

# **The Green Shiver**

**Captain Trouble series**

**by Perley Poore Sheehan, 1877-1943**

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# Chapter I

NO one would have taken him to be an American, as he stood there in the thick of the Chinese mob. His wrinkled skin was brown and dirty. The dank hair that fell over his swollen and gummy eyes was black. So were his eyes black—as much as you could see of them.

There are a number of ways of turning eyes that are blue or gray to a dark, unguessable shade. Lemon juice is the best—squeezed right in if you can stand the pain. But the juice of bitter sage, a common weed of the mountains, will also perform the trick. It hurts worse, too. The root of the same plant will also furnish a sticky brown stain for the fair Caucasian skin.

While it dries it wrinkles. Mixed with ashes, it not only makes the skin look „native“ but it also takes on the appearance of encrusted dirt.

In his heart, Shattuck—Pelham Rutledge Shattuck, sometimes of the U.S.A.—laughed a little. He wished that certain friends of his could see him now—and smell him! Even the smell was right. He could distinguish it even here in the crowd. He was an offense even to himself.

But this was the fault—or the virtue—of the clothes he wore.

He was dressed in a combination of soiled sheepskins, of greasy yak-hair felt, and tattered silk.

On his head was a Tibetan felt cap—a sort of pointed skull-cap with ear-laps.

As for his race, he might have been one of several things: Tibetan, Mongol, or for that matter, just wild Chinaman—shan jin, a man of the mountains. A robber, in any case. Minchow, just now, was full of such.

Minchow was one of those old cities the outside world never hears about. It lay far up in wild Kansu, where the frontiers of China, Mongolia and Tibet meet. A great place for caravans. Caravans had been making this their headquarters for centuries—caravans from Turkey and Persia, with opium and tobacco; from Tibet with turquoise and gold and musk; from China with silk and ivory.

In the gossip of desert and mountain, Minchow stood considerably higher than Peking.

NOW a new war-lord had taken Minchow and made it his capital. All day his men had been going about the tunnel-like streets of the old city with red paddles in their hands as signs of a military requisition. They took whatever they wanted—from turnips to women; for which they sometimes gave a „chop“—the war-lord's seal on a bit of red paper, which passed for money—and sometimes they didn't.

In any case, the soldiers had rounded up some twenty-five or thirty small merchants, too poor for „squeeze,“ who'd protested overmuch, and the war-lord was about to make an example of them.

SHATTUCK could see the victims. He was taller than most of the straining crowd about him. He was taller than most of the war-lord's soldiers who formed a triple hedge about the place of execution.

Shattuck had an eye for everything—the discipline of these troops, the way they were uniformed and armed, the expression on their faces.

Good fighting-stock, he judged. Mountaineers and Northerners, husky, browned and hard.

A little ragged in their quilted cotton, Chinese-style; but that would pass. Their rifles were modern and looked well cared for. Natural fighters who didn't know what they were fighting for, beyond those perquisites the red paddles brought them; fighting, as some men work, for what it brought in grub and fun.

„Great stuff, though,“ Shattuck was telling himself, „if they once went crazy for some great cause!“

There was a shrill of hysterical bugles and a crash of gongs.

The war-lord was coming.

The place of judgment couldn't have been better chosen.

It was a broad, raised terrace, a platform about a hundred yards long and as many wide. On one side of this was the long façade of a temple, on the other, the long front of an old imperial palace. The temple had been made a barracks for the war-lord's personal regiment, which now stood on guard. The palace had become his headquarters.

Both buildings were ornate with red lacquer and gold, heavy green tiles and flamboyant carvings. They were like the wings of some tremendous theatre. The terrace of polished stone was the stage. Mountains and sky made the backdrop.

In the middle of the terrace, facing the palace, the prisoners were kneeling at spaced intervals, each stripped to his waist and his hands tied behind him. Old and young, black hair and gray, skinny backs and backs that would have looked well in the prize-ring, here and there an old-fashioned queue dangling to the pavement.

At the left and right of this kneeling file were two squads of soldiers standing at ease. Between these two groups, the war-lord's executioner strolled—a pachyderm of a man, a professional wrestler, also stripped to the waist and proud of what he had to show in the way of well-fed brawn, carrying what wasn't so much a sword as a colossal butcher knife.

He didn't look at the prisoners. The prisoners didn't look at him.

There came another blast and jangle from the trumpets and the gongs. And the crowd went a little more tense.

THE war-lord had passed the Number Two court of the palace. He was evidently taking his time—stopping to light a cigarette, pausing to admire a fountain.

The prisoners had been waiting so long, some of them had begun to sag. The executioner lost his smirk for a frown as he prodded this one and that one up to a position of greater respect. Here and there kicking knees back into a more perfect alignment.

Then he was smirking again as he resumed his stroll.

„Him I'll kill,“ said Shattuck in his heart, as he gripped the sword concealed under his ragged sheepskin coat.

Just then, there was a third ripping blast and jangle as the war-lord, followed by his staff, sauntered through the great pai-lo, or entrance—gate, of the palace.

## Chapter II

HE was a short but powerful man—bowlegged from having passed most of his life in the saddle. A Mongol habit. That he was more Mongol than Chinese was stamped on his face.

It was a face that was large and almost perfectly round. The cheekbones were more prominent than the large but bridgeless nose. A moon-face. It was like a platter of hammered brass, the hammered brass effect deriving not only from the color and shine, but the thousand smallpox pits that covered it. Also from the fact that the expression of it never changed.

Only the bead-like eyes of it were quick and alive, incessantly alert, every glance like a little black dart that traveled far and never missed its mark.

For an instant, Shattuck had an almost painful impression that he himself had been looked at.

The war-lord didn't even move his lips or change his expression when he laughed or talked. You could watch him closely, and you wouldn't see the quiver of a muscle.

His lips were always a little open. They gave that platter-mask of his a fixed, inscrutable smile. It was a smile that gave all those who looked at it long enough a strange invasion of terror, especially if they found themselves looking overlong at the great man's teeth.

These teeth were small and pointed and spaced apart, very clean, but uncanny and not quite human. They were like the teeth of certain rapacious fish. And the report was current—just one of many about this man of power—that he'd come by these teeth through a certain habit of feeding, once every new moon, on forbidden flesh.

HE was familiar with all these stories, of course. There wasn't a war-lord in China with a more efficient, or harder-working corps of spies.

But the stories pleased him. He encouraged them. They were right in his line. He was General Yu.

Now, yu is the Chinese word for jade.

Jade, in Chinese common thought, is green; and from this and that the general had come by a nickname. It was: „Yu, the Green Shiver.“

He came strolling out through the great pai-lo and stood there for a while leaning on his sword, knowing the sort of impression that he made and enjoying it.

All eyes were on him now, and the black eyes in his moon-disc of a face shot a million tiny black darts back at the crowd.

In the collapse of all sound, following his appearance, you could almost hear the packed mob translate that nickname of his with a single, chattering breath:

„Yu! Yu! Yu!, the Green Shiver!“

Finally he glanced at the kneeling prisoners, from one to the other, his examination beginning at the left of the file and proceeding to the right—an instant glance for each of them.

And as each was touched by that glance, it was as if the victim had been touched by the point of a needle—a poisoned needle, perhaps. At the touch of it, something in each of them died—a flutter of hope, an excuse, a plea.

MEANTIME, that elephant of an executioner had been standing there, also swaggering a little, swelling his chest, flexing the muscles of his arms,

playing his big butcher knife in little oscillations somewhat like a prize-fighter showing off and limbering up after he has cast his dressing—robe aside.

The Green Shiver glanced at the executioner, and the yellow Hercules stiffened. There for a moment, was a whiff of fright on the executioner's own face. It was known that the Green Shiver cared to have no man steal his act.

But the mood of the war-lord was tolerant.

Some sort of signal must have been shot from his ferret-eyes. Or perhaps he spoke—there was no telling from any movement of his lips. There was a swish and a thud. It was as if there was a tiny explosion of red mist over a spouting red fountain, and a head had jumped away and rolled.

AGAIN that gasping breath from the crowd:

„Yu! Yu, the Green Shiver!“

The war-lord must have heard it. He appeared to smile. But on his face there was no change of expression. Only his eyes were active as the executions followed.

One after the other. Without disorder. Now and then the executioner had to get his subject into a better pose. He did this with his foot. The slash followed afterward so lightning-fast, there'd been no time for the victim to sag again.

Twice the big man showed good-natured patience—one of the elderly and one of the younger prisoners being too far gone, having to be coaxed to a balance by an ear. But, even then, no disorder, no loss of more than a dozen seconds.

And now that original little red cloud had become a faint but clearly discernible mist in the westerning sun—a faint pink cloud, like that which might overhang a pool or a cataract at sunset.

The residents of Minchow and the surrounding country had long called this valley of theirs the High Cloud Place, or Cloudy Garden—because of the rainbow-tinted clouds that hovered about the numerous cascades coming down from the hills. But now they were calling it something else.

Since the Green Shiver had come this way, the Cloudy Garden had become the Feng-ti-yu, meaning „the Valley of Hell.“

## Chapter III

THE executioner had just finished his work and there was a surging movement in the crowd toward dispersal when the War-lord raised his sword in a signal that the show wasn't over.

Instantly there was a smashing attack of noise again as the buglers and gong-beaters got to work. The noise swirled up in a crashing roar, like a house afire, and this time lasted longer than it had before. At the same time the spies and military police scattered through the crowd, shouting for everyone to remain where he was.

Here and there a head was cracked, someone was collared, thrown and kicked.

Shattuck took advantage of the disorder to work in closer to the hedge of soldiers.

The blare and hammer of trumpet and gong had as if set a new tempo for the beating of his heart and the pulsing of his blood.

He always felt like this when some new excitement was impending.

It was as if his heart took voice. It was as if his boiling blood became the blood of some older, more primitive and, perhaps, a better self.

He wasn't Shattuck, any more. Not Pelham Rutledge Shattuck of the U.S.A. He was Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool. Shadak Khan, the heir of Kubla Khan, whose sword he'd come by, whose empire he'd unfurl again up and down and around the world!

Before he could push his private reflections further, he was once again engrossed by what was unfolding before his eyes.

The war-lord, still followed by his staff, having neatly skirted that lake of blood in the center of the terrace—a lake of blood in which the dead were hunched or sprawled, like ornamental islands—was now pacing his leisurely way around the limits of the terrace, like a general inspecting his troops.

BUT it was the gaping crowd as well as the banked regiment that he looked at. The stone—paved terrace was two or three feet higher than the level of the rest of the open square. The Green Shiver could look down on all these people. They shivered all right at the touch of his eyes.

For a second—the fraction of a second—Shattuck felt the touch of those eyes on his own. There came to him the penetrating thought that he had been discovered, that the war-lord knew who he was—knew that here was a rival down from the mountains—knew that back there in the mountains were horses and men, armed with machine-guns stolen from an arm-running caravan, captured far away at the other end of the Gobi.

What didn't the Green Shiver know, with all those spies of his?

Long ago he must have heard the gossip that was now going the rounds of a thousand—ten thousand—camp-fires.

Shadak Khan! The name had caught on! Chinese-Mongol for Captain Trouble. A Captain Trouble come to conquer the world. Like Kubla Khan, his great predecessor. And already this Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool, had gone to Kara Koto, the ghost city of the Gobi. There he had met and defeated the Chud and allied himself with the Agharti—two of the great Subterranean Peoples, as they were called.

The Chud were slaves. They'd been set to work digging Kara Koto out of the sands.

The Agharti had acknowledged Shadak Khan as their chief. They'd put at his disposal all their buried treasures of gold and magic. Shadak Khan! Kubla Khan come back after all these centuries!

WHETHER by intent or accident, the war-lord had come to a stand not far from where Shattuck himself stood wedged between the soldiers and the mob.

All this time the bugles had been squalling and the gongs rolling out their tumbling thunder—a barbaric incantation to turn any man to thoughts of blood and fire. Now the war-lord again made a quick signal with his sword and the racket ended.

Even after it had ended, the air kept throbbing for a minute or so, and during this interval the Green Shiver still looked about him. As he slowly turned, that big face of his caught the sun and reflected it like hammered brass.

This time Shattuck had a yet stronger impression that the war-lord had looked at him—looked at him as a snake might look, seeing, knowing, appraising, but itself a sphinx.

A hard, metallic voice was heard—a small voice, but needle-pointed, carrying far, like those black darts of the war-lord's eyes. And although there was still not the slightest quiver or change of General Yu's bright face and grinning lips, everyone knew that the voice was his.

## Chapter IV

HE spoke a variant of the Peking dialect and he didn't speak this very well. But it was good enough. Minchow, as a caravan center, had been brought up on strange accents.

The voice came in a drawling, choppy snarl, almost plaintive, at times, like the menacing talk of an offended tiger.

„I don't want to go on killing you,“ the Green Shiver said. „I like this town. I want to stay here and have people around me. I'm going to make it my capital. I'm going to protect you. I'm telling you this for the good of us all. I don't want to do to you what I did to the people of Holy-Way-Town down there in the South. They thought they'd keep their women and their rice for themselves. Now they don't need either.“

As an orator he was highly successful, regardless of his accent. The people were listening. The haze of sunset was like a haze of blood. There was a scent of blood in the air stronger than all the other compact taints that drifted here and there—of sweat and incense, of unmentionable things; the faint but far-traveling perfume of sesame.

The Green Shiver, still with his darting eyes at work on the crowd, made a slight movement with his hand. One of his younger staff-officers leaned close, listened to some whispered command, and started off at a trot toward the palace.

„Speaking of women,“ said the Green Shiver—and now Shattuck's heart leapt with a premonition—„speaking of women, I suppose you've all heard that I have a certain little taitai of my own just now—a white one, a maiden, daughter of a keto-jin (hairy foreigner), daughter of a cursed missionary and his wife, I found down there in Holy-Way-Town—Meikuo-jin (Americans)—and worth their weight in gold. Them I killed. I sent them to hell. That shows you that I'm not after money.

„But as for this daughter of theirs, this little yang-kwei-tzu—“

He paused.

„As for this little foreign devil—“

He'd heard that patter of feet. He waited. A dozen palace-servants in long purple robes—eunuchs, most likely—were coming on the run, bearing an elaborate sedan-chair, on long poles. It was an imperial chair, screened and veiled and ornamented, fit for an emperors' favorite, for which it might have been originally intended. It was carved, jeweled, lacquered. It was further ornamented with swaying tassels and little bells, like the wind-bells of a temple.

The servants put the chair down, bowed to the ground, and pattered into the background.

THE Green Shiver had a great sense of theatrical values. He was absolutely motionless as he scanned the crowd. Shattuck was conscious of those watchful, snakey eyes and controlled himself. But his heart was beating high.

Then it was true—the rumor he'd heard in the hills! It was this that had brought him here—an American girl in the hands of the Green Shiver.

He even knew her name. It was Macon. The Chinese convert—a fugitive from Holy-Way-Town that they'd found dying in the hills—had called it Ma-kong. But he'd been able to write the name: Laureen Macon.

The crowd strained, holding its breath. Most of the people here had lived their lives thus far and had never seen a foreign devil before, even a man. And now, a taitai!—a woman! a girl!

One of the officers in the war-lord's suite, acting on an inaudible and invisible order, had stooped toward the chair and jerked a carved screen aside.

„Get out!“ he ordered, in correct Chinese.

The girl stepped out.

At sight of her, the crowd let out a sound that was half-howl, half-shriek. They were looking at the apparition of their lives.

It was as if they'd seen a spirit.

She was, literally, white and gold, an ivory statue come to life.

SHATTUCK read details of her tragedy as he looked at her. She'd been wakened from her sleep. She'd been carried off before she'd had a chance to dress herself. All she wore was her nightdress and a Chinese coat of embroidered silk, grass sandals on her feet. Her head was bare and her long yellow hair was loosely plaited.

But the tragic note was principally in her face. A young face. She was perhaps, eighteen, or even younger. A face that was lean and delicate, very beautiful, with wide eyes filled at once with terror and challenge.

„Hi-ee!“ cried the crowd.

„Ee-ya!“

Shattuck was smothering his heart as he looked up at her.

The girl was frightened to death, but was standing firm. And that—was courage!

„Stand forward!“ said the officer, curtly—the one who'd commanded her to leave the chair. „Quickly!“—and he gave her a prod with his finger-tips.

„And you also, I'll kill for that!“ Captain Trouble choked in his heart.

Shattuck was Captain Trouble again. He was Shadak Khan! He'd kill! The world was in need of a purge! He was the Fighting Fool. The world was in need of Fighting Fools just now!

The girl—like a girl in a dream—had stepped forward. She was looking out over that ocean of straining yellow faces—not all of them bad—not many bad; but strained, gaping, shot with wonder, lust, superstition.

„Hi-ee! Eee-ya! Ai!“

Then the droning snarl of the Green Shiver was snaking out over their heads again, commanding silence, as a coiling lash would do.

„Look at her!“ he cried. „Silver and gold! Who wants her?“

The question was so amazing that it held the crowd in suspense.

The Green Shiver took up his menacing complaint:



„So far, Minchow hasn't been so very generous! Who wants her? I'm going to sell her to the highest bidder!“

Shattuck could control himself no longer. He hadn't tried to. It was something else controlling him.

„Me!“ he howled in a choked voice. „I want her!“

He thought of it only after the last word was out—he'd spoken Chinese, thank God!

## Chapter V

SOME of those nearest Shattuck—those who could see him—began to laugh and jeer. They referred to his rags and his smell.

But he turned on them with a curse so deadly and foul that they quailed, and, satisfied, he turned again toward the war-lord.

General Yu was looking at him. Even the girl was looking at him. And some of the nearest soldiers also had lost their fixity of attention on the war-lord and were glancing around at him.

At the same time, as if through the back of his head, Shattuck was aware of pushings and scufflings, and he knew what the meaning of this would be. These were the bravos and gorillas of the war-lord who'd been scattered through the crowd. They were headed his way.

Had the Green Shiver given some secret signal that would fetch him—Shattuck wondered—a knife in the back?

In any case, as well to be damned for a sheep as a lamb!

SHATTUCK again addressed the Green Shiver direct:

„You made your offer! I take you up!“

He and the war-lord were looking at each other. While they looked, there was one of those moments when the fate of the world seems to be hanging in suspense—all things suspended—ready to fade into nothingness or come back into solid reality again: those mountains in the background, the blue Nan Shan; sun and air; this crowd; that white wraith of a girl.

He didn't dare look at her again, as yet, but he knew that again she had turned and was looking down at him—just another figure in that nightmare of hers.

What could she be thinking of him? Had she grasped something of what was going on? The Chinese refugee back there in the mountains had spoken of her as not having been long out of America. How much could she possibly understand of what was going on.

The Green Shiver had kept his grin. But that meant nothing. Through his small-pox-paralyzed lips, his small pointed teeth were gleaming. He was something very, very hard to look at, vaguely terrifying even to a man with nothing on his conscience, nothing to fear. To face him now was like facing a tiger in a world of tigers.

„Who are you?“ came the cold steel of his voice.

„I'm an ambassador,“ said Shattuck.

It was a bold stroke. He'd made it boldly. This was no time to cringe. He'd bawled his answer.

There was a guffaw, a howl.

„He stinks!“

„He’s lousy!“

„He’s smoked a green pill!“

But the Green Shiver had seen nothing nor heard anything to laugh at. He looked away from Shattuck for a few flashing seconds, spreading a chill and a silence wherever he looked.

„An ambassador!“ said General Yu, in his droning voice; and his eyes were drilling into Shattuck again.

Yu was no fool. He’d spent a lot of his life among men who’d looked no better than this clotted and squinting beggar down there. Some of these men had been kings in their way, the masters of strange secrets, wide flocks.

„Ma-lai!“ Shattuck growled. „Make way!“

AND he clawed at the shoulders of the nearest soldiers.

There was something of terror in the way they tried to stop him. Was this an assassin—a crazy man at that—bent on killing the Green Shiver here before their eyes?

For a flickering moment it seemed as if the same question had found its way into the warlord’s brain. He took a half-step backward. As he did so, two of his staff-officers jerked out automatics and switched the muzzles toward Shattuck.

But it was the war-lord himself who repeated the order that Shattuck had given.

„Ma-lai!“

And Shattuck, who’d been elbowing the soldiers aside, found the way open before him.

The world seemed large before him as he emerged from the crowd. He was breathing again and looking about him as he came up to the stone-paved terrace.

He was close to the girl, close to the war-lord, close to those tense young officers who stood just back of the war-lord still with their revolvers drawn.

„Kungyeh,“ Shattuck said as he faced the war-lord „—Duke, you at least know a man when you see one. So do I!“

The crowd had fallen deathly silent again. The only sound in all Minchow, just then, was a faint and as if reluctant murmur from the wind-bells, suspended from the temple roof. It sounded like a tolling—a knell for those already dead and those about to die.

## Chapter VI

„WHAT’S your name?“ came the query from the war-lord’s motionless lips. „I have no name,“ Shattuck answered recklessly.

„What’s your business?“

„Bakha!“—a strolling minstrel.

Shattuck felt a sort of drunkenness upon him. He always felt like that when his danger was great—it was like some subtle ether distilled by the nearness of Death. Yet it left him fearless, poised, his brain abnormally clear.

He looked at the girl.

She was gazing at him as if with sightless eyes. One horror more or less at the present moment meant nothing to her.

Shattuck, rolling slightly on his feet, took time to look out over the crowd. His look was one of contempt and defiance. He made the gesture of spitting at them. Then, once more, he confronted the war-lord.

„If you are a strolling minstrel,“ said the Green Shiver, „you’ll know some poetry. Recite us something.“

Shattuck quoted:

*May you mount the Sacred Mountain  
And find yourself as a god;  
Eat jade-pure sky and quaff the sunrise cloud,  
Yoke up the hornless dragon—  
The White Tiger of the clouds—and so,  
Ride on to heaven!*

Had any of those tense young officers back of the war-lord—or had the Green Shiver himself—detected anything wrong in his recitation of the verse? It was a poem he’d learned as a child, down in Tientsin. Had the girl caught the message he’d woven into it? One English word to a line he’d woven into the recitation:

*„Laureen!  
Laureen!  
You  
Have  
Help  
Near-by!“*

Shattuck had the pose of a man who has acquitted himself well, and isn’t ashamed to acknowledge it himself. But he wondered—wondered!

DEATH was very near, and now this meant not only his own death but that—and God grant nothing worse than that—of the girl. He looked at her again, taking his time about it this time, as any man might—especially when he was expecting to buy her. This time, when her eyes crossed his, he saw—he was sure—a glint of understanding.

General Yu cut in with a purring query:

„So, Mr. Minstrel, you are an ambassador, are you?“

„Duke, I have that honor.“

„And what’s that you’ve got hidden under your coat?“

This was death—it flashed through Shattuck’s mind. But that other self, his Genius, came to his aid.

„That, Duke,“ he said, „is my testimonial—the sword of him who sent me!“

AND before the frozen stare of the officers and the crowd, and for an instant, the alert suspicion of the Green Shiver himself, Shattuck carefully, slowly, brought out the sword he’d been keeping concealed. He brought it out unsheathed, gleaming white—the perfect sword.

There was no disguising it. This, unmistakably, was the Perfect Sword. As compared to other swords, it was as a thoroughbred among crowbaits—the beautiful lines, the perfect balance, but, above all, that ancient seal on the gold pommel of the hilt. It was a seal cut into a thousand rocks, in the secret places of the mountains.

„Who was it that sent you?“ the war-lord purred.

„Shadak Khan,“ Shattuck replied. „He has sent me to inquire about this maiden.“

As Shattuck said this, he saw a glint of such black poison in the eyes of General Yu, that he knew that the girl's fate and his own would be sealed, unless he thought quickly.

Quickly he added in a whisper that only the Green Shiver could hear:

„And I alone, O Duke, can deliver Shadak Khan into your safe-keeping.“

„Hm-m-m!“

The seconds ticked off. Looking up, Shattuck saw a dozen carrion eagles in the sky—circling lower, circling lower, while the Green Shiver toyed with plans and speculations in his crafty brain.

„I think,“ the war-lord said, at last, as much to the others as to Shattuck, „that the honorable ambassador would like to refresh himself with a bath and a change of raiment. We'll talk things over afterward in private.“

As Shattuck joined the procession that now started for the palace—trumpets screaming and the big gongs rolling again—he noticed that the executioner was walking at his side.

There lay the score or more of headless bodies in their blackening pool—most of them in an attitude of prayer. He took a last glance at the sky. The sky seemed very beautiful. The sun was going down.

## Chapter VII

SHATTUCK, that morning, had left his people well back in the Nan Shan. They'd been on their way through the mountains, headed for Tibet, when they'd come on the dying Chinese who'd told them of the murdered missionary and his wife, and their daughter, Lauren, and then of that grinning horror of a warlord, General Jade, the Green Shiver.

Just over the mountains from China, and Minchow, in the Tibetan highlands lay Koko Nor—Koko Nor, the Blue Lake. It was at Koko Nor that Kubla Khan had established one of his capitals. Where Kubla Khan had passed, there Shadak Khan would follow.

Shadak Khan was already at the head of a growing horde.

Juma, the old Kirghiz chief, was calling in his people to join the new movement. Why not? Fighting for those who wanted it; new grazing lands for those who didn't want to fight.

Then Champela, the mystic, the only lama in Tibet with an American father, had decided that now was the time, and his friend Shattuck the means, to bring about the long-predicted reformation of the Lhasa government and Lamaism in general.

It was the dream of many another fighting-priest in the Tibetan highlands. They'd come drifting down to the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation ready to join the movement. For them it was the launching of a new Crusade.

SO with the Agharti, that tribe of the Subterranean People who'd kept alive during the centuries the legend that some day the Great Khan would return and when he did it would be to clear the way for Maitreya, the new King of Peace and King of the World.

Shattuck had given them a sign. He himself was the Great Khan come back—Shadak Khan, the Trouble Captain, Captain Trouble.

The Aghartis, master astrologists, all of them, had cast Shattuck's horoscope. It was as they had known it would be. The „eight signs of his birth“ were all signs of war and the sun over all, meaning that he would succeed.

Now some of the Agharti were going with Shadak Khan to Koko Nor while others remained at Kara Koto, the black ghost city of the Gobi, now arising again from the sands after more than half a thousand years...

„Dak, my son and my chief,“ old Juma had said, stroking his beard, „you can't risk all this by going down into that Chinese city alone. Say the word, and we'll all go.“

But Dak—Juma's first rendering of Shattuck's name—must have his way. His friends had seen him on his way. Strange are the ways of a man possessed! The life on which may hang the turning of the world—that life a man will risk as he might risk a coin.

BUT the thing that is written can't be changed. Kismet! Karma! Fate! Still, there had been certain arrangements, in case things did go wrong. That also would be an affair of Karma, the invisible tissue of cause and effect that shaped men's lives.

Should Shadak Khan fail to appear again outside the walls of Minchow before the setting of the sun, the Agharti, singly and in scattered groups, were to make their way to the city in the dark.

The main gates of the city would be closed by that time, but they'd have no trouble in finding the entrance of the opium-runners—the t'u fang-tze.

Minchow had been in the smuggling business—opium included—for upward of a thousand years.

Great guides and travelers were the Agharti, especially at night. Which wasn't surprising. From father to son they'd spent their own centuries going about Asia in secret. They had secret trails through mountains and mountain-caves, known only to themselves. They had allies in widely-scattered cities.

All these centuries they had been storing up this knowledge and their wealth against the coming of the Great Khan. And now the Great Khan had come: Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble.

There was a cave in the Nan Shan overlooking Minchow called the Fur-Girl cave. It was a hiding-place that could be reached only by the Gorge of the Grasping Fist.

In the cave itself and the folds of the mountain that could be reached only through the cave, there was room enough to hide away an army—an army with horses and camels.

It was here that the two chief lieutenants of Shadak Khan, Juma and Champela, one the fighting chief and one the spiritual chief of the rising horde, took up their watch after the Agharti had taken their leave.

Sunset! And in the glow of the West the faint slim ring of a new moon! The moon was gone and the stars came out.

Dogs were barking now, and down in the darkening valley Minchow was like a moored ship gleaming with ten thousand yellow lights. The lights grew rarer as the stars swung over.

„And still no Shadak Khan!“ breathed Juma in his beard.

Champela, the mystic, was at his side. Champela had been sitting, cross-legged as was his custom, like a man in a trance. His eyes were open, but they appeared to be unseeing. One would have said that Champela was seeing by some other eye.

„There’s a signal!“ Champela suddenly spoke up.

„Where?“ gasped Juma.

He had the eyes of an eagle—or a nighthawk—and he’d been watching dark Minchow as if it held his only hope of heaven.

A full two seconds passed—seconds of darkness; then, from a corner of special blackness in the city’s mass Juma saw a flash of bright red flame.

It was the signal they’d been waiting for.

## Chapter VIII

THE palace was as large as any that Shattuck had ever seen—courtyard after courtyard and all of these guarded by soldiers. He was a prisoner. He had no doubt about that as he followed the lead of the executioner back into the far interior of the palace. Very wonderful! Painted and gilded rafters, jade and porcelain, vast old carpets of yellow and black, plum-color and mountain-blue, silk hangings.

„The honorable ambassador will drink tea with me—after his refreshing bath,“ said General Yu, and he was gone with the members of his staff.

Had the Green Shiver meant it for a joke?

Whether he did or not, Shattuck didn’t care. He was busy, busy. His brain had developed as many feelers as a cuttle-fish.

He believed that he could find again the court where the chair-carriers had turned aside with Laureen Macon. He could find again the court where the war-lord had just now left him. This was a game and the loser in it would lose his life.

The palace was getting dark, and a swarm of servants were going about the place lighting paper lanterns and oil lamps, some of which were old and some of which were modern. Even to Minchow the American Oil King had found his way; and by some occult twist of his mind Shattuck found the fact encouraging.

BUT the thing that arrested him most was the sight of all these servants. Manifestly they were not newcomers. These were Minchow people. These were servants that had been left here by the old regime.

He took note of the fact and no longer felt alone. He was on the side of these people, and if he could prove it to them so also would they be on his side.

Then—the crisis was on him like a springing tiger.

There'd come a push from behind. As he plunged forward, unable to turn, he was caught in what seemed to be a giant spider-web. The web had been spun across the door of a shadowy room. The room was suddenly filled with men in uniforms.

Shattuck had heard about these man-trap spider-webs before—heard about them vaguely. They were good to take men alive and uninjured. Like that the prey could be left in full possession of his capacity for pain. An old invention—old as China. The real, exquisite perfection of torture could be indulged in only when the victim was taken unblemished, unstunned, wide awake.

TORTURE! Shattuck could see it now. He'd be tortured while the Green Shiver was drinking his tea. There was the finger-nail torture? The ten-thousand little tap torture!

All this simultaneously, in the very act of sprawling.

And other things simultaneously. A warning in his brain not to struggle—it was by his struggles, sudden and wild, that the victim tied himself up the more securely in these silken nets. A foot in his back—and there came to Shattuck a memory of the executioner footing like that a man he was about to kill.

And all in this same instant there came to Shattuck the memory that he'd promised himself to kill the executioner for doing just that.

At his first contact with the silken mesh he'd started to turn. He'd kept his arms hunched and close to his sides.

Before he'd come to the floor he'd pulled an automatic from the left sleeve of his sheepskin coat and sent a bullet through a mass of flesh that was all he could see.

Shattuck came down on his side all but paralyzed so far as free movement was concerned.

The next time he fired he came within an ace of shooting himself in the chin. He'd fired with his two hands against his stomach, up past his own head, at some one plunging toward him from the room.

Two shots, and he didn't know—he didn't even try to guess—the result of either of these. But the fools were giving him time. Why didn't they pile on to him?—smother him?

Carefully, swiftly, knowing that a single false movement and yet also the loss of a second, might mean slow death—for himself, for the girl—while a Green Jade Devil drank his tea—Shattuck's two hands found his sword. If ever a fighting man made a prayer to his sword—back through strangling dark annals of unwritten history—he made one now.

But this also must have been happening all at once. The blade had turned. An invisible harper had begun to play as taut silk strings were severed.

He was quick as a cat, quick as a snake, as the web dissolved about him. He didn't suspect until then how quick he had been.

A glance behind him and he saw the big executioner in a final paroxysm—kneeling, kowtowing. Still on his spraddled knees, the executioner ducked head down to the floor and remained there in the attitude of one of his own beheaded subjects.

A GLANCE into the room, and Shattuck saw that he'd shot another man. The comrades of the man were just easing him to the floor.

The look of consternation on the faces of these comrades brought him a further flash of discovery. Not one of these men was armed. They were the kidnaping crew, meant to trap rich merchants and such others as General Yu might invite to tea. If the men were armed, they might injure the guest before the war-lord himself got to work—the bloom would be gone from the peach, the torture-luxury would have lost its quintessence.

Shattuck was on his feet, sword in one hand, pistol in the other.

He addressed them softly.

„Have you ever heard of Shadak Khan?“

They had. Not a caravan had come into Minchow since they'd been here that hadn't brought stories of Shadak Khan. Caravans were Minchow's newspapers, its telegraph and radio.

„I'm Shadak Khan,“ said Shattuck, „And you may take your choice. It's me—or death!“

## Chapter IX

„KILL! Kill!“ It was the old cry of the Chinese mobs. In Chinese it went:

„Dah! Dah!“

„Kill! Kill!“—and the hard-pressed, long-suffering people of Minchow were shouting it now. The Agharti, Shadak Khan's new followers, had fired them to it. But Minchow's people were already human tinder just waiting for the match.

They'd seen their men murdered and their women abused, their temple defiled and their palace—to which emperors had come to write poems—turned into a laboratory of luxury and pain.

But now they dared rise. Shadak Khan had come to save them.

General Yu, the Green Shiver, must have heard those cries at last. For some time he must have been hearing them—but strained fine, as through a sieve of silence—back there in the depths of the yamen where he was taking his repose.

He lay on a divan of purple satin splashed with a rich embroidery of yellow dragons and bright green willow-trees. Before him, kneeling on a cushion, was Lauren Macon.

„Are you still resolved to kill yourself,“ the general was asking, „if I honor you by making you my wife?“

She stared at him, but did not answer.

„You saw that lousy beggar—that crazy man from the hills?“

No answer.

„Would you prefer that—I marry you—to him?“

The general might as well have been threatening a ghost.

„Um-m-m!“ he purred. „No answer! Did you ever hear of someone dying under the fifty-thousand cuts? That generally makes them talk. And my good people of Minchow would enjoy the spectacle—“

He reached over and touched a suspended gong.

„Dah! Dah!“

The shouting from the street had taken on a ponderous rhythm.

The girl herself heard it and tried to straighten up from her kneeling position, but her knees were tied and she almost fell.



General Yu, with a curse, struck the gong with his fist. No one had answered that earlier summons.

„Dah! Dah!“

It was rolling thunder, drawing nearer.

The Green Shiver came to his stockinged feet. He'd had his boots pulled off and his sword-belt unbuckled when he'd entered the room. The boots were gone, apparently, beyond recall. But he found his sword.

He'd just unsheathed it when a dark figure lurched through the doorway also armed with a sword.

IT was the sword that the Green Shiver recognized first—the sword of Kubla Khan—the sword of Shadak Khan—of Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool.

Yu, the Jade Green Shiver, was a wily fighter. It was characteristic of him that his first movement should have been to seize the girl as a guard, as a possible hostage, a piece to be ransomed. With her he might still ransom his life.

„DAH!“

It was Shattuck who shouted it.

It was as if the sword had acted of itself. It was like a shot arrow as it sped through the Green Shiver's throat...

Shattuck had brought the girl to her feet and cut the silken cords that bound her knees. He scarcely dared touch her himself. But he could speak to her. He was telling her not to be afraid, that she was safe, that he'd give her an escort down to the Coast.

THREE or four of the palace servants came in, swiftly, armed with daggers. The daggers were red.

When they saw Shattuck—Shadak Khan—they bowed low.

„Go quickly,“ he commanded them, „and seek out the best women in the palace—the older ones—and let them care for this lady. Tell them she's—Holy!“

He turned to the girl.

„Who are you?“ she whispered.

She was as beautiful as an artist's dream of a holy wraith. Shattuck felt a pang of regret at the thought of never seeing her again. But he had work to do.

He knew what was happening in the town. The Agharti had stirred up the people. The people would be butchering the soldiers of the Green Shiver as the Green Shiver had himself just died. And even now Juma and Champela with the Tibetan force would be headed this way.

He had work to do, all right.

„Me?“ he said. „I'm no one.“

„No one? You've been an angel to me!“

So Shattuck let it go at that and shepherded her out and away from the thing that lay there sprawled on the floor.

