

## CHAPTER XXV

### BANDITS

THE bell had rung and the students were filing into morning classes when Galahad felt his arm grasped, turned, and looked into the weary and frightened face of Lao Li, the hired man.

"I must see you at once," the latter panted.

"Come to my room," said Galahad, leading the way. "What is it?" he asked, when they were inside the door.

Lao Li seemed very much agitated. He looked around for water to drink and drank copiously. Then he sat down and wiped his forehead, on which stood great beads of perspiration. He looked at the young master. "Well," said the latter. Lao Li did not seem able to begin.

"Something has happened?" Galahad suggested. He knew this type and was aware that, if he demanded the information too rapidly for the hired man, he might miss something of importance.

"I should say there had!" the man responded ominously.

"Tell me about it," coaxed the other.

"Well, last night—let me see, yes, it was last night, the fourteenth; my! it seems five days ago. To-day is the fifteenth, isn't it?"

On being assured that he was correct in the date he took a new start. "Last night, you know, was rather warm. Well, I had gone to bed when the old gentleman, your father, called me to go out and get a pail of water. I knew that the water jar was empty, but thought I'd get up early in the morning and fill it. I put on my pants but didn't bother to put on my socks.

You see, I haven't got them on, now." Galahad agreed that he had noticed the absence of socks.

"I went down to the well, the one on the south street. The water in the one on our street has been bad for some time. Probably a dog has fallen into it, and everybody's too busy to clean it out. We're doing our spring plowing now."

"Yes, yes, but what happened last night?" demanded Galahad.

"I'm coming to that. I left the door open. It wasn't so late, you know, and the family were all up except your youngest sister. As I came up the street, some one followed me. I couldn't see who it was, it was so dark. Last night was cloudy, you remember. Just before I turned into our gate he stepped up behind me, took hold of my arm and said, 'Don't make any outcry or I'll kill you.'"

"Robbers!" exclaimed Galahad.

"Worse than that. Wait till I tell you. The man and four others who came out of the shadow followed me into the house, after carefully bolting the outside door. The man kept hold of my arm until we got inside the house. He had a red beard on, so I couldn't see what he looked like."

"*Hung-hu-tzu* (brigands)!" cried the other in genuine alarm.

"Your father and mother and Welcome to Spring were in the kitchen. Of course they were very much frightened when the man with the false whiskers said, 'If you open your mouth, we'll cut your tongues out.'"

"Was my wife in the room?" anxiously asked his master.

"No, not then. Your mother began to cry; but one of the men, who seemed to be their leader, said she needn't worry, for they wouldn't be hurt if they did as they were told. The worst one was the man with the

false beard on, and his dialect was like ours, but the others spoke like Northerners."

"Go on, go on," urged Galahad.

"The captain asked where their foreign daughter-in-law was. 'What do you want with her?' asked your father. The man laughed. 'What do kidnapers generally want with rich people's relations?' Your sister began to weep, and the old gentleman said, 'But we are not rich.' Then the man got mad. 'Come, come now, don't try to fool us,' he said, 'or it may go hard with you. These foreigners all have plenty of money, or, if they haven't, their friends have. You certainly ought to be able to scare up about twenty thousand for us. If you don't, you know what will happen.'

"They made me go over and call the young mistress, and when she came in the man with the beard said, 'Here's the she-devil.' The captain said, 'Shut up,' and then took off his hat and bowed and smiled.

"The young mistress asked what she was wanted for. The captain was very polite to her and said, 'I'm sorry we have to disturb you but you will have to go with us.' 'What! go out at this time of night?' she asked. 'Yes, there is no help for it, but I will have a donkey for you to ride.'

"I expected to see her break down and cry, but she didn't. She smiled at the captain and asked if I could go along to wait on her. 'No,' broke in the man with the beard, 'who ever heard of such a thing?' Then the captain got into a rage and asked the bearded man who was running the show, and told him to keep his tongue to himself unless his advice was asked for. He was as oily as could be to the young *ta'i t'ai* and said I could go along.

"So I saddled the donkey and put a quilt on it. We went out the side gate so the neighbors wouldn't see them, and the last thing they said to your folks was

that they must not stir outside the gate until morning or they should be shot."

"And didn't my father do a thing to prevent their carrying off my wife?"

"What could they do? They all begged, of course, and even got down on their knees to the brutes, but nothing would move them. After ransacking the house for all the money they could find, we started out."

"In which direction?" asked the distracted young husband, who was pacing up and down the room.

"We traveled directly north toward the coast. I kept my ears open and heard them say something about a junk and Antung. Evidently they are going to try to get across to Manchuria."

Suddenly Galahad stopped before the man and savagely said, "And you ran off and left her alone in the hands of those wretches?"

"Don't get angry, master, and I'll tell you all about that. I never should have left but for the missus. We had traveled about six hours, I judge, when we came to a stream. She called to me to come and steady her as the current was rather strong at that place. But I found out that it wasn't so much that she was afraid of falling off as that she wanted to say something. As I came alongside she whispered, 'Lao Li, you go tell the young master.'"

"Was that all?" asked the latter.

"Yes; the bandits were close in and she couldn't have said anything more without their becoming suspicious. Soon after, I got a chance to slip away in the darkness. It must have been some time before they discovered it; then they fired off their guns, and I could hear them calling one to another and cursing. And I heard her voice crying, 'Oh, has he run away and left me? Lao Li, come back, come back.' I was tempted to go back, but I felt sure it was a blind on her part, so I headed straight for Chefoo."

"Is that all? Have you forgotten anything?" asked Galahad weakly.

"No, I think not. Yes, there is something more." He fumbled in his clothes and brought out a little handkerchief tied through a plain gold ring. "She slipped this into my hand."

Galahad sprang forward and snatched it eagerly. "Her wedding ring," he exclaimed. Turning away, he bent his face over the bit of dainty linen and drank in the familiar fragrance which still lingered faintly in it. The sight of the ring and the breath of the perfume seemed to put resolution and courage into him again. Bidding Lao Li remain and sleep, Galahad went at once to Mr. MacGregor's office.

MacGregor looked up as he came in. "What's the matter, Yung-fu? You're quite pale. Are you ill?"

"No, sir, but a servant has just come from my home with bad news. My wife has been carried off by bandits."

MacGregor leaped to his feet at the word and grasped Galahad by the shoulders. "Great Heavens, boy, when was this? Tell me all about it."

The story was soon told.

"You say that you think they have a boat and will make for Manchuria?" questioned MacGregor.

"The servant thought so from their conversation."

"Well, it takes a boat to catch a boat." As he spoke, he drew a holster from the drawer. "Here, buckle that on under your gown. I have another. Now come with me."

They found rickshas at the school gate and, jumping in, promised the men an extra sum to hurry. In a quarter of an hour they drew up before the Standard Oil Company's office and hastened inside. Yes, Mr. Hawley was in his office, and to prove it came to the door with his hands full of papers.

"Hello, Hawley," said MacGregor, "those are rather

prosy looking things for a man of your spirit. Have you ever captured a pirate ship?"

"Well, no," replied the Socony man, a tall individual of about thirty-eight with a whimsical smile. "I took a jackpot the other night. Do you take me for an admiral?"

"No, not yet. But to put it in a different way, did you ever long to fight with pirates?"

"Sure, every kid has dreamed of that, and my wife says I'm still a kid."

"Well, China's the place dreams come true. I'm your fairy godmother and have it all fixed up, 'fifteen men on a dead man's chest,' a beautiful maiden to rescue, and all that."

"Say, the highly metaphorical language of you missionaries needs exposition. What's on *your* chest?"

When MacGregor told him, Hawley exclaimed, "And I was complaining only this morning of the monotony of life! Go? Of course, I'll go. I will send a coolie down to order up the launch immediately. But if we don't let the boys in on this, they will never forgive me. I'll telephone a bunch of them."

The "bunch" was telephoned, as well as Mrs. Hawley. Within an hour a group of eight men besides MacGregor and Gakahad—British, American, Belgian, and one Russian—appeared at the dock where the launch was moored. All brought firearms of some sort, and one man brought two great Chinese cutlasses. There was much merriment and raillery. One had tied a red bandanna handkerchief around his head.

The launch was a stout little craft, not very fast, but able to overhaul any Chinese junk. It was used as a tug to draw lighters of kerosene from the company's filling plant to the godowns on the docks. Its crew of six men were all Chinese.

"Where's Green?" asked some one.

"Getting into his new shooting suit," replied French,

who was in the same office. "You don't expect to see Green appearing in anything but the proper outfit, do you?"

As they spoke, Green sauntered around the corner. Sure enough, he was faultlessly attired. Every article of his apparel, from the hat to the tan shoes, bespoke the model amateur huntsman. He carried his rifle slung gracefully in the hollow of his arm.

"You're just in time, Green," said Hawley.

"I thought I should have time to get into my togs," answered Green. "There's nothing like being dressed right, I say. Clothes have so much to do with a man's mental attitude and with a fellow's being at his best, don't you know?"

"In other words, wear ducks when duck shooting," suggested one. Green took no notice of the jibe.

On the dock was a quantity of old ship's steel plates, some flat and some curved. The pieces were about five feet square and had rivet holes along one side. Galahad said something quietly to MacGregor, who in turn spoke to Hawley.

"Good idea," rejoined the latter. "The devils are armed, and it will serve as a protection."

Coolies were called and six pieces of the steel were carried on board the launch and one curved piece set up in front of the pilot house.

Mrs. Hawley and Mrs. French had come down to see their husbands off. The former had had a large hamper packed with provisions and its arrival was hailed with cheers. Indeed, the whole departure was more like that of a picnic party than anything else.

"We think you're real mean not to take us along on your picnic," Mrs. Hawley said to MacGregor.

"I am a nurse, you know," said Mrs. French. "Can't I come along to care for the wounded?"

As they shoved off, Mrs. Hawley called out to her husband, "Ed, bring me back a real live pirate for

dinner." The laugh that ensued upon this sally was echoed by the Chinese on the dock, who did not understand the joke but knew it was time to laugh. But was it? Little did they realize that from the gay party some would never return alive.

