



## KARA KHOTO

By BALLIET LUM

HE sat before me, a smile of superior wisdom in his eyes. Green eyes that were alive and vital and looked into mine with an amused tolerance of my absurdly apparent disbelief in what he was telling me.

"I can prove to you that there is such a place."

He had answered my unspoken query.

"Kara Khoto—buried city in the far wastes of a Mongolian desert. In the course of an hour here, I can show you that there are cities, perhaps countries, of which we deluded mortals have not the slightest cognizance; that entire civilizations have passed and left no obvious record; or, rather, the obvious record that humanity demands before it will listen.

"But to start where I should:

"One afternoon, when the heat of the summer was pouring in a molten stream of torrid unpleasantness upon the squalid streets of Peking, I set out to buy jade.

"Why I felt I must buy jade that afternoon I confess I didn't know. Unless it was that I had dreamed the night before of a piece of jade of such magnificent beauty and felt I must try to duplicate my dream.

"But shop after shop which I visited, and where I was shown exquisite workmanship, I left without buying any jade. Subconsciously I was searching for the absolute replica of the one in my dreams—flawless—its luster undimmed by any blur.

"I at last entered a tiny shop buried almost from sight in the depths of a filthy alley. A shriveled old man came forward

and at my request for perfect jade vanished into the rear of the shop.

"He presently returned, bearing a box wrapped in yellow silk. With almost reverent gesture he placed it upon the table, and with a look in his eyes as for something he worshipped, unwrapped layer after layer of the yellow silk until, with a little, low sigh of regret, he placed before me a circlet of jade.

"Absolutely flawless jade—jade whose beauty had remained uncut and unmarred. Green of such depth and luster that it surpassed my wildest imagination. Green and gleaming. I could almost feel it breathing. It seemed alive. It was alive, alive with the Green Fire of Life.

"Unless you have been entrapped by the lure in which jewels have the power to envelope one, you cannot understand my emotion over this stone.

"How I bought it, or what I paid for it I have not the vaguest memory. I only know that as I left the shop I exalted in the thought that it was mine.

"It became a part of my life and I always had it with me.

"Months after, late at night, I felt an incessant urge to look once more at my stone, and I took it from its box. I carried it to my window and gazed at it beneath the rays of the full moon. And, as a slowly lifting veil, I sensed something pulsing within its depths—something slowly stirring—and from the hazy blur of unreality, forms appeared. I seemed to become a part with

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# The Trumpets of Spain

THE stringed instrument does not best convey the glamorous story of Spain. It is rather a subject for trumpets. The soldiers and indefatigable builders of Rome have set their mark on the land, and the banners of Moor and Saracen have flown above the battle-ments.

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the jade, to feel and experience emotions as if my body were entwined with the jade, my soul rising to heights that only those who are beyond the urge and rush of life may attain.

"And then from apparently vaporous space a city appeared about me. Whether I was a pillar, man or beast, a jewel or a Buddha, I have not the slightest recollection. But life was all around me and I could feel the deep surge of iniquitude ensnare me. Soldiers were rushing here and there; eunuchs wore worried, skeptical faces; women were weeping.

"As if someone had whispered to me, suddenly I knew where I was.

### The Buried City

"It was the city of Kara Khoto, the famed city of Mongolia long ages dead. It was high walled and surrounded by an endless waste of sand. The temples were built of gold and encrusted with jewels, the Buddhas were carved from solid jade and emerald, the streets were marble. There were crystal windows.

"But my thoughts of the city were few, for an invading horde of Chinese was almost at the gates. For many past months they had laid siege and waited, with the patience that none else ever equaled. But still the inhabitants of Kara Khoto had withheld and yesterday it had looked as if the Chinese might be repelled. But today sorrow and despair hung like a heavy weight over the once gay city.

"For last night the Chinese had cleverly turned the river, which but so short a time past had swirled through the town with such a majesty of bearing, from its ordained route, and it now ran brooding around the outer wall.

"Vainly had the people dug. There was no water to be had within, and with no water, what chance was there for life?"

"There was only one hope, a slim thread of chance against the mighty balance of armed force. To make a breach in the heavy wall and with one desperate dash attempt to slay the enemy.

"But it failed.

"And the Mongolians were slaughtered by hundreds. The wounded lay among the dead and there was no succor. The Emperor of Kara Khoto seized a dagger as the first of the Chinese entered and slew his wife, then his daughter, and as the head of an enemy appeared in his doorway he uttered a laugh of triumph and plunged it into his own heart. For a week the Chinese held the town, and the jewels which had been their object were torn from their natural abode. And the Chinese lay drugged by the success of their onslaught, drunk by the lust of jewels.

"And still I continued to watch and study this strange occurrence with apparent security, for no one molested me.

"And then one day I heard the words, 'Let all mortals vanish from this spot,' whispered into the air, and abruptly all life vanished from before my eyes.

"Again the voice breathed softly near me and again words were wafted past—words barely audible, yet words that worked miracles, miracles that could only have been worked by an Almighty One, a God.

"Let sand blow and blow. Let

sand cover this jeweled town, cover every building, fill every crevice. And because jewels are now evil. Evil in that they enslave man, fill woman with strange emotion: although when man has passed beyond the reach of base existence they shall resume their natural position of beautiful fascination, their effect still is more evil than good. Therefore let there be a sandstorm each time a mortal approaches this spot.'

"And sand came, rolling in clouds and larger clouds of dust, until everything was covered, even I, until all I could feel, all I could sense, was sand.

"And then I realized that I was still gazing into the jade, that I was not a part with the jade, that I had only seen these events unroll themselves before me in the darkness of past centuries and that they were again passing into the depths of green oblivion, into total blackness as the moon dipped beyond a wave in the sea.

"And the jade, too, glided through my fingers into the sea, which lazily lapped against the rocks beneath my window—lazily mocked me—lazily laughed.

"I never found my jade, though I searched the beach for days.

"I was then staying on the Mediterranean, but I knew it had vanished from me forever: and I knew also it had become a part of me. It would be swept back into China and again, perhaps again and again, another should find it and relive past days.

### Kara Khoto

"After that night I made up my mind that I would search the Mongolian deserts until I found the city of Kara Khoto. And now for three long years I have been searching, and a month ago I found it. It was buried beneath the sand and terrific storms arose on my approach.

"The natives are terribly superstitious, but I at last entered it and found that it was all my dreams had been. The natives told me it was only once in many, many years that the sand was swept clear and one could enter the city.

"So you see my story was true, and there are places far beyond our furthest travels.

"I have convinced you now. Will you start with me next month to try and find the Lake of KooKoonor, the lake which no white man has ever visited?"

And with the story pulsing through my body, with the call for unknown beauty in my veins, and though I knew beyond any question that I should never return, I realized that what we should find would repay many times our death by the side of the Lake KooKoonor. So I smiled back into those green eyes of his, those green eyes which had seen so much—smiled into them and agreed.



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