

Yellow Men Sleep

By JEREMY LANE

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CHEE MING.

Synopsis. — John Levington, a poet, visionary, and impractical, and Mary Martin, the daughter of rich and worldly parents, hear the call of love and unite their lives. They go to a small Michigan city, where John finds work in a stove factory and on Sundays writes poetry. The Martins try in vain to get the happy wife to leave her husband. Mary begins to breathe for two. John loses his job. He appeals in vain to the Martins. Mary goes to the hospital and never returns. Thus comes into the story Cornelius Levington. John leaves town and the city farms out the child. Two years later John appears, claims his little son and takes him with him on his wanderings over the whole earth.

Under the same conditions do you believe you could have made more of life than Con Levington made of his?

CHAPTER I—Continued.

In Frisco again, with the boy nearly four years of age, John worked in many strange places. They lived near Dory street. John was a marked man. He did not drink often, but he chose the most fatal occasions for it. The gray shadows beneath his eyes deepened. Con learned to cut bread and light the fires—a rather solemn young person, who was well aware that his father was not always the same. His eyes were blue, large, ready to trust. In his consciousness there was no such thing as stranger. The matter of home remained worldwide.

He ventured down to the steam ferries and pondered the mystery of their endless coming and going. He loved the strength of horses as they hauled heaving loads over the cobbles. He wondered what made the loads so heavy. And where had everything come from? The fire-engines were delightful. At night, when they passed below the window and he could not get up, he lay beside his father and wondered what might be burning, and imagined how the smoke would come out and blacken the stars, and the fire crackle and curl up high, as the firemen worked from the street. Was it a big building burning? Who was getting burned up? What would they have done if they hadn't been burned up to-night?

On some occasions his father would talk, but he was asleep all the while, and how could he know what he was saying? Con listened and it was like Bill the Chink. He could not understand the words of either of them, but it was wonderful to hear. There was a rhythmic pulse to these night words of John Levington, and upon it Con was frequently carried into magic dreams.

"I'm going." The father, usually said this to the boy in the morning, and it did not mean he was going to work. Con understood so much, but no more. John Levington said it more and more often.

Con himself became marked for "different." At the age of six he felt it. He did nearly everything the boys in the Dory street neighborhood, even the soiled little yellow boys whose play was weird with forty centuries of Asiatic wickedness; but Con was not always admitted. He could fight and climb, was generous and bold. But the clear light in his eyes betrayed him; he was different.

At length he realized that things were said concerning his father which he could not quite fathom. John seemed tired and always very gentle, drowsy but never ready for bed. Their little kitchen was clean. The bedroom smelled like Father himself, a friendly personal scent, rather like cinnamon and whisky. This went with the gray-shadowed eyes, and grew more perceptible when John began to stay at home every day, being out of work. Often now, John Levington would take the child between his knees and look for a long time steadily into the blue eyes. Con found that this was better than talking. He received his father into an open heart, giving him utter devotion. John slept a great deal when out of work. His eyes were shadowed and sunken.

They returned to Dowagiac. The house was rented by strangers, but the slovenly woman next door was there as always, her sparse black hair standing out at angles from her head. It seemed she wore the same snagged apron, stiff with grease. She moved out to the sidewalk to shake hands.

"You ain't looking well—and is this the baby?"

She nonchalantly pinched Con's cheek, and he coldly suffered her touch.

John Levington did not reach the cemetery. As he was leading his son to that hill the blaze of an August sun mastered him. His vitality was gone, had left him long since. Con crossed the street to ask at a house for water, because his father was down and could not get up. Dowagiac's new ambulance thus found its

premier case. The boy was handed over to the matron of the city rest room. After supper they took him to his father in the hospital.

"I'm going," said John.

Con was somewhat closer to the meaning now. John's eyes were more deeply shadowed, but even in this new situation the boy was reassured by the familiar scent of wine and cinnamon about the bed.

The young son did not like the funeral. He refused to weep as instructed. But he screamed when they let him see that his father was in the box. He knew all about it now. He had seen funerals before, and thrown stones at them. It meant, as some said along Dory street, good-night. Realization of his father's death came like a shower of hot needles, and then a slow weight on his chest. It was unbelievable. To-morrow would be all right; it must be. Con was stupefied.

"So the city council extended its humanity once more, and voted care for the wif, and it happened that the lowest bidder for his keep was the woman next door—the cheerful slattern with four of her own—and to her foul dwelling Con went to be raised.

CHAPTER II

Purple Tracery.

In the darkness of the months and years that followed, Con Levington did not suffer consciously from the horrors of his environment. He became much like it, and through the accumulating films of sordid experience he saw but vaguely that there was more in life than this. Whenever anything beautiful forced its way toward him, he could not imagine that it might be for himself. Yet the true heritage in his blood was not lost. Merely his decent, poetic young self woven and crossed with filth.

He companioned with the scum of cities, after running away from Dowagiac, also took a few music lessons of Max Markov, a young Russian spirit in Chicago. He spent much of his time at a club of questioners, yet managed to make a firm friend of Premenez, a Spaniard in French diplomatic circles, a princely person of irreproachable standing. Con never realized what an indigestible layer-cake he was making out of life. The nearest he ever came to straightening himself out was during recurrences of a longing to know more, to see deeper into the complexities about him. He forgot his father and mother, even forgot the dirty woman whose marks were still upon his habits, but this longing would come frequently, out of the wells of his spirit, perhaps to be instantly polluted, denied, snuffed down. Con did not believe that real life was for such as himself. Both to the underworld and to the upper realms of society, he felt somehow an outsider.

There was at last a series of events that quickened his longing to a degree that would not be put aside. The pressure of these strange events formed his life, once for all. The better story begins here, the final raveling out of the ugly weave in his days.



He Tried Not to Show the Strain This Hour Held for Him.

Through these events, all the longings of early years, even the yearnings of those who went before him, were intensified and definitely answered.

Destiny, for Con Levington, began swiftly to untangle at a dinner, a quiet affair with one of his newest friends.

This fate-laden dinner was shaded and silvery, served for two, in the smaller dining-room of the Wedger house. The members of the family were all away, except one.

Cecil Wedger sat opposite his guest, Levington, and talked candidly of the

numerous motion-picture stars in his golden orbit. The guest, while attentive, and never missing his host's callow pleasantries, was merely bearing up as best he might under boredom, and at the same time concealing the commotion in his heart. Con was aware of Destiny.

The wine was expensive if not melodic, and the cooking was undeniably good, having been accomplished by Cecil's own attache—Chinese, whose existence seemed to begin and end in the night-flying son of the Wedgers. Con, taller than his father, held a likeness to John Levington only about the eyes and temples, something grave and tense, that disappeared when he laughed. He tried not to show the strain that this hour held for him, although in the luminous haze of cigarette smoke his features were a degree drawn and pale. His voice had a natural sincerity. The eyes, blue-gray and steady, seemed to hide none of the secrets that hovered in the lines around his mouth. The gentle excellence of his brow and head ranked him one with those who had been carefully directed, well combed at the start. Con was a good listener. His were well-built limbs, the shoulders almost too massive, though he was slim through the waist, and sometimes abashed at the fineness of his hands.

The integrity of this only son of two consummate lovers had been tempered in the roaring pits of the world. Con had never been one to wait for temptation. As the reticence of childhood had been rubbed away, and before a man's dignity had come to him, he had been famously ready. He had scaled the walls around the garden of illusion, battered his way joyfully along its paths, and plunged into every alluring pool. He had found its promises worthless, and had aged in a dozen years. His inner prompting had taken a false lead, but he had no regrets. With help he had at length found his way out into the clean and cool winds of humanity. He had discovered again the treasures of a small-town boyhood, the satisfaction of open fields, the sun in his eyes. Morning air on the slopes was wine to him. In the blue rush of the sea he tried his strength, and found it sufficient. These were what he had wanted all the while. But the guides had all pointed the other way.

Cecil Wedger's invitation to dinner was part of a plan. The loquacious Wedger sprout had no notion that he was being used. Nor did Con feel guilty in the deception, for he was stepping into a work that claimed all his best energies.

The Chinese servant entered like a living shadow bringing fresh coffee. Cecil made his own cup into a gloria by brimming it with brandy. Levington smiled and waved the bottle away. This was not so easy as it appeared. His nostrils twitched at the fragrance from his host's cup. Perhaps the Chinese understood, for he nodded gravely. Now Cecil, to show his democratic spirit, spoke to the servant, very nearly as one man might address another:

"Chee Ming, what do you think of a chap who turns deacon and won't drink anything at the age of twenty-five?"

The Chinese countenance unfolded a few more small wrinkles near the nose, and a light appeared in the narrow eyes, as Chee Ming made reply, "Doubtless wise."

"Deacon is hardly the word," declared the young man of twenty-five. "Deacons are a thirsty brotherhood."

Cecil considered this remarkable humor. He was glad he had asked Levington to come.

The servant's face was the yellow-gray of summer dust, and when the light of a moment vanished from his eyes, they became smooth wet stones. His body was spare, a kind of unnatural prolongation youth in it; and Cecil, to publish his own magnanimity and good taste, had insisted that Chee Ming continue to robe in native dress, a loose blousing smock with white sash and narrow straight trousers. Chee Ming was scoured and brushed clean. He was not young, had never been young, and possibly would never grow old. A power that was wire-nerved and psychic radiated from his motionless form. The essence of sober cunning showed in his countenance; ages of calm iniquity had wrought in the lore of his soul; his was a face impossible to read, while a well-tamed scorn lurked in his hands. He smoothly retired to the pantry.

"I was telling you about my little friend, wasn't I?" resumed Cecil, livening to the task.

"Yes," replied his guest, "you were going to show me her picture."

"Pinkie little thing you ever saw," asserted the pride of the Wedgers. "Coffee won't be enough for you when you see—"

Cecil left the table and hastened for the photograph of his newest darling.

Con heard him whistling as he went up through the deserted mansion.

Alone in the dining-room, Con also arose from the table. The tension about his eyes was more marked. Half a smile drew at his mouth, a

close-gathering of faculties. He went to the door of the butler's pantry, and passed on through.

In the low light beyond was Chee Ming, taking care of the silver. The face was shadowed, showing neither surprise nor interest at the approach of Levington; yet one bony hand moved along the shelf toward the handle of the bread-knife. The two men came together as swiftly as struggling phantoms.

Chee Ming was built of live tendons. The bread-knife came around in the grip of yellow fingers closer over Levington's stomach, but could not go on. Con pinioned his arms and, with a pang of regret bent him backward with a force that might have snapped a white man's spine, but the Chinese would not be broken. Neither uttered a sound. An instant they locked.

Their feet seemed fast to the floor. Then, under necessity, the white young man forgot to be tender-hearted, a quick gasp of pain came from the Oriental lips and Chee Ming's weapon rattled to the floor. The victim sighed and crumpled in Levington's arms.

On the floor he quivered, while the victor plunged a hand into the blouse and searched. Against the skin Con touched a tiny packet of leather, warm and soft and precious. He snatched the throng, withdrew it, stood erect and listened. Cecil was humming as he returned. Levington released the yellow hands that weakly held one ankle, lifted himself out at the pantry window, and dropped into the bushes below.

In the darkness he ran across the lawn, where he had walked two hours before, listening to the endless half-

Unsealed Proposals

By MARTHA M. WILLIAMS

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"M-m-m. Let me see! You have a fine brow, a straight enough nose, your mouth is rather decent—when—when—" Risley began, scanning his stepcousin Anne-Marie critically from beneath lifted fingers. She laughed softly before answering plaintively: "But, you see, Ansell, it so rarely is shut me in sure to spoil the picture."

"You needn't—can't be much hardship to keep silent an hour or so," Risley retorted. Anne-Marie made a face at him.

"Suppose you try it," she said. "Pose me, tell me exactly for how long; then, in the language of today, go to it. A mighty fair proposition. Are you game?"

"Certainly," Ansell flung back. "In fact, you couldn't please me better. A talky model spoils inspiration," as he spoke flourishing an old sheathed sword and a tattered battleflag. "You know all about these," he went on. "Try to put yourself in the spirit of those who used them—fill your soul with the joy of victory—I'll do the rest."

Risley, you see, had temperament. Anne-Marie translated it conceit. He had come to Hillover, the Eton place, a tanned shadow of himself, a month back, from a journey around the world.

It was thus he had elected to come home, after service abroad. At first he had been too weary for anything but sleep, food and rest. Together they had brought him back to himself—indeed, to a self raised to about the nth power in its sense of its deservings. The deservings included Anne-Marie—she was lively, healthy, reasonably good-tempered. Besides she would be rich when she came to twenty-one. Only a year ahead. Her stepmother, his aunt, had exhorted him to make sure of her before that time. She had planned the marriage ever since she came into the family, seven years back. Even so early Ansell had shown temperament—which is a sight draft upon the bank of Fate for substantial endowment.

He was working upon a picture for a prize competition—not that he cared for the money; what was a mere thousand dollars?—but the acclaim of winning would be worth while, withal sweet incense to his swollen vanity.

He had already washed in his background—luckily Hillover commanded a noble prospect, full of enchanting distances, with a tree, lightning-scathed, a winding, narrow stream, a tall gray bluff, in the foreground. Clear grass at the bluff foot would serve admirably for the standing figure, leaning lightly upon the sword, and gently fingering the tattered flag.

He had hoped for another model—Mademoiselle Yvonne, the exotic, brought back by Susan Glower of the Red Cross service to help civilize this crass America, had failed him at the last minute. What she lacked of equaling him in temperament she more than made up in thrift. When artless Susan had let her know that Ansell had to choose between Anne-Marie and working for a living, she had instantly decided to waste no more time nor smiles on him.

Hence his captious humor. Of course he had not been seriously thinking of the French girl—but she had a way so taking she had gone rather to his head. When he had posed her substitute to his mind, Anne-Marie said suddenly: "There must be a forfeit—what's to gain or lose by speaking out of time?"

"Oh, anything," Ansell said, almost fretfully. "Whatever you like. If only you'll be quiet now—" busying himself with his palette as he spoke. "Of course if I need to mention small changes on account of changing light—that is not to count!"

She nodded comprehension, the ghost of an impish smile playing about her lips. "Look serious, inspired—if you can," he cried, noting it. Again she nodded, but banished the smile to her eyes. In its place there shone from her countenance a sweet, sunny peace—she had been the least-bit harassed these last ten days.

She loved her stepmother fairly well—moreover the habit of obedience was strong in her. And mamma had all but said outright she could not die happy without seeing Anne-Marie safely settled in life—also that unless she married Ansell the shock of disappointment and grief would surely bring on a heart spasm fatal to Ansell's aunt.

A year earlier that would have clinched matters—Anne-Marie would have gone, a lamb to the matrimonial slaughter. But Jim Eldridge had suddenly dawned on the horizon. That complicated matters. Jim was masculine to the point of saturation, chivalrous, humble before womanhood, and of a fine merry humor more than engaging. He would have courted Anne-Marie right off the reel if mamma had not intervened, telling him her stepdaughter was betrothed to the wandering soldier-artist—had loved him for years and would never love anybody else.

Therefore the good lady had besought Jim to be kind to Anne-Marie and kinder to himself, by keeping all thought of loving her out of his mind. See the complication? It was quite beyond poor Jim to think an elderly Christian lady could lie—even for the

accomplishment of her own darling purpose.

He had accepted the role of brotherly friend with what grace he might—to the sorrowful bewilderment of Anne-Marie—who recognized in him "the male of her species," but dared not admit it even to herself.

She started ever so slightly when half an hour later Jim came up the hill, calling a gay greeting to them. Ansell waved him away imperiously, then, finding him stock-still and staring, burst out with a stamp of the foot: "Go back! Don't you see we are not to be interrupted?"

"Jim, you've saved my life!" Anne-Marie cried joyously, holding out her left hand to him. The right was numb from clutching the sword.

"What's up?" Jim demanded, possessing himself of the other hand. "Is it a game or an endurance contest, or what?"

"I think it is the game of my salvation," Anne-Marie said under her breath.

Ansell pushed in between them, saying masterfully: "You have lost, young person. I claim as my forfeit—this, taking her right hand forcibly from Jim's clasp.

"You spoke first!" she cried, snatching away her hand.

"I had to," Ansell retorted.

Jim looked dazed. "There is—speaking and speaking," he began. "I have to do some of it—her and now. Madame Eton has asked be to stand brother to Miss Anne-Marie. As such, I call you to account. To my sure knowledge you are making love to the French woman, and all the while engaged—here."

"Who says it?" Anne-Marie demanded, her eyes shooting sparks.

"The madame herself," Jim answered steadily.

"She is mistaken," Anne-Marie returned, her voice steely. "I am not engaged to Ansell Risley—what is more, I never shall be."

"H-m! Will unsealed proposals be considered?" Jim asked with twinkling eyes. She smiled at him, dropped her head upon his shoulder and murmured softly, holding up her lips: "You had better seal right here."

Jim needed no second prompting. Ansell rushed away scowling madly. Jim called after him tauntingly:

"Better play safe hereafter. Both ends against the middle is too risky, even for a genius."