



***ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS***

***THE MAKER
OF MOONS***

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Robert W. Chambers

The Maker of Moons

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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I.

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" I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk
Of the beginning and the end;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

CONCERNING Yue-Laou and the Xin I know nothing more than you shall know. I am miserably anxious to clear the matter up. Perhaps what I write may save the United States Government money and lives, perhaps it may arouse the scientific world to action; at any rate it will put an end to the terrible suspense of two people. Certainty is better than suspense.

If the Government dares to disregard this warning and refuses to send a thoroughly equipped expedition at once, the people of the State may take swift vengeance on the whole region and leave a blackened devastated waste where to-day forest and flowering meadow land border the lake in the Cardinal Woods.

You already know part of the story; the New York papers have been full of alleged details. This much is true: Barris caught the "Shiner" red-handed, or, rather, yellow-handed, for his pockets and boots and dirty fists were stuffed with lumps of gold. I say gold advisedly. You may call it what you please. You also know how Barris was—but unless I begin at the beginning of my own experiences, you will be none the wiser after all.

On the 3rd of August of this present year I was standing in Tiffany's, chatting with George Godfrey, of the designing

department. On the glass counter between us lay a coiled serpent, an exquisite specimen of chiselled gold.

"No," replied Godfrey to my question, "it isn't my work; I wish it was. Why, man, it's a masterpiece!"

"Whose?" I asked.

"Now I should be very glad to know also," said Godfrey. "We bought it from an old jay who says he lives in the country somewhere about the Cardinal Woods. That's near Starlit Lake, I believe——"

"Lake of the Stars?" I suggested.

"Some call it Starlit Lake—it's all the same. Well, my rustic Reuben says that he represents the sculptor of this snake for all practical and business purposes. He got his price, too. We hope he 'll bring us something more. We have sold this already to the Metropolitan Museum."

I was leaning idly on the glass case, watching the keen eyes of the artist in precious metals as he stooped over the gold serpent.

"A masterpiece!" he muttered to himself, fondling the glittering coil. "Look at the texture! Whew!" But I was not looking at the serpent. Something was moving—crawling out of Godfrey's coat pocket—the pocket nearest to me—something soft and yellow with crab-like legs, all covered with coarse yellow hair.

"What in Heaven's name," said I, "have you got in your pocket? It's crawling out—it's trying to creep up your coat, Godfrey!"

He turned quickly and dragged the creature out with his left hand.