

# THE YELLOW SEVEN. THE HUT IN THE CLEARING

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ILLUSTRATED BY  
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BEGIN HERE TODAY

Peter Pennington, detective, detailed by the government to capture the leader of The Yellow Seven, a gang of Chinese bandits, Capt. John Hewitt, commanding Police Officer, Jessie, British North Borneo, procure warrants for the arrest of Chai-Hung, by The Yellow Seven. Pennington goes to him for the arrest. He is accompanied by Hewitt's beautiful sister, Monica Viney. Pennington learns that Hewitt's cook boy is a member of The Yellow Seven.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

SHE tripped over a root that she stumbled against him, gasping for breath.

"I'm so sorry," she panted. "I—simply—can't—do it."

Pennington steadied her with his arm, apologizing profusely.

He looked up and saw that the guide had disappeared.

This was the first serious hitch that had occurred. Swearing softly to himself, he carried her the next thirty yards, rested her against a tree, and flashed his torch like a search-light, sweeping it in all directions. Suddenly he plunged forward and caught the delinquent cowering behind a thorn-bush. He drew the shivering Wong-See from his hiding place, then kicked him with astonishment accuracy.

The remedy proved efficacious, for, throughout the final phases of the nocturnal expedition, Wong-See made no further attempt to elude his captor!

The guide stopped abruptly, dropping to his hands and knees, and Pennington, creeping up to him, extinguished the torch. Monica, her hands torn and bleeding, her neck and wrists and ankles so many itchy zones where the thirsty blood-suckers of the jungle had taken their toll, felt herself forced from the main track by the sudden pressure of her companion's left arm. Ahead of them—scarcely twenty paces distant—a light flickered for a moment and then went out.

Pennington's lips, pressed against her ear, breathed two words: "Chai-Hung sentry!"

A LONG BLADE FLASHED IN THE LAMPLIGHT.

Pennington's hand had left Monica's arm and a subdued, restless, yet constant something was going on at her side. Presently she felt a solid mass press against her and found that she was gripping the torch that Pennington had thrust toward her. She groped wildly in the darkness with her free hand. For a matter of seconds her heart stood still, for in the space where she had believed Pennington to be—there was nothing. Her fingers dropped suddenly to a warm, motionless body that lay prostrate at her side.

She withdrew her hand, shuddering inwardly, and somehow the torch flashed in the blackness, sending a bar of brilliant light straight down the track that stretched before her. She saw a huddled form, seated on what might have been a fallen trunk and then, before the creature—surprised by the illumination—could stir itself, a white-clad figure had sprung like a panther from the trees and overwhelmed it.

She saw no more, for her thumb had found the switch and pushed it into place. She knew now that the form she had touched was that of the miserable Wong-See, who was ef-fectively gagged and bound.

"Come on," said the voice of Pennington in her ear. "I fancy I've cleared the path."

She was beginning to understand the reason for her brother's deep-rooted confidence in this amazing man, with the strength and cunning of a primeval savage—and the table-manners of a prince!

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So cautious were their movements after this that Monica felt prompted to cry aloud, to laugh, anything to relieve the appalling monotony. A broad, squat shadow loomed presently in front of them, a tumb-down wooden erection from which issued the sound of subdued voices. Pennington drew her along with him toward a spot where a slight showed between the rotting timbers.

Crouching in the weeds that rose waist-high in the clearing, she peered through. In the center of the apartment, around a broad stone slab, she counted seven orientals. His back to her, clad in a gorgeous wide-sleeved jacket or dark blue silk on which was embroidered a many-headed dragon, sat an elderly Chinaman whose enormous proportions could belong to no other man she had yet seen than the arch-criminal whom Pennington sought to secure red-handed.

On the stone slab, like so many sponge-fingers, Chinese playing cards were spread face-downward and, even as the girl bent forward, a yellow hand began passing to and fro over the surface of the improvised table, sweeping the cords into a shapeless mass.

Each drew a card except the man whose back was toward her, who sat motionless as a carved figure, silent and watchful as the sphinx. She saw the cards turned over, that they formed the nucleus of seven pairs, their converging circles of black and red showing clearly in the light of a hurricane lamp that hung, askew, from a beam. The light flickered and an arm shot up from the huddled group and raised the wick. For a moment it flared to the roof, illuminating every corner of the building, and Monica gasped. Half-hidden behind a log, his arms stretched out beyond his head, the wrists secured by leather thongs, his knees drawn up almost to his chest, lay the commissioner of police. The head came slowly round and the prostrate man gazed inquiringly toward the squatting circle. As if realizing that she had seen, Pennington's fingers closed on her arm and, at that instant, she realized the significance of those seven, ever-increasing piles of greasy cards. They were drawing for the Yellow Seven!

She closed her eyes to still the throbbing of her fevered brain. She opened them again, and, acting on a sudden impulse, glanced up at Pennington. He was kneeling on the soft earth, one eye to the narrower portion of the chink that served as a spy-hole, while the barrel of his automatic was thrust partly thro' the wider extremity of the aperture. She caught something of the infection of the calm that seemed to pervade his being, and looked back into the hut in time to see a tall Chinaman in black rise to his full length, a hideous grin illuminating his swarthy features, the Yellow Seven held aloft. The guttural chattering began again, the cards were swept into a neat pack, disappearing into the capacious sleeve of the man who had originally spread them out, and the hand of the Oriental who held the Yellow Seven slipped to his waist.

Every head was turned toward the commissioner as a long blade flashed in the lamp-light, and the Chinamen, still gesticulating, rose one by one, spreading themselves out along the walls; but the figure in the mandarin jacket, embroidered with a many-headed dragon, remained in precisely the same position as that in which Monica had first seen him.

The tall Oriental in black drew back his sleeve and tested the blade with a grimy thumb. A sudden hush fell upon the entire assembly and the girl, cramped and trembling became aware of the ticking of the watch at her wrist: In all this ghastly nightmare, these ceaseless, regular pulsations rang out as the sole links with the normal existence she had left behind her. She tried to think of the bungalow on the hill, the long, cane chairs with their many cushions, the winding path that led, ribbon-like, to the road, the wooden jetty where the coasting steamers lay at anchor; but these phantom creatures refused to materialize and her eyes, sore and tingling, gazed straight before her, fixed, because she was powerless to withdraw them, puon whom the lot had fallen to destroy her brother.

Someone came forward and threw aside the lag, and the hand that held the knife swung suddenly aloft.

Pennington's pistol broke upon the stillness. The man with the dagger spun round awkwardly—and collapsed in a heap. Cries of terror resounded on every side, and a hand reaching upward, plunged the building in darkness.

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