

# THE YELLOW SEVEN THE BRONZE JAR

BY MONICA VINNEY,  
Illustrated by  
H. H. H. H.

## BEGIN HERE TODAY.

Monica Vinney, beautiful widow, lives with her brother, Capt. John Hewitt, Commissioner of Police at Jesselton, British North Borneo. Peter Pennington is hired by the government to apprehend Chai-Hung, leader of the Yellow Seven, a gang of Chinese bandits. Lien-Yin, former agent of Chai-Hung, comes to Captain Hewitt with a great bronze jar which he declares contains the ashes of Chai-Hung. Hewitt doubts the report of Chai-Hung's death.

## NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

He placed the jar carefully on a corner of the desk.

"I'm sorry, Jack," she said wearily. "I didn't want to disturb you, but the sheer loneliness of the place is getting on my nerves. I just had to come in." She slipped into the chair he had pushed forward, and the kitten, freeing itself with an effort, began chasing a giant cockroach across the floor.

"You've got a touch of fever," suggested Hewitt sympathetically. "Better take a stiff dose of quinine—and turn in."

She smiled faintly.

"I don't think I'm fever. It's this awful uncertainty. I'm worried about—Mr. Pennington. He's been on the island too long. The natives must be getting to know him. I haven't slept for nights. I've been picturing him wandering through the jungle on this wild-goose-chase for that creature's tomb, with the followers of Chai-Hung on his track."

The Commissioner perched himself on the table.

"He'll come back all right," he declared, aware all the time of a certain unaccountable huskiness in his throat. "Pennington always does."

Her gaze traveled to the bronze jar.

"Is that the thing?" she demanded dully.

Hewitt nodded.

She left her chair and crept forward, half-fearfully, her hands outstretched in front of her. Presently she stood before the jar, looking wistfully down at it.

"And to think—that everything depends on that!—everything, at least, that matters!"

The Commissioner jerked up his head and stared hard at the wall in front of him. He did not want to discover how Monica knew, but the very fact that she did know startled him. In the silence that followed, he caught the measured tread of the entry on duty outside, the insistent hum of nocturnal insects, the pattering of the absurd kitten across the boards. On a tray by the bookshelf there reposed a decanter and glasses. He went over to it and poured out a stiff tot.

She took it unquestionably, making a wry face as the spirit burnt her throat.

"So—Pennington does matter?" he said quietly.

The warm blood mounted to her cheeks.

"Of course."

"I'm glad of that."

He was placing the glass back on the tray when he realized that his sister had followed him across the room.

"Must we keep that wretched jar here? Can't you just lock it in—to make sure—and send it back to them again?"

He shook his head and laughed to dispel a certain uncomfortable inward feeling that Monica's present mood inspired.

"That's the devil of it," he told her. "I can't find out how it works."

She surveyed him for some moments, her head on one side.

"Why don't you send for a blacksmith—or somebody—and force it open?"

"I should scarcely like to do that. You see, it wouldn't be policy to provoke any further unpleasantness by deliberately committing sacrilege. Besides, it's an uncommonly fine urn." He looked down at his watch. "Time we got to bed. Lien-Yin's coming round in the morning—and then we shall know all about it."

She clutched at his sleeve.

"Jack, I can't sleep here with that thing in the house. I've been feeling perfectly horrible ever since they brought it here. You call it nerves. I know, but I've seen things at the window—"

"What sort of things?"

"I can't quite explain. Just vague, shadowy objects. That was what made me come to you. I could have sworn I heard them breathing and once for a fraction of a second two hands—like claws—rested on the sill. I should have gone mad if I had stayed."

In spite of himself, the Commissioner glanced at the wide open aperture through which the cool night air filtered. His keen gaze fell upon nothing but the rectangular patch of blackness she had expected to see. He walked deliberately to it and tossed the end of his cigar into the garden.

"There is nothing there, you see," he declared. "I tell you what it is, Monica. You're worrying too much about young Pennington, and you want a holiday. If you take my advice, you'll get married as soon as he comes back—and get him to take you for a long sea trip."

"Aren't you looking rather far ahead?" said Monica demurely. "You forget—he hasn't asked me yet."

The Commissioner tapped the bronze jar with his finger nail. "No, but he will as soon as I show him that. He was only waiting for proof that our enemy was dead."

She came slowly back toward the urn.

"Proof," she echoed in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible. "I wonder if this clumsy thing proves anything. For all we know—it may be empty."

"In which case," smiled her brother, "there's nothing on earth to prevent us going to bed."

But Monica was not listening. She was passing her fingers over the metal surface.

"I fancy that band has something to do with it—the band with the four little gold studs."

She held her thumb poised over the nearest of the four gold knobs. It hovered for a second—a bare half-inch from the metal, and then—a form plunged wildly through the open window, landed in a crouching attitude on the bare boards, and extending a lean arm, thrust her bodily into a corner.

The bronze jar toppled awkwardly and rolled to the floor, where the Siamese kitten fell upon it in a frenzy of delight. Hewitt wrenched open the drawer in which his automatic lay, and Monica, her eyes wide open with terror, leant helplessly against the wall, gazing into the scared, swart face of a Chinaman. The intruder's greasy coat was torn and weather-stained, his feet were swathed in sandals of plaited straw, and his features wore an expression that did not altogether understand.

"Put them up!" said the Commissioner coldly, and the celestial, complying readily, bestowed on the astonished Hewitt a broad, boyish grin.

"Don't keep me like this for long," came the familiar, measured drawl of Chinese Pennington. "I've got Lien-Yin trussed like a chicken outside, and I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

The Commissioner tossed his weapon back into the drawer in disgust.

"Look here, old son," he complained. "What the deuce do you mean by giving us shocks like this?"

The scrawny produced a rubber pouch and began rolling himself a cigarette.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you, Mrs. Vinney, only I didn't like to see you fiddling about with that jar."

"What did you suppose was inside?"

He fung out the words like a challenge.

"The ashes of our deeply-lamented friend—Chai-Hung."

The younger man surveyed him pityingly.

"The ashes of fiddle-sticks! Chai-Hung—of all men—starting out on a new line—and arranging to be cremated! Doesn't sound very probable, does it? And yet I suppose even I might have been deceived by the delightfully plausible story—if they hadn't chosen me to be one of the bearers!"

"Good Lord!"

Hewitt passed a clammy hand over his forehead.

Suddenly Monica uttered a little scream and pointed wildly to the floor. The Siamese kitten that had been playing with the bronze jar was lying on its back, kicking spasmodically. The movements ceased abruptly, and before the Commissioner could reach it, the wretched creature was dead.

More amazing still, the bronze jar lay open, its gaping mouth, dark and hollow like a tunnel, displaying no sign of the remains Hewitt had expected to see.

"I wanted to see what was inside. She had recovered from the surprise. Her sudden entry had given her. Her cheeks were flushed and the folds of the kimono at her bosom rose and fell in tun with her quick breathing. Pennington ran his lower lip along the gummed edge of the paper and looked across at the Commissioner.

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