

LING TIT TALES

And Other Stories of Adventure

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THIS is the tale of "Zomy" Sal, of the skipper of the barque Nimrod, and of Ben Almond's one hundred pounds. To get the full thrilling effect, it should, of course, be reviewed from the angle of Theodore Brunt. You know Brunt. He writes popular stories—creepy, pallid things abrim with slimy facts. If you relish having your nerves laid bare by his pitiless scalpel, then don't read this tale—to the end. For there is just one bet that Theodore Brunt has overlooked.

Zomy Sal got her nickname one of the first nights she appeared at Lee Hung's place. She was a hearty, silent young woman—always silent, yet merry withal. Somebody demanded where she hailed from. She, great buxom lass that she was, her cheeks still rosy red from English sun and fog, made answer. Her reply came loudly during an unexpected pause in the whirling Oriental music.

"Zomerzet!" she said, a wry twist to her lips. "Zomerzet! Didst ever see it? Nay, but I'd tell you—"

"By gad," cried Lady Nell, "she's from Somerset! Who'll buy a drink for a Somerset lass?"

The response was so uproarious that after this, Lee Hung had the performance repeated each time an English ship came upriver. Thus came Zomy Sal by her name. However, she showed little liking for the performance, and became more silent than ever; the more silent she was, the finer and heartier her warm smile.

From all this, you might easily deduce that there was something morally unsound in the air. Such might be readily imagined—furtive women and careless men, nuances of evil, dim lights and painted eyes. No, no! Metonymy is dangerous; the appearance does not always spell the reality. The Reverend Mr. Barham's charming cherub, "who couldn't sit down, for he hadn't de quot," is a case in point.

Undoubtedly, Theodore Brunt could write a fearful and terrible rhapsody about Lee Hung's place, stamping Lady Nell with tragedy and so forth. Yet it was really not so bad.

Perhaps you have never been in Bangkok. Lee Hung's "English and American Bar" was on the west bank of the Menam River, down a bit from the Tachin railway station. Thus, you will observe that it was nearly opposite the legations, custom-house and wharves. A very convenient location in some ways—handy to the shipping trade.

Lee Hung was a flat-faced yellow gentleman who regarded the Siamese as barbarians. He catered only to foreigners and wealthy Chinese—to gentlemen only, be it noted. He had an expert Australian barmaid, and a dozen girls who got a percentage of the drinks. There were gambling rooms, over which Lee himself presided, while Lady Nell had charge of the dance-hall.

Our blue-law enthusiasts would think all this perfectly horrible, naturally, but read on. Lady Nell was a handsome creature of thirty-odd—dark and dashing, abrim with a reckless vitality, ever a gay spendthrift of her inner self. It is true that she smoked; so do ladies. It is true that she drank sometimes; so do ladies. There, however, the comparison ends; for Lady Nell was not a lady, and no man took her name lightly.

In fact, you must not think evil of Lady Nell or any of Lee Hung's girls. This was no place for common seamen, decadent artists or vers librettists. One did not even get drunk in this place. I have said that Lee Hung was a gentleman; also he was a peculiar man, with extraordinary notions of honor and pride. When no white visitors were here, his yellow friends came and drank and indulged in witty talk with the girls, and went home happy. Honi soit!

Now, there was one peculiar thing about Lady Nell. When officers of coasters or merchant vessels were in the bar, she was ever curious about other men in their profession. Oftenest, she would ask if they knew a certain John Hanson, an American, who had been mate in a Sydney island-trader ten years previously. One gathered vaguely that she had known this Hanson.

She never got any news of him, however—that is, any definite news, for no one in these parts

knew or cared anything about the archipelago. All they knew about was their own little world. Once an officer from a Fluviale, best spoke of a Hanson in command of a Saigon river steamer; but that Hanson was a black Dane. And once a braw Scots engineer knew of a John Hanson in the Bombay trade who had died years ago, but this was vaguely said, spoken only with a desire to please.

And Zomy Sal said nothing at all. She only sat and smiled and listened, while slowly the English sun and fog were driven out of her cheeks by the Menam river mists.

One night two men came into the English bar together, ordered ale and dropped into the settle by the fireplace for a bit of private talk. This was long before dancing hours. Zomy Sal was the only girl in view, and she was sitting over some sewing.

The two men were officers from a Dutch packet in the stream, and they talked in Hollandsch. After the ale was gone, they began to drink Hollands; and after this, they began to talk in less guarded tones.

One of them was a dark man with a ragged black beard, gray-streaked, and a very bad and morose eye. The other was younger, sneering in his manner, an obvious parasite on the world. Both men had spent the afternoon at the Samsen gambling pavilions, up the river, and they were in the sullen mood of men who have lost heavily.

"That barque will be up the river to-morrow, sure," said the older man. Houtman was his name, and he was a second officer. "It must be done here or not at all, Kohn."

"Course your carefulness!" said Kohn, with a hard and sneering laugh. He was only a supercargo, but he had little good in him. "You seem to think that only Siam is safe for our kind of a job!"

"It is safe," asserted the other, placidly fingering his ragged beard. "I should know! And we know that Hanson will have the money with him."

"Naturally," said Kohn dryly. "He always has it with him. Was he not famous down in the islands for always having those Bank of England notes in his belt? That is, unless rumor lied! He'll have it, right enough—all ready for us!"

Houtman regarded his companion with a very cynical air.

"You are young, Kohn," he said. "You are young, and you make light of great things. This Cap'n Hanson is no small matter. Perhaps you never heard how three men tried to kill him and take that money, once in Amboina when he was drunk."

"Ja, I heard," scoffed Kohn. "Three men from a Thursday Island pearler, fighting men! And this Cap'n Hanson broke them all to pieces, maimed them, killed one of them! Well, what of it? I may be young, but by heavens I have a head! And I have done things."

"That is true," Houtman frowned thoughtfully. "Ten thousand pounds in Bank of England notes! He never spends it. He never does anything with it. He says that he is waiting to find the owner. Well, it is known that Cap'n Hanson is not crazy, certainly. Perhaps this money is his, fetish, Kohn. Did you ever hear of a fetish? In the old days, away back on the West Coast—"

"Never mind prating of your adventures in Africa," struck in Kohn—yet with a smile of friendliness that took the edge from his sneer. These two men knew each other well. "I know what a fetish is, ja! And I don't care a snap for all the fetishes on earth. I will put this American captain in hell, and we shall divide his money."

"He made a sudden cautious sign. "Eh! That girl. Call her over."

Houtman turned and looked at Zomy Sal, beckoned her to join them. She laid down her sewing and came, smiling. Now, when Sal smiled, men wondered. In these ends of earth, they seldom saw a woman smile with this hearty pleasant frankness. So, though Zomy Sal was ever silent, men loved to talk with her and buy drinks, for the sake of her quick, warm smile. It took them back to honest things they had nearly forgotten.

Yes, one must admit that Lee Hung picked his helpers wisely! He did all things wisely, that yellow man.

Houtman tried Sal with French and Hollandsch, to which she shook her head and smiled the more. Having English made her speak, she broad country tongue was beyond either of these men. Kohn watched her with narrowed, evil eyes, and finally made an irritated signal to Houtman. Zomy Sal, after a glass of ale, went back to her sewing.

"Fetishes mean nothing to me," said Kohn, reverting to their line of talk. "Bah! I am a man."

"So," observed Houtman, "was the big squarehead who found Medan lying sick on the beach at Medan, one night. He was a man too! Hanson was sick and weak. None the less, they say that the squarehead reached the residency with a broken jaw, a dislocated arm, and one eye gone. No, no, my friend—I am not afraid! But I am no longer young, and I am cautious. It is best to take no chances. Hanson is a stranger to this place, has never been here be-

fore, and we can do it easily enough if we do it right."

"You're sure of all that?" demanded Kohn quickly.

Houtman nodded, smilingly vaguely.

"Oh, ja! Sure enough. That mate of his was very drunk, and talked freely. This is Hanson's first trip up the coast, here. Some one will bring him here to this bar, and this is the place to work it. No one will interfere."

Kohn's brows lifted in a question. "But I've always heard that this yellow man was square and honest!"

"He is. Other men are not. There is a fellow who owes me some money, in the Guang Tit Lee sawmill—the American manager. He will do the trick for us. The Nimrod is a Straits Company boat, so she'll drop her hook off the Berne. The whole affair is as certain as daylight, except our part of it. That must be arranged."

"All right," Kohn lit a thin, pallid Dutch cheroot and leaned back. "What's our part of it, then?"

"To finish Hanson after he's drugged, and take the money."

Houtman said this simply, coolly. One gathered from his air that it was entirely a business proposition with him.

Zomy Sal went on with her sewing, silent as usual, but no longer smiling.

Down around the Banda and Arakura seas, where he was best known, Captain John Hanson was a marked man.

All peculiar skippers are marked men, of course, but Hanson was the marked man. This, by reason of the ten thousand pounds in the money-belt around his waist. The whole archipelago knew about it, and some of the archipelago had



Smile Again—by George, That Smile of Yours is the Finest Thing I've Seen These Ten Years."

moved heaven and earth to get hold of it.

There was some deep secret about that money; no one knew just what. Hanson, finding the story had somehow slipped out, merely said that he carried the money in trust and was seeking the owner. Another man would have lied and scoffed at the story, but not Hanson.

Another man would have banked the money, but not Hanson. That money was safer in his belt than in any bank, he considered. And rightly enough, so far as his own ship was concerned. No one who knew him would ever try for that money. As a rule, he was off, poking around through the distant islands—he had even been to the Kermadecs. He had the air of a man restlessly seeking.

On the night after the Nimrod had pulled up the river to Bangkok and dropped her hook, Hanson came ashore. He came into the "English and American Bar," in company with one Ben Almond, who managed a sawmill along the stream. Almond was an American, that money was safer in his belt than in any bank, he considered. And rightly enough, so far as his own ship was concerned. No one who knew him would ever try for that money. As a rule, he was off, poking around through the distant islands—he had even been to the Kermadecs. He had the air of a man restlessly seeking.

Lee Hung had once put him out of the place, for reason, and ordinarily would never have allowed him entrance again. On this particular night, however, Lee Hung was too busy to watch things. Lady Nell was down with an attack of river fever, and all hands were roused.

So the two men came into the English bar, and sat themselves down. Cap'n John Hanson looked about, with only a flicker of interest, at the crowd. With his seaman's cap off, he looked older, and showed much gray hair about the temples.

He was not a big man at all, this skipper of the Nimrod. He

was quite lanky, even thin. The effect of his hooked nose and square chin was dampened by a certain weary air in his eyes. Now he appeared rather disgusted with his companion.

"I don't care for this sort of place," he said mildly. "Loose women—"

Ben Almond snickered.

"It ain't what it seems, Cap'n—not a bit of it! Try anything on with these gals, and they'll show you what for! So'll Lee Hung."

The heavy brows of Hanson went up. "So? You can't mean—"

"I do, though," Almond looked about impudently. "I don't savvy it myself. Tried to make a date with one of the girls, and I thought Lee Hung would knife me! I guess they're straight enough."

Later this remark was to make some money for Almond, but he did not dream it now.

"You know," he went on, "it's rotten hard for a white woman, on her uppers, to keep straight in these parts, Cap'n! You know how it is—blamed hard. Mebbe that's why Lee Hung went into business. These Chinks are the devil for queer notions. I've heard he's a reg'lar father to 'em, sends 'em back home, and so forth. Yes, I guess the girls are all straight enough."

"Coming from you," said Hanson carelessly, "that is a tremendous affirmation."

Hanson went on looking about the room.

As for Almond, he was rather slow in sensing what had just been said. When he did understand it,—when he realized that Hanson, in a tone of careless disregard, had classed him with the lowest

"You telly my, yes-no," he said softly.

Almond opened the paper and read the message—a curt command from Lee Hung to get out. A pallid fury leaped athwart his face. He wiped the look away, stifled the oath on his lips and looked up at the skipper.

"I got to go see a man in a hurry, Cap'n," he said. "It's a hell of a note! But it's a business deal—"

"Don't mention it," returned Hanson with a wave of his cigar. Even as he spoke, his eyes wandered carelessly. It meant nothing to him, nothing at all.

Almond departed, leaving Hanson sitting there.

A moment later Zomy Sal came by and smiled at Hanson. She paused before him and spoke. He frowned, listened, made her repeat three times before he understood that she wanted to speak with him. Then he nodded and ordered a drink. He scrutinized her curiously.

"What language is that you speak?" he inquired. "Good Lord, girl, I can't understand a thing you say!"

True enough. She was absolutely unintelligible to him—that broad Somerset burr was all Greek to his American ears. Suddenly she plunged into excellent Hollandsch.

"My father was often in Holland," she explained. "He was a sea-captain too."

"Good!" said Hanson, still studying her face. "That's good, girl. Smile again—by George, that smile of yours is the finest thing I've seen these ten years!"

But Zomy Sal did not smile. Instead, she returned his intent look.

"That man with you," she said, "he meant to drug you. Two men were in here last night, and they talked in Hollandsch—they did not know I understood. He was to drug you, and they were to get you when you left."

Hanson removed the cigar from

between his teeth, and sat back in his chair. His deep eyes had changed slightly; a little flame had come into them. His muscles had tensed, so that he seemed to be awkwardly poised in his chair.

"Good for you!" he said calmly. "I thought there was something odd about that chap picking up such a friendship for me. Had my eye on him. Who were those other two men? Dutchmen?"

Now Zomy Sal smiled again, and right merrily.

"Yes! And I fooled them nicely. There names were Houtman and Kohn; you don't know them. But tell me, Captain Hanson! Were you ever mate in a island-trader out of Sydney, a schooner called the Ayu-avu? Ten years ago?"

The effect of this question upon John Hanson, as extraordinary.

For an instant his dark eyes closed; otherwise he did not move a muscle. One would have said that those eyes closed to shut out the world, to shut in a prayer drawn from the man's soul.

Then the eyes opened, dwelt upon the girl with a singular intensity.

"Yes," said Hanson. "I was." Zomy Sal was perhaps a little disappointed at his manner. She leaned forward, and spoke again in her good European Hollandsch.

"And did you once carry a rich man and his daughter to Rarotonga? And was the ship wrecked? And was nearly everyone drowned—nearly?"

The features of Captain Hanson, brown as rosewood under the cap-line, became overspread with a mortal pallor. His nostrils became pinched, whitish. In his eyes shone agony.

"Oh, God, have I found her at last?" he muttered in English. It was actually a question addressed to his creator.

"Yus!" said Zomy Sal triumphantly. "Yus!"

A frightful effort, a spasmodic

contortion of the facial muscles, passed across the countenance of the skipper. He was himself again, shrewdly alert.

"What d'you mean, girl?" he demanded sharply. "Who told you this yarn?"

"She's upstairs, sick with the fever," Sal's broad face beamed happily. "She was talking in her sickness today, and I heard it all. I know she had asked everyone who came here for news of you, and I thought you were the man. Now she's afraid that if she ever did find you, you would think that we were not honest because we work here—that she had not been good. But she has."

These last words were entirely ignored, brushed aside unheard.

"Upstairs!" said Hanson. Something like a shiver passed over his spare lithe body. He shook it off and put the cigar in his mouth again. "Ten years! Ten years! There was awe in his voice."

Suddenly he stirred, sat up, reached with fumbling fingers for his cap.

"Look here," he said, a touch of acerbity in his tone, "I feel sick. I had fish for supper—must ha' been tainted. But I have to see her—"

"You can't," said Zomy Sal with finality. "She's asleep now, and sweating. She'll be all right tomorrow. You come back and see her then."

"All right," Hanson came to his feet. He had a bit of difficulty finding the floor with him. He fished a sovereign from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"I'll be back in the morning," he said, his voice oddly thick. "Back in the morning, girl. Don't you tell her, now! I've got her dad's money—been carrying it ten years until I saw her again. Heard she'd been rescued—couldn't find any trace—God, how I've prayed these ten years past! I'll be back."

He went out of the place like a man drunk. Zomy Sal gazed after him, simple adoration in her eyes. It was a romantic moment for Sal—a great moment!

Neither of them reflected that it might not have been the drinks that were doped, but the cigar.

You can readily perceive what a tremendous story, a tale to bring the very heart of Theodore Brunt could make out of this situation! How Hanson died, and Lady Nell never saw him, perhaps. Or how the ten years were to end only in the agony of misunderstanding, how the skipper would condemn Lady Nell as a bad woman, and how she would end up in a Chinese harem, and so forth. That's like Brunt—short and bitter, reptilian!

But there is one bet that Theodore Brunt has overlooked.

Captain John Hanson went out of the "English and American Bar" into the darkness. He staggered down to the landing at the mouth of the creek, guided by the paper lanterns. His feet hit with a hard uncertainty on the teak planks. He knew that boats waited there, and he could easily get a lift to the Borneo wharves.

He was thinking only of the wonderful thing that had happened—all his swimming thoughts were centered on this. After ten years!

"Boat, Cap'n?" said a voice.

"Yes," returned Hanson thickly. "To the Borneo—barque Nimrod."

"Right. Here y'are, sir."

Two men grasping his elbows, Hanson stepped down into the waiting boat. As she lurched to his weight, something struck him heavily in the back of the head, and he fell.

"Let him lie in the bilge," muttered Kohn. "So much the better if he drowns. Now, get away from here first, and go through him afterward."

"Good," said Houtman. "Straight downstream, then across."

The boat melted into the shadows.

When Captain John Hanson came to himself, the light of the morning sun was striking through the port of his own cabin and blinding his eyes. He lay in his own bunk. Sitting in a chair and watching him in anxiety was his mate, an old Australian cockney who had been long with him, in many ships.

Hanson lay for a long moment looking into the eyes of his mate. Then he remembered everything in a flash. He lifted a hand to his head. The fingers trembled, shook visibly, but not from the pain of his hurt.

"Ten years!" said Hanson very huskily. "What happened to me?"

"You got it," said the mate morosely. "You've been bleedin' well arskin' for it, aint you? Ten years—huh! A coolie fetched you aboard with your 'ead stove in; that's wot!"

Automatically, by sheer habit, the hand of Hanson went to his belt—and dropped.

"Huh," assented the mate glumly. "They got it, all right! It's gone."

A sudden smile broke out in the face of John Hanson—a smile such as the old mate had never seen there before, a glorious and splendid smile.

"Get me a boat," said the skipper, his voice gaining strength. "I'm going across the river."

"No, you aint!" cried the mate, alarmed. "You're off your ruddy 'ead; that's wot! And you aint shaved. Gray 'airs stickin' out all over your chin—"

Hanson made a violent effort. He swung up, rocked to his feet, stood unsteadily.

"Confound you—go get me a boat!"

"Listen 'ere!" pleaded the mate. "Let me 'tend to it, sir! You aint in no shape to go after that 'ere bleedin' money—"

"Damn the money!" roared John Hanson, so that this voice shook the cabin. He laughed exultantly as he swayed there. "Damn the money! Get me a boat, or I'll show you who's master of this jobber!"

So John Hanson, gray hairs and all, went across the river to find the woman he had met and lost ten years since. And with the next night the Nimrod had gone her way.

It was three nights later that the "English and American Bar" witnessed a peculiar scene.

Two men, who had spent the past day at the Samsen gambling-house, and who had won huge sums there, left their boat and lurched arm in arm up to Lee Hung's place. They were both half drunk, and exuded money at every pore. One was Kohn, the other Houtman.

They came in as though they owned the place, scattering largesse profusely. To the general surprise and astonishment, Lee Hung himself met them and graciously conducted them to a private room.

These two men were vociferous in stating what they wanted. One thing they desired was a girl with red cheeks, a girl who smiled. Lee Hung informed them, deprecatingly, that Zomy Sal had gone away. She had gone to Singapore with friends, and was not coming back.

Now, just what took place in this private room is a mystery. And it is not wise to speculate in public upon anything that Lee Hung wishes to remain a mystery.

In any event, upon the following dawn Houtman and Kohn were put aboard their own ship by a coolie boatman. They were stripped naked and were drunk—or drugged. However, their captain was delighted to see them, since he was leaving with the tide. And so they pass out of the story.

About the time Houtman and Kohn were leaving Bangkok, the estimable Lee Hung was mailing two letters. One of these containing an extremely large draft on the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, was addressed to Mrs. John Hanson, care the Straits Company, Singapore.

The other letter was opened on the following day by one Ben Almond. He opened it with astonishment and suspicion. His astonishment became stupefaction when he found a Bank of England note for one hundred pounds, and a brief scrawl: "From Captain Hanson. For services rendered."

Almond turned the note over and over, read the scrawl again, scratched his head.

"Well," he observed, "I'm damned! Never could understand that fellow!"

What a magnificently tragic and horrible story could be made out of all this by the genius of Theodore Brunt! Yet there is one bet that Brunt has overlooked. It is found in the first verse of the fourteenth Psalm.

HE FORGOT SOMETHING.

"Last fall," said one acquaintance to the other on the street car, "I told you I was going to move into a house heated by a furnace, a thing I had never had."

"Yes, I remember," said the other. "I asked you how much coal I would need for the winter."

"Yes, I remember."

"And you told me six tons."

"Yes, I think I did."

"I bought six tons," continued the other, "and here I am out of coal, and all the family suffering with chills and sore throats and all the children frost bitten. What have you got to say to that?"

"Why, my dear friend, I must say that I forgot something. I ought to have told you that with six tons of coal the whole family of you must stay in bed four days, you must hover over the registers. The family should eat all the horse-radish and fried peppers they can eat and drink about three gallons of hot tea. Then, if the coal gives out, you ought to buy a stove and a barrel of kerosene. Oh, yes, I was in a hurry the day you asked me, and I forgot."

NO HARM DONE.

"Look here," said one returned soldier to another as they met on the street, "the government has mixed things up pretty badly for me."

"As to how?" was inquired.

"Why, I am put down as a deserter from the army, and you all know what I did. I saved the lives of our officers as we were going Over. When we arrived I captured three generals, five colonels and a whole battery of artillery. I captured and turned in fifty horses and two hundred muskets, and came home with about forty medals waving around me."

"And I," said the other, "did not do anything at all but lay around and ate up my rations. I wasn't in a single fight and spent most of my time flirting with the French girls, and I have got all the credit that is coming to you."

"And what are we going to do about it?" asked the first one.

"Nothing, comrade. Nothing at all. You see, there was no one to blame about it. It was just at the time we were letting go of our mugs and glasses and turning to cold water, and Uncle Sam he got mixed up and so did you an injustice."