she hummed to herself there in the moonlight playing on her round-faced, short-necked lute of four strings.

Terror indeed seemed ended for her, and in her heart a great overwhelming joy was welling up which seemed to overflow across the entire moonlit world.

She had no longer any fear; no premonition of further evil. Among the few Americans and English aboard, something of her story was already known. People were kind; and they were also considerate enough to subdue their sympathetic curiosity when they discovered that this young American girl shrank from any mention of what had happened to her during the last four years of the Great World War.

It was evident, also, that she preferred to remain aloof; and this inclination, when finally understood, was respected by her fellow passengers. The clever, efficient and polite Japanese officers and crew of the *Nan-yang Maru* were invariably considerate and courteous to her, and they remained nicely reticent, although they also knew the main outline of her story and very much desired to know more. And so, surrounded now by the friendly security of civilised humanity, Tressa Norne, reborn to light out of hell's own shadows, awoke from four years of nightmare which, after all, perhaps, never had seemed entirely actual.

And now God's real sun warmed her by day; His real moon bathed her in creamy coolness by night; sky and wind and wave thrilled her with their blessed assurance that this was once more the real world which stretched illimitably on every side from horizon to horizon; and the fair faces and

pleasant voices of her own countrymen made the past seem only a ghastly dream that never again could enmesh her soul with its web of sorcery.

And now the days at sea fled very swiftly; and when at last the Golden Gate was not far away she had finally managed to persuade herself that nothing really can harm the human soul; that the monstrous devil-years were ended, never again to return; that in this vast, clean Western Continent there could be no occult threat to dread, no gigantic menace to destroy her body, no secret power that could consign her soul to the dreadful abyss of spiritual annihilation.

Very early that morning she came on deck. The November day was delightfully warm, the air clear save for a belt of mist low on the water to the southward.

She had been told that land would not be sighted for twenty-four hours, but she went forward and stood beside the starboard rail, searching the horizon with the enchanted eyes of hope.

As she stood there a Japanese ship's officer crossing the deck, forward, halted abruptly and stood staring at something to the southward.

At the same moment, above the belt of mist on the water, and perfectly clear against the blue sky above, the girl saw a fountain of gold fire rise from the fog, drift upward in the daylight, slowly assume the incandescent outline of a serpentine creature which leisurely uncoiled and hung there floating, its lizard-tail undulating, its feet with their five stumpy claws closing, relaxing, like those of a living reptile. For a full minute this amazing shape of fire floated



there in the sky, brilliant in the morning light, then the reptilian form faded, died out, and the last spark vanished in the sunshine.

When the Japanese officer at last turned to resume his promenade, he noticed a white-faced girl gripping a stanchion behind him as though she were on the point of swooning. He crossed the deck quickly. Tressa Norne's eyes opened.

"Are you ill, Miss Norne?" he asked.

"The—the Dragon," she whispered.

The officer laughed. "Why, that was nothing but Chinese day-fireworks," he explained. "The crew of some fishing boat yonder in the fog is amusing itself." He looked at her narrowly, then with a nice little bow and smile he offered his arm: "If you are indisposed, perhaps you might wish to go below to your stateroom, Miss Norne?"

She thanked him, managed to pull herself together and force a ghost of a smile.

He lingered a moment, said something cheerful about being nearly home, then made her a punctilious salute and went his way.

Tressa Norne leaned back against the stanchion and closed her eyes. Her pallor became deathly. She bent over and laid her white face in her folded arms.

After a while she lifted her head, and, turning very slowly, stared at the fog-belt out of frightened eyes.

And saw, rising out of the fog, a pearl-tinted sphere which gradually mounted into the clear daylight above like the full moon's phantom in the sky.

Higher, higher rose the spectral moon until at last it swam in the very zenith. Then it slowly evaporated in the blue vault above.

A great wave of despair swept her; she clung to the stanchion, staring with half-blinded eyes at the flat fog-bank in the south.

But no more "Chinese day-fireworks" rose out of it. And at

length she summoned sufficient strength to go below to her cabin and lie there, half senseless, huddled on her bed.

When land was sighted, the following morning, Tressa Norne had lived a century in twenty-four hours. And in that space of time her agonised soul had touched all depths. But now as the Golden Gate loomed up in the morning light, rage, terror, despair had burned themselves out. From their ashes within her mind arose the cool wrath of desperation armed for anything, wary, alert, passionately determined to survive at whatever cost, recklessly ready to fight for bodily existence.

That was her sole instinct now, to go on living, to survive, no matter at what price. And if it were indeed true that her soul had been slain, she defied its murderers to slay her body also.

That night, at her hotel in San Francisco, she double-locked her door and lay down without undressing, leaving all lights burning and an automatic pistol underneath her pillow.

Toward morning she fell asleep, slept for an hour, started up in awful fear. And saw the double-locked door opposite the foot of her bed slowly opening of its own accord. Into the brightly illuminated room stepped a graceful young man in full evening dress carrying over his left arm an overcoat, and in his other hand a top hat and silver tipped walking-stick.

With one bound the girl swung herself from the bed to the carpet and clutched at the pistol under her pillow.

"Sanang!" she cried in a terrible voice.

"Keuke Mongol!" he said, smilingly.

For a moment they confronted each other in the brightly lighted bedroom, then, partly turning, he cast a calm glance at the open door behind him; and, as though moved by a wind, the door slowly closed. And she heard the key turn of itself in the lock, and saw the bolt slide smoothly into place again.

Her power of speech came back to her presently—only a broken whisper at first: "Do you think I am afraid of your accursed magic?" she managed to gasp. "Do you think I am afraid of you, Sanang?"

"You are afraid," he said serenely.

"You lie!"

"No, I do not lie. To one another the Yezidees never lie."

"You lie again, assassin! I am no Yezidee!"

He smiled gently. His features were pleasing, smooth, and regular; his cheek-bones high, his skin fine and of a pale and delicate ivory colour. Once his black, beautifully shaped eyes wandered to the levelled pistol which she now held clutched desperately close to her right hip, and a slightly ironical expression veiled his gaze for an instant.

"Bullets?" he murmured. "But you and I are of the Hassanis."

"The third lie, Sanang!" Her voice had regained its strength. Tense, alert, blue eyes ablaze, every faculty concentrated on the terrible business before her, the girl now seemed like some supple leopardess poised on the swift verge of murder.

"Tokhta!" [\[1\]](#) She spat the word. "Any movement toward a hidden weapon, any gesture suggesting recourse to magic—and I kill you, Sanang, exactly where you stand!"

"With a pistol?" He laughed. Then his smooth features altered subtly. He said: "Keuke Mongol, who call yourself Tressa Norne,—Keuke—heavenly azure-blue,—named so in the temple because of the colour of your eyes—listen attentively, for this is the Yarlig which I bring to you by

word of mouth from Yian, as from Yezidee to Yezidee:  
"Here, in this land called the United States of America, the Temple girl, Keuke Mongol, who has witnessed the mysteries of Erlik and who understands the magic of the Sheiks-el-Djebel, and who has seen Mount Alamout and the eight castles and the fifty thousand Hassanis in white turbans and in robes of white;— *you* —Azure-blue eyes— heed the Yarlig!—or may thirty thousand calamities overtake you!"

There was a dead silence; then he went on seriously: "It is decreed: You shall cease to remember that you are a Yezidee, that you are of the Hassanis, that you ever have laid eyes on Yian the Beautiful, that you ever set naked foot upon Mount Alamout. It is decreed that you remember nothing of what you have seen and heard, of what has been told and taught during the last four years reckoned as the Christians reckon from our Year of the Bull. Otherwise—my Master sends you this for your— *convenience* ."

Leisurely, from under his folded overcoat, the young man produced a roll of white cloth and dropped it at her feet and the girl shrank aside, shuddering, knowing that the roll of white cloth was meant for her winding-sheet.

Then the colour came back to lip and cheek; and, glancing up from the soft white shroud, she smiled at the young man: "Have you ended your Oriental mummery?" she asked calmly. "Listen very seriously in your turn, Sanang, Sheik-el-Djebel, Prince of the Hassanis who, God knows when and how, have come out into the sunshine of this clean and decent country, out of a filthy darkness where devils and sorcerers make earth a hell.

"If you, or yours, threaten me, annoy me, interfere with me, I shall go to our civilised police and tell all I know concerning the Yezidees. I mean to live. Do you understand? You know what you have done to me and mine. I come back to my own country alone, without any living kin, poor, homeless, friendless,—and, perhaps, damned. I

intend, nevertheless, to survive. I shall not relax my clutch on bodily existence whatever the Yezidees may pretend to have done to my soul. I am determined to live in the body, anyway."

He nodded gravely.

She said: "Out at sea, over the fog, I saw the sign of Yu-lao in fire floating in the day-sky. I saw his spectral moon rise and vanish in mid-heaven. I understood. But——" And here she suddenly showed an edge of teeth under the full scarlet upper lip: "Keep your signs and your shrouds to yourself, dog of a Yezidee!—toad!—tortoise-egg!—he-goat with three legs! Keep your threats and your messages to yourself! Keep your accursed magic to yourself! Do you think to frighten me with your sorcery by showing me the Moons of Yu-lao?—by opening a bolted door? I know more of such magic than do you, Sanang—Death Adder of Alamout!" Suddenly she laughed aloud at him—laughed insultingly in his expressionless face:

"I saw you and Gutchlug Khan and your cowardly Tchortchas in red-lacquered jackets slink out of the Temple of Erlik where the bronze gong thundered and a cloud settled down raining little yellow snakes all over the marble steps—all over you, Prince Sanang! You were *afraid*, my Tougtchi!—you and Gutchlug and your red Tchortchas with their halberds all dripping with human entrails! And I saw you mount and gallop off into the woods while in the depths of the magic cloud which rained little yellow snakes all around you, we temple girls laughed and mocked at you—at you and your cowardly Tchortcha horsemen."

A slight tinge of pink came into the young man's pale face. Tressa Norne stepped nearer, her levelled pistol resting on her hip.

"Why did you not complain of us to your Master, the Old Man of the Mountain?" she asked jeeringly. "And where, also, was your Yezidee magic when it rained little snakes?—What frightened you away—who had boldly come to seize a

temple girl—you who had screwed up your courage sufficiently to defy Erlik in his very shrine and snatch from his temple a young thing whose naked body wrapped in gold was worth the chance of death to you?"

The young man's top-hat dropped to the floor. He bent over to pick it up. His face was quite expressionless, quite colourless, now.

"I went on no such errand," he said with an effort. "I went with a thousand prayers on scarlet paper made in——"

"A lie, Yezidee! You came to seize *me*!"

He turned still paler. "By Abu, Omar, Otman, and Ali, it is not true!"

"You lie!—by the Lion of God, Hassini!"

She stepped closer. "And I'll tell you another thing you fear—you Yezidee of Alamout—you robber of Yian—you sorcerer of Sabbah Khan, and chief of his sect of Assassins! You fear this native land of mine, America; and its laws and customs, and its clear, clean sunshine; and its cities and people; and its police! Take that message back. We Americans fear nobody save the true God!—nobody—neither Yezidee nor Hassani nor Russ nor German nor that sexless monster born of hell and called the Bolshevik!"

"Tokhta!" he cried sharply.

"Damn you!" retorted the girl; "get out of my room! Get out of my sight! Get out of my path! Get out of my life! Take that to your Master of Mount Alamout! I do what I please; I go where I please; I live as I please. And if I please, *I turn against him*!"

"In that event," he said hoarsely, "there lies your winding-sheet on the floor at your feet! Take up your shroud; and make Erlik seize you!"

"Sanang," she said very seriously.

"I hear you, Keuke-Mongol."

"Listen attentively. I wish to live. I have had enough of death in life. I desire to remain a living, breathing thing—even if it be true—as you Yezidees tell me, that you have

caught my soul in a net and that your sorcerers really control its destiny.

"But damned or not, I passionately desire to live. And I am coward enough to hold my peace for the sake of living. So—I remain silent. I have no stomach to defy the Yezidees; because, if I do, sooner or later I shall be killed. I know it. I have no desire to die for others—to perish for the sake of the common good. I am young. I have suffered too much; I am determined to live—and let my soul take its chances between God and Erlik."

She came close to him, looked curiously into his pale face.

"I laughed at you out of the temple cloud," she said. "I know how to open bolted doors as well as you do. And I know *other things*. And if you ever again come to me in this life I shall first torture you, then slay you. Then I shall tell all!... and unroll my shroud."

"I keep your word of promise until you break it," he interrupted hastily. "Yarlig! It is decreed!" And then he slowly turned as though to glance over his shoulder at the locked and bolted door.

"Permit me to open it for you, Prince Sanang," said the girl scornfully. And she gazed steadily at the door.

Presently, all by itself, the key turned in the lock, the bolt slid back, the door gently opened.

Toward it, white as a corpse, his overcoat on his left arm, his stick and top-hat in the other hand, crept the young man in his faultless evening garb.

Then, as he reached the threshold, he suddenly sprang aside. A small yellow snake lay coiled there on the door sill. For a full throbbing minute the young man stared at the yellow reptile in unfeigned horror. Then, very cautiously, he moved his fascinated eyes sideways and gazed in silence at Tressa Norne.

The girl laughed.

"Sorceress!" he burst out hoarsely. "Take that accursed thing from my path!"

"What thing, Sanang?" At that his dark, frightened eyes stole toward the threshold again, seeking the little snake. But there was no snake there. And when he was certain of this he went, twitching and trembling all over. Behind him the door closed softly, locking and bolting itself. And behind the bolted door in the brightly lighted bedroom Tressa Norne fell on both knees, her pistol still clutched in her right hand, calling passionately upon Christ to forgive her for the dreadful ability she had dared to use, and begging Him to save her body from death and her soul from the snare of the Yezidee.



# CHAPTER II

## THE YELLOW SNAKE

When the young man named Sanang left the bed-chamber of Tressa Norne he turned to the right in the carpeted corridor outside and hurried toward the hotel elevator. But he did not ring for the lift; instead he took the spiral iron stairway which circled it, and mounted hastily to the floor above.

Here was his own apartment and he entered it with a key bearing the hotel tag. A dusky-skinned powerful old man wearing a grizzled beard and a greasy broadcloth coat of old-fashioned cut known to provincials as a "Prince Albert" looked up from where he was seated cross-legged upon the sofa, sharpening a curved knife on a whetstone.

"Gutchlug," stammered Sanang, "I am afraid of her! What happened two years ago at the temple happened again a moment since, there in her very bedroom! She made a yellow death-adder out of nothing and placed it upon the threshold, and mocked me with laughter. May Thirty Thousand Calamities overtake her! May Erlik seize her! May her eyes rot out and her limbs fester! May the seven score and three principal devils——"

"You chatter like a temple ape," said Gutchlug tranquilly.

"Does Keuke Mongol die or live? That alone interests me."

"Gutchlug," faltered the young man, "thou knowest that my heart is inclined to mercy toward this young Yezidee ——"

"I know that it is inclined to lust," said the other bluntly. Sanang's pale face flamed.

"Listen," he said. "If I had not loved her better than life had I dared go that day to the temple to take her for my own?"

"You loved life better," said Gutchlug. "You fled when it rained snakes on the temple steps—you and your Tchortcha

horsemen! Kai! I also ran. But I gave every soldier thirty blows with a stick before I slept that night. And you should have had your thirty, also, conforming to the Yarlig, my Tougtchi."

Sanang, still holding his hat and cane and carrying his overcoat over his left arm, looked down at the heavy, brutal features of Gutchlug Khan—at the cruel mouth with its crooked smile under the grizzled beard; at the huge hands—the powerful hands of a murderer—now deftly honing to a razor-edge the Kalmuck knife held so firmly yet lightly in his great blunt fingers.

"Listen attentively, Prince Sanang," growled Gutchlug, pausing in his monotonous task to test the blade's edge on his thumb—"Does the Yezidee Keuke Mongol live? Yes or no?"

Sanang hesitated, moistened his pallid lips. "She dares not betray us."

"By what pledge?"

"Fear."

"That is no pledge. You also were afraid, yet you went to the temple!"

"She has listened to the Yarlig. She has looked upon her shroud. She has admitted that she desires to live. Therein lies her pledge to us."

"And she placed a yellow snake at your feet!" sneered Gutchlug. "Prince Sanang, tell me, what man or what devil in all the chronicles of the past has ever tamed a Snow-Leopard?" And he continued to hone his yataghan.

"Gutchlug——"

"No, she dies," said the other tranquilly.

"Not yet!"

"When, then?"

"Gutchlug, thou knowest me. Hear my pledge! At her first gesture toward treachery—her first thought of betrayal—I myself will end it all."

"You promise to slay this young snow-leopardess?"

"By the four companions, I swear to kill her with my own hands!"

Gutchlug sneered. "Kill her—yes—with the kiss that has burned thy lips to ashes for all these months. I know thee, Sanang. Leave her to me. Dead she will no longer trouble thee."

"Gutchlug!"

"I hear, Prince Sanang."

"Strike when I nod. Not until then."

"I hear, Tougtchi. I understand thee, my Banneret. I whet my knife. Kai!"

Sanang looked at him, put on his top-hat and overcoat, pulled on a pair of white evening gloves.

"I go forth," he said more pleasantly.

"I remain here to talk to my seven ancestors and sharpen my knife," remarked Gutchlug.

"When the white world and the yellow world and the brown world and the black world finally fall before the Hassanis," said Sanang with a quick smile, "I shall bring thee to her. Gutchlug—once—before she is veiled, thou shalt behold what is lovelier than Eve."

The other stolidly whetted his knife.

Sanang pulled out a gold cigarette case, lighted a cigarette with an air.

"I go among Germans," he volunteered amiably. "The huns swam across two oceans, but, like the unclean swine, it is their own throats they cut when they swim! Well, there is only one God. And not very many angels. Erlik is greater. And there are many million devils to do his bidding. Adieu. There is rice and there is koumiss in the frozen closet. When I return you shall have been asleep for hours."

When Sanang left the hotel one of two young men seated in the hotel lobby got up and strolled out after him.

A few minutes later the other man went to the elevator, ascended to the fourth floor, and entered an apartment next to the one occupied by Sanang.

There was another man there, lying on the lounge and smoking a cigar. Without a word, they both went leisurely about the matter of disrobing for the night.

When the shorter man who had been in the apartment when the other entered, and who was dark and curly-headed, had attired himself in pyjamas, he sat down on one of the twin beds to enjoy his cigar to the bitter end.

"Has Sanang gone out?" he inquired in a low voice.

"Yes. Benton went after him."

The other man nodded. "Cleves," he said, "I guess it looks as though this Norne girl is in it, too."

"What happened?"

"As soon as she arrived, Sanang made straight for her apartment. He remained inside for half an hour. Then he came out in a hurry and went to his own rooms, where that surly servant of his squats all day, shining up his arsenal, and drinking koumiss."

"Did you get their conversation?"

"I've got a record of the gibberish. It requires an interpreter, of course."

"I suppose so. I'll take the records east with me to-morrow, and by the same token I'd better notify New York that I'm leaving."

He went, half-undressed, to the telephone, got the telegraph office, and sent the following message:

"Recklow, *New York* :

"Leaving to-morrow for N. Y. with samples. Retain expert in Oriental fabrics.

"Victor Cleves."

"Report for me, too," said the dark young man, who was still enjoying his cigar on his pillows.

So Cleves sent another telegram, directed also to

"Recklow, *New York* :

"Benton and I are watching the market. Chinese importations fluctuate. Recent consignment per *Nan-yang Maru* will be carefully inspected and details forwarded.

"Alek Selden."

In the next room Gutchlug could hear the voice of Cleves at the telephone, but he merely shrugged his heavy shoulders in contempt. For he had other things to do beside eavesdropping.

Also, for the last hour—in fact, ever since Sanang's departure—something had been happening to him—something that happens to a Hassani only once in a lifetime. And now this unique thing had happened to him—to him, Gutchlug Khan—to him before whose Khiounnou ancestors eighty-one thousand nations had bowed the knee. It had come to him at last, this dread thing, unheralded, totally unexpected, a few minutes after Sanang had departed.

And he suddenly knew he was going to die.

And, when, presently, he comprehended it, he bent his grizzled head and listened seriously. And, after a little silence, he heard his soul bidding him farewell.

So the chatter of white men at a telephone in the next apartment had no longer any significance for him. Whether or not they had been spying on him; whether they were plotting, made no difference to him now.

He tested his knife's edge with his thumb and listened gravely to his soul bidding him farewell.

But, for a Yezidee, there was still a little detail to attend to before his soul departed;—two matters to regulate. One was to select his shroud. The other was to cut the white throat of this young snow-leopardess called Keuke Mongol, the Yezidee temple girl.

And he could steal down to her bedroom and finish that matter in five minutes.

But first he must choose his shroud, as is the custom of the Yezidee.

That office, however, was quickly accomplished in a country where fine white sheets of linen are to be found on every hotel bed.

So, on his way to the door, his naked knife in his right hand, he paused to fumble under the bed-covers and draw out a white linen sheet.

Something hurt his hand like a needle. He moved it, felt the thing squirm under his fingers and pierce his palm again and again. With a shriek, he tore the bedclothes from the bed.

A little yellow snake lay coiled there.

He got as far as the telephone, but could not use it. And there he fell heavily, shaking the room and dragging the instrument down with him.

There was some excitement. Cleves and Selden in their bathrobes went in to look at the body. The hotel physician diagnosed it as heart-trouble. Or, possibly, poison. Some gazed significantly at the naked knife still clutched in the dead man's hands.

Around the wrist of the other hand was twisted a pliable gold bracelet representing a little snake. It had real emeralds for eyes.

It had not been there when Gutchlug died.

But nobody except Sanang could know that. And later when Sanang came back and found Gutchlug very dead on the bed and a policeman sitting outside, he offered no information concerning the new bracelet shaped like a snake with real emeralds for eyes, which adorned the dead man's left wrist.

Toward evening, however, after an autopsy had confirmed the house physician's diagnosis that heart-disease had finished Gutchlug, Sanang mustered enough courage to go to the desk in the lobby and send up his card to Miss Norne.